Hippos - Sussita of the Decapolis
The First Twelve Seasons of Excavations
2000-2011
Volume I

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Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research History</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excavation Methods and Research Tools</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Geographical, Geological and Geomorphological Settings of the Sussita Region</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“City mostly of non-Jews, such as this Sussita”: The Historical Geography of Sussita-Antiochia Hippos-Qal’at el-Ḥuṣn</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban plan and city landscape</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Architecture</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellenistic Sanctuary</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basilica</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odeion</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Northwest Church Complex</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Northeast Church and Northeast Insula Project</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window Glass Finds in the Northeast Church</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Inscriptions</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coin Finds of Hippos-Sussita</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Northeast Church (NEC) and has continued thereafter with further excavation work in the *insula* extending to the east and south of the church (NIP).

Here we should like to thank these two teams from abroad, the one from Poland that has already completed its excavations and the American one that is continuing to excavate with us in close-knit and effective cooperation. There is no doubt that such cooperation, interchange of ideas and cross-fertilization has contributed greatly to the success of the excavation project.

**Team Members**

As in all such complex and broad-ranging projects, the directors of the expedition teams were assisted by a number of experts in various fields. For the first five seasons, the architect of the expedition was Mr. Ma’ayan Ralbag and the architect for the sixth season was Ms. Nili Dothan. The role was carried on by Mr. Brian Cannon as architect for the seventh and eighth seasons. The surveyors, Mr. Dov Porotski and Mr. Viatcheslav Pirsky, served as architects of the expedition during the ninth and tenth seasons, while the engineer, Ms. Tatiana Meltsen was the architect during the eleventh and twelfth seasons. Professor Jolanta Młynarczyk served as the pottery expert for the expedition for the first ten seasons, while Dr. Arie Lev Kapitaikin was responsible for the treatment of pottery finds during the eleventh and twelfth seasons. The coin finds were handled by Mr. Ariel Berman throughout the twelve excavation seasons in Hippos-Sussita.

The names of the area supervisors who excavated with us during the years 2000-2011 are, in alphabetical order: Mr. Ran Abramovitch, Ms. Bella Bordman, Ms. Adi Golan, Mr. Eyal Dan, Mr. Ran Vizen, Ms. Emilia Jastrzebska, Mr. Stas Mumladze, Ms. Victoria Mesistrano, Ms. Ranin Noufi, Ms. Zeruya Panet-Nahari, Dr. Vered Raz-Romeo, Dr. Kate Raphael and Mr. Amit Rosenblum.

Excavations of the scale carried out at Hippos-Sussita require a firm logistical basis and efficient management. The role of administrator is a complex and highly responsible one and its management during the past twelve seasons has been assigned to a number of persons who faithfully performed their work and contributed significantly to the success of the excavations. The names of the administratarios for the various excavation
incidents, almost totally prevented any regular archaeological work. However, in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Gev which lies along the foot of the mountain, various finds were occasionally made that were brought to the kibbutz and exhibited in a few sites on the lawns of the settlement. An assortment of architectural items can be found on the central lawn near the dining hall. Unfortunately, in most cases, no documentation exists to indicate the exact spot where this or that item was found. 16

In 1967, at the end of the Six Day War, the outpost was evacuated and the army dismantled the various installations and positions. Some of the communication trenches were filled in and what remained in the area were the two concrete-built structures described above. 17

In 1969 a national park with Sussita Mountain at its center was officially declared and in 2004 the establishment of the Sussita Nature Reserve was also announced. 18 The very inclusion of Sussita Mountain within the area of a national park and nature reserve has far-reaching implications with regard to the preservation of the existing state of the site and its immediate vicinity and the prevention of damage or construction of any kind. What is important is that this does not only concern the area of the city itself but also the extensive tracts of land around it. Thanks to the inclusion of Sussita Mountain within a nature reserve area, researchers will be able not only to excavate within the city but also to examine and study the interrelations between the city and its cemeteries and also with its agricultural hinterland. There are not many such sites in our region that have been granted such favorable conditions such as these. 19

The excavation of the Southeast Church (the Cathedral) in 1952 was the last excavation conducted in Hippos until the beginning of the 1990s when the water supply system of Hippos was being researched and trial squares were dug all along the course of the stone pipe of the aqueduct. This was a joint research project of the Archaeology Institute of Tel Aviv University and of the Fachhochschule in Lübeck, Germany. 20 In the framework of this project, several sections of the aqueduct that brought water into Hippos were excavated. The researchers examined the course of the aqueduct from its starting point to its termination within the city itself. 21

At the beginning of 1999, I approached Prof. Vassilios Tzaferis who was then the Deputy Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority and informed him of my intention to conduct a multi-year research project in Hippos. Prof. Tzaferis recommended that before submitting a request for an excavation permit, a preliminary urban survey should be undertaken at the site in order to estimate correctly the scope and nature of the future project. A detailed urban survey was then conducted in the summer of 1999 as a preparatory stage for the opening of the

16. Preserved in the archive of Kibbutz Ein Gev are photographs of some of the finds that were made during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s in Hippos and its environs. We would like to thank Mr. Tzvi Mor, who is in charge of the kibbutz archive, for allowing us to examine the archive. Additional information can be found in the IDF and the Ministry of Defense Archive in Givatayim. This archive contains the “Sussita File” which, among other things, contains the photographs that document the fortification activities on the mountain at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s. A study of this photographic material testifies to the scope of alterations in the site caused by the erection of the two permanent buildings, the digging of communication trenches and the piling up of ramparts. Finally, we should mention the existence of the Antiquities Authority Archive in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. This archive holds the “Sussita File” which contains all the information about the archaeological activities and surveys that have been conducted in Hippos since the period of the British Mandate. Also see above, notes 5 and 6.

17. See above, n. 7.

18. Sussita National Park, with an area of 169,000 m² was declared on December 18, 1969. The Sussita Nature Reserve, with an area of 508,600 m² was announced on January 29, 2004.

19. A glance at sites such as Caesarea, Beth Shean or Gerasa makes it clear how extremely difficult it is to research and excavate an archaeological site within the residential areas of a modern city. See here, Introduction chapter.


21. See the chapter on Water Supply System, Vol. II.
during which it was destroyed by a violent earthquake in the year 749 CE. Sussita flourished during the Roman and Byzantine periods when it was known as one of the cities of the Decapolis.

The main roads during the Roman period and apparently also during the Byzantine period, ran only along the margins of the Golan Heights and not across it. There is no real evidence that their existence had any influence on the development of the settlements in the area. Although we have no clear testimonies that these roads served for regional trade or international commerce, it may be that during times of peace the local population used the Roman roads for mercantile traffic.²

Four milestones, still not reported in any publication, were discovered on the road leading from Sussita to Damascus. Both ends of the city were connected with a Roman road and its remains and milestones are still visible in Wadi Jamusiyeh and in Kibbutz Ein Gev.³

Landmarks in the history of Sussita have been noted in research from time to time since the establishment of the State of Israel (1948), but in an abbreviated form. However, an in-depth and comprehensive examination of the unique name for the site has not yet been made, neither its etymological affiliation with other cities that bear the name of Hippos, nor the cultural, social and economic aspects of Sussita in light of the various but meagre sources available to us, including biblical evidence regarding the area of Sussita, classical literature, whether Greek or Latin, Rabbinic literature, as well as epigraphic and numismatic finds. The exposure of the buried structures of the city during recent years under the direction of Professor Arthur Segal and Dr. Michael Eisenberg of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa, with the participation of Professor Jolanta Młynarczyk of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Dr. Mariusz Burdajewicz of the National Museum in Warsaw, Poland, Professor Mark Schuler of Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA - sheds

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At the bottom of the tower and inside it (0.60m north of wall W1018) opposite the wicket, a short section of another wall was discovered (figs 96-97, 102). This wall (W1051) was exposed to a length of about 2 m and survived up to a height of two layers above its foundations (1.15m). The wall is built of crudely dressed basalt ashlars. The foundation layer is arranged in a header construction while the one above it is in an alternating header-stretcher pattern. Wall 1051 predates the walls of the tower including those of the southern city wall, and was part of the earliest fortifications. The substructure of the wall, its course (east-west, 284°), as well as its method of construction are different from the tower walls. The builders of the tower were aware of the existence of this wall and did not dismantle it. The upper part of this wall is as high as the horizontal bracket in the south wall of the tower which was meant to uphold a floor, and therefore must have served this purpose. The pottery found in the substructure of the wall (L1067) is dated from the 1st to the 2nd century CE.

As the excavation progressed along the line of the south wall and to the east of the tower, it became clear that we had here a series of five chamber vaults, with the tower built to the east of the westernmost chamber vault in this system, between Nos. I and II (figs 92, 98-99).

Although the series of chamber vaults have only been partially excavated, we can already determine the method of its construction and its function. The south wall on the edge of the cliff, which was sometimes built beyond it, serves as the front wall of the chamber vaults. The rear and front walls of the bastion were built with an exterior distance of 13m, an interior of 10m between them and about 1.60m in thickness of walls. The two walls are parallel with each other, and together with the chamber vaults they create a rectangular extension measuring 47 x 13m built on the edge of the cliff (figs 92, 98-99).

Chamber Vault I, the one furthest west, was not excavated, but its ruined corner and its missing foundations allow us to learn about the construction methods used in the entire vault system (fig. 100). The mortar underneath the southwest corner of the chamber was washed away from the basalt bedrock and left its foundations exposed and resting only on their counterweight. Basalt beams of 1.80m in length constituted the foundations of the entire system (figs 100, 102, 119). The substructure under the foundations is composed of binding material and small rough stones that served to level the uneven rock surface in order to lay the foundations – the basalt beams.

Chamber Vault II was partially excavated. In its upper part we found seven stones arranged in an arch (figs 99, 101, 106-108). The contents of the chamber included pottery from the Early Roman until the Byzantine period. From the foundations of the floor (L1086) pottery sherds were unearthed from the Roman to the Byzantine period. The span of the vault was 5.70m. The foundation trench of wall 1046 was located (L1405) and the pottery finds discovered here were dated to the end of the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. This dating can confirm the building period of the vaults and the entire fortification section.