

MARINOV ZBORNIK

Papers in Honour of Professor Emilio Marin



HRVATSKO KATOLIČKO SVEUČILIŠTE

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Town Planning and Architecture of Hippos (Sussita) of the Decapolis in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods

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Urban planning is a universal phenomenon that has existed in various cultures without dependency or influence upon each other. A city, whose network of streets, functional division of its area and whose extent and general character were determined prior to its construction, is a planned city.

Hippos (Sussita) is a well-planned city situated on the top of a mountain 2 km east of the Sea of Galilee and 350 m above it. The city was founded in the first half of the 2nd century BCE by the Seleucids. From the time of Pompey (63 BCE) it was included in *Provincia Syria*. Like other cities of the Decapolis, Hippos functioned as a Greek city in all respects. Its period of florescence was from the 1st to the 3rd century CE. The city continued to prosper during the Byzantine period as well. Its end came in the fatal earthquake of 749 CE, never to be inhabited again.

Hippos was surrounded by a city-wall. The city had an orthogonal plan and a clear functional division. Its main street (*decumanus maximus*), which was designed as a colonnaded street, crossed the entire length of the city along an east-west axis. A number of streets that ran in a north-south direction (*cardines*) intersected perpendicularly with the main axis and created *insulae*. Around the centrally located forum were a sanctuary and a few public buildings. In spite of its Hellenistic foundations, the city plan and most of its building complexes, except for the main sanctuary, were built during the Roman period.

Key words: Hippos, Sussita, Decapolis, city landscape, Hellenistic architecture, Roman architecture, Byzantine architecture.

Introduction

The mountain of Sussita, which is located about 2 km east of the Sea of Galilee, is detached from the southwestern slopes of the Golan Heights (Figs. 1–4).¹ The mountain top rises to a height of 142 m above sea level and about 350 m above the surface of the lake. The highest point of the mountain is on its eastern

part from which the surface gradually slopes downward towards the west. The northern slopes of the mountain are especially steep. Along the bottom of these slopes flows the Ein-Gev stream in a deep and inaccessible channel. The southern slope is slightly more moderate than the northern one, with the Sussita stream flowing at its foot. The slope on the west descends very steeply towards the lake and it is only

1 The mountain is named today Susita or Sussita and so does the geological formation – Sussita Formation. Sussita is the Aramaic translation of Hippos, both meaning a mare or a horse. None of the ancient Jewish sources as well as epigraphical evidence show a clear avoidance from the Greek name Hippos and use only the Aramaic name when describing the city and its region (Ben David 2011, 315).

on the eastern side that the saddle ridge allows for easy ascent to the mountain. In the past, as today, it is possible to ascend the Sussita Mountain by two routes. The western route goes up along a winding snake-like road on the steep and rocky slope in order to overcome the 350 m difference in height. On the other hand, the route leading to the mountain from the east is gradual and easy to climb. At the top of the Sussita Mountain there is a fairly flat plateau that slopes gradually downward from east to west at a total height difference of 40 m (Figs. 4–5). The mountain plateau was eminently suitable for building a medium-small city.

Research History

The first researcher who surveyed the city was the engineer Gottlieb Schumacher who visited the site in 1885 and left a fairly detailed description of the remains of ancient buildings (Schumacher 1888, 194–206). Significant for us, as will be seen, is the urban plan of Hippos that he drew up which clearly marks the main street that crosses the entire length of the city from east to west (Fig. 6). It also indicates the sections of the city fortifications surrounding the mountain top. When Kibbutz Ein Gev was founded in 1937, a few surveys were conducted on the Sussita Mountain. At the beginning of the 1950s, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) set up an outpost on the site. During the construction of the southern building, the Cathedral was partially exposed. This is one of the seven churches in Hippos for which we have actual evidence. At the beginning of the 1990s, a team of Israeli and German researchers conducted a study of the city's water supply system.

The main excavations at Hippos were initiated in 2000 under the auspices of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa, Israel. The ex-

cavations were headed by Arthur Segal and Michael Eisenberg (2000–2011) with a team from the Poland directed by Jolanta Młynarczyk and Mariusz Burdajewicz, and Mark Schuler of Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. Excavations were headed later by Eisenberg (2012–2015) and Eisenberg and Arleta Kowalewska (2016–2021).²

History of Hippos

The archaeological finds and the historical evidence and especially the Greek name of the city, Antiochia Hippos, all testify that the city was founded in the first half of the 2nd century BCE, after the Battle of Paneion (ca. 199 BCE) either by Antiochus III the Great (222–187 BCE) or by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), but more probably by the former.³ The pottery and numismatic finds discovered during the excavation of the Hellenistic Compound (see below), confirms that at the end of the 3rd century BCE, under Ptolemaic rule, this site was a military outpost. Hippos is mentioned in very few historical sources. In c. 83 BCE, Alexander Jannaeus conquered the city, but Hasmonean rule was soon exchanged for Roman rule in 63 BCE when Hippos and other Greek cities on the eastern bank of the Jordan River were incorporated within *Provincia Syria*.

From what has already been exposed in Hippos in the course of the twenty-one excavation seasons, it is clear that, like the rest of the Decapolis cities, it flourished and prospered during the period of *Pax Romana*, which brought tranquillity, open borders and wide-ranging trade relations. The wealth of Hippos during this period is expressed in the extensive construction work that took place in it. It seems that most of the public buildings were erected in the period from the 1st century to the mid-2nd CE. These buildings were an expression of urban pride by the

2 Hippos is within the Sussita National Park managed by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. For the history of research see: (Segal 2014b). For an overview of the recent excavations see (Eisenberg 2019a).

3 For the choosing of the site, its military features and foundation see (Eisenberg 2014; 2016a; 2017a). For the site's historiography see (Dvorjetski 2014).

citizens of Hippos and of their loyalty to the Roman emperors. Fate smiled at Hippos even during the Byzantine period (4th–7th century CE) and the city apparently continued to prosper. At that time Hippos was included within the area of *Palaestina Secunda*, the northernmost of the three administrative districts in the Byzantine period. From Byzantine sources we learn that Hippos served as the seat of a bishopric. So far seven churches, of which five have already been exposed to some degree, were discovered in Hippos.

Archaeological finds prove that the transition from the Byzantine to the early Arab period under the Umayyad Caliphate was not accompanied by destruction. As far as we know, most of the churches continued to function during the 7th century but towards the end of the 7th–early 8th century some of the churches cease functioning and others are reduced in size. However, there are clear signs of a change and decline in the cityscape. No new public buildings were constructed during the 7th–8th century. Moreover, in its public areas, in the plazas and streets of the city, workshops, stores and private buildings were set up. These buildings were carelessly planned and of low-quality construction. Such haphazard dwellings seriously marred Hippos cityscape and towards the end of the 7th century it is no longer a polis but a declining town (Eisenberg 2016b). The end of Hippos came in a fatal earthquake that shook the region in 749 CE. The destructive force of this earthquake has left its mark on the archaeological finds. The fallen columns, crushed walls and the small finds scattered over the area all confirm that the tremor was sudden and very destructive. The city was deserted immediately after the earthquake and was never inhabited again.

Shape and Plan of the City

The shape and plan of Hippos conform, by the nature of things, to the shape of the mountain top on which it was built. This gave the city its irregular rectangular shape. Its lengthwise axis was east-

west, its length was about 550 m and its maximum width was about 220 m. The city of Hippos, with an area of about 8.6 hectares, was enclosed by a fortification wall that followed the line of the natural basalt cliffs surrounding the top of the mountain. The total length of the city wall was about 1550 m. There were two main gates in the wall (Figs. 4–6). One was located at the eastern end of the city, built above the saddle, while the other was at the western end of the city facing the road that descended towards the Sea of Galilee. In spite of the fact that only a small part of the city area has so far been exposed, it can clearly be seen that the urban plan of Hippos is orthogonal, which means that its streets intersect at right angles. These streets enclosed rectangular or square areas, city blocks (*insulae*) in which public buildings and residential quarters were erected.

City Fortifications and Gates

The city of Hippos was surrounded by a solid fortification wall built of basalt ashlar. Except for a few sections that collapsed into the valleys around the mountain, the course of the city wall is visible on the surface. The builders of the city wall made a real effort to mount it exactly upon the edge of the cliffs surrounding the mountain top. In most cases, the first course of ashlar was laid directly upon the levelled rock surface and in those places where the rock surface did not allow this, a foundation of rubble mixed with binding material was prepared on which the first course was laid. Along the city wall, at irregular intervals, a small number of square or rectangular towers were erected. Until now, a few sections of the northern as well as the southern walls have been exposed. The earliest fortifications, dated to the end of the Hellenistic period, between the second half of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 1st century BCE, were identified only along the northern cliff. Most of the exposed city walls were dated to the Roman period, early 1st–early 2nd century CE. The city walls continued to function and maintained

during Roman and Byzantine periods. In the Early Islamic period, they are probably no longer part of city fortifications but serve as a perimeter wall. The most unique example of Roman military architecture excavated in Hippos is the bastion (a battery for ancient projectiles, catapults and ballistae). The bastion, a basalt construction measuring 51×10 m, was built on the edge of the southern cliff, about 40 m south of the forum (Figs. 7–8). Its solid basalt wall frame is intersected by four chamber vaults and two towers. The chamber vaults carried the floor, of which little survived. The bastion was built in the 1st century CE and partially dismantled during the 2nd century when the southern bathhouse was built into it, reusing its large basalt wall frames.

Hippos had two gates. The west gate was located at the western end of the *decumanus maximus*. It is partially preserved and has not yet been excavated. On the other hand, the east gate at the eastern end of the *decumanus maximus*, has been excavated, and in spite of its partial preservation, its plan may be reconstructed (Figs. 4, 9). The east gate is located in the upper part of the rocky slope facing the saddle. The gate had one passageway 3.15 m wide. On either side of the gate front there were towers. Of the northern tower, which was square (3.50 x 3.50 m), hardly anything remains. But a few of the lower courses of the southern tower, which was round, have remained and allow for its reconstruction. The southern tower was integrated with the city wall, and together they created a defensive formation that controlled entry into the city from the east. The external diameter of the tower was about 8 m and it may be assumed that it originally rose to a height of three stories. It was solidly built of well-dressed basalt ashlar. The tower was designed in a manner typical of the Early Roman period, and it seems that missile launchers (catapults) could be placed on its upper storeys to fire at an enemy approaching with their siege machines along the only possible route, across the saddle in the east. The gate is dated to the 1st century CE. Similar gates were excavated in nearby Tiberias and Gadara (Eisenberg 2014).

Street Network

Anyone touring Hippos today will immediately notice the main traffic axis of the city that goes across its entire length from east to west for a distance of about 550 m. This is the *decumanus maximus*, a colonnaded street along which columns were placed on both the north and south sides. The course of the *decumanus maximus* stopped at about mid-point where the central public plaza of the city, the forum, extended. So far, we have exposed sections of three *cardines*, the north-south streets that intersected the *decumanus maximus* at right angles. This was sufficient to confirm that the urban plan of Hippos was an orthogonal one. A careful study of aerial photographs, especially those taken by the RAF during the 1940s prior to later interferences shows several additional *cardines* (Fig. 10).

In the survey conducted by M. Heinzelman and R. Rosenbauer on behalf of the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem in November 2004 in the south western part of Hippos, a partial reconstruction was made of the street network in this part of the city (Heinzelmann 2004). We have here a residential quarter that, like the public areas in the center of city, had been well planned. It seems that the main street in this quarter extended along an east-west axis parallel to the course of the *decumanus maximus*. This is at present stage only one of the *decumani* that has been located in Hippos.

About 300 m of the colonnaded *decumanus maximus* has so far been excavated. This excavated section extends from the forum eastward to the city east gate and from the forum westward for additional 50 m. The surface of the street, which was about 4.20 m wide in average, was paved carefully with basalt flagstones placed obliquely. The street was lined on both sides by columns made of local basalt and crowned with Ionic capitals of basalt and mounted on Attic basalt bases (Figs. 11–12). Recent excavations under an eastern segment of the *decumanus maximus* made it possible for better dating, to the first half of the 1st century CE. Same dating as the forum paved plaza (see below).

The main streets continue to function during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods with some changes. The main ones are the narrowing of main streets and most probably a vast reuse of the colonnades from the *decumanus maximus* in the churches, probably after the 363 CE earthquake. The best example would be their reuse in the North-West church.

Public Plazas and Buildings

The Forum

In the center of Hippos there was a square plaza measuring 42 x 42 m carefully paved with rectangular basalt flagstones (Figs. 13–14). A well-preserved stairway located in the southern part of the plaza led to an underground water reservoir roofed with an impressive barrel vault. This reservoir measuring 9 x 6 x 20 m has survived almost without any damage.

Extending along the eastern and northern side of this forum were colonnades arranged in the form of the Greek letter Γ. A number of column shafts that had once been part of the colonnades now lie scattered on the surface of the forum and serve as clear evidence of the powerful earthquake that had toppled them in 749 CE. These 4.7 m monolithic column shafts made of grey granite were crowned with Corinthian capitals and mounted on Attic bases. Both the capitals and the bases were made of white marble. The columns were placed on high pedestals made of *nari* above the stylobates, reaching a total height of about 9 m including the stylobate.

On the western side of the forum stood two structures side by side. The southern one was an open exedra-like structure (length of façade facing the forum: 19 m), in the middle of which was a semi-circular niche roofed with a half-dome. This structure apparently served as a *kalybe*, a temple for the imperial cult (Segal 2001; 2013). The first story of this monumental structure has been well preserved, but its second story only hinted by the amount of ashlar collapse, a staircase in its rear northern part and several well-preserved ashlar on the northern side. Very little re-

mains of the building to the north of this temple. It seems to have been a structure resembling a decorative gate that marked the point of transition from the forum to the western section of the *decumanus maximus*. A similar decorative gate was erected at the western end of the *decumanus maximus*, in the section that extends between the east gate of the city and the forum. In the area to the south of the forum, the surface drops downward towards the southern city wall and the Roman period bastion.

In 2019, excavations beneath the forum's floor handed a better dating of the forum paving which correlates to the laying of the *decumanus maximus*, first half of the 1st century CE. About 20% of the forum slabs bear mason's marks, identical to the *decumanus maximus*, a *cardo* partially exposed south of the odeum, and in the Roman basilica. Recent research of the mason's marks not only made it clear it could be used as a relative chronological tool for all the region but that this phenomenon in Hippos most probably existed only within the 1st century CE (Kowalewska and Eisenberg 2019).

The Southern Bathhouse

30 m eastward of the forum, the Southern Bathhouse was built over and reused the bastion solid frames of walls which were no longer needed in the 2nd century CE. The public bathhouse measures circa 50 x 30 m, built in the 2nd century CE and ceased functioning at the end of the 3rd century. About 65% of the bathhouse area were excavated and published (Kowalewska 2019). Public bathhouses are one of the main features of any Roman cityscape.

The Late-Hellenistic Compound

The forum is bordered on the north by a long and impressive wall (46 m) built of basalt ashlar with dressed margins and rough central bosses (Figs. 15–16). Of this wall there remain five courses arranged

in a regular pattern of headers and stretchers. This method of construction is typical of the Hellenistic period (2nd–1st century BCE). The wall is the southern wall of a large compound that has only been partially exposed. So far, except for a few sections of the city wall, these are the only building remains in Hippos that can be dated with a high degree of certainty to the late Hellenistic period (end of the 2nd century BCE). In the southern part of the compound, a plaza carefully paved with rectangular limestone slabs was exposed. This plaza was surrounded by colonnades arranged in a U-shape formation. The bases and column drums were also made of limestone. The location, size and construction methods of the compound all confirm that this was the main sanctuary of Hellenistic Hippos. The compound continued to function in its original capacity during the Roman period as well. On top of the ruins of the Hellenistic temple, of which only a few architectural items were found on the site, a new temple was erected at the end of the 1st century BCE (during the rule of Augustus Caesar). It should be mentioned here that the large *nari* ashlar reused in the North-West Church must have been removed from the Hellenistic or Roman temple. As to the Augustan temple, many more of its remains were found *in situ*, including the lower section of a stairway (*scalaria*) (10m in length), placed between two terminating walls (*antae*), as well as many architectural items made of basalt and even sections of a podium walls. These sections were incorporated in the foundations of the North-West Church that was erected over the ruins of the Roman temple.

Basilica

The basilica, a main public building found in all Roman cities and usually erected near the forum, may be defined as a sheltered alternative to it. The forum serves as an open plaza for conducting the social, administrative and economic activities of the citizens. In bad weather conditions, the basilica offers a convenient refuge in a spacious and roofed building.

The basilica is an impressive public building measuring 56 x 30.5 m built of ashlar, constructed at the end of the 1st century CE (Figs. 17–18). It was rectangular in shape, its lengthwise axis was north-south and it stood in the north-eastern corner of the forum. The three doorways in its short south wall facing the forum provided easy access between the forum and the basilica. The rows of columns standing parallel to the four walls of the basilica supported the roof and created a central nave surrounded by four aisles. The interior sides of the walls were decorated with stucco pilasters embedded opposite each column to break the monotony of the large wall surfaces. The inner space of the basilica was painted with fairly strong colours in shades of red, blue, green and orange. The architectural items that were exposed among the basilica ruins such as columns, Corinthian capitals, friezes or bases, all indicate excellent workmanship. The bases, columns and capitals were made of basalt, but some architectural items were of marble. The basilica collapsed during the 363 CE earthquake and wasn't rebuilt (Segal 2014a; Eisenberg forthcoming).

Odeum

The odeum can be defined simply as a small roofed theatre-like building for more intimate events than staging of plays, as for example poetry reading with musical accompaniment, intended for a much smaller, select and refined audience. The fact that Hippos had an odeum indicates an affinity of the urban elite for classical culture.

The semi-circular odeum of Hippos was located about 80 m to the west of the forum with the north-south axis of 27 m and an east-west axis of 21 m (Fig. 19). The building consists of two main parts:

1. A rectangular stage structure (*scaena*) with the stage (*pulpitum*) in the centre.
2. A semi-circular seating arrangement (*cavea* or *auditorium*).

None of the seats have survived but there were apparently 11 graded semi-circular rows of seats to

accommodate maximum of c. 380 spectators. The *orchestra*, a semi-circular area between the stage and the seating arrangement, was paved with rectangular marble slabs.

The odeum in Hippos, which was erected at the early 2nd century CE is smaller in comparison with others found in the Roman Empire but excels in the quality of its construction and careful planning. Two other *odea* have so far been found in the Decapolis region: one in Philadelphia (Amman) and the other in Scythopolis (Beth-Shean). The structure was dismantled in the 4th century CE, perhaps as the result of the 363 CE earthquake, but it could have happened prior to this event as well.

The Saddle Compound

A protective ditch, 7 m wide and 4 m deep, was cut in the middle of the saddle. The saddle's soft *nari* stone is vertically cut on the east and a perimeter wall along the western slopes of the saddle create a clear compound measuring c. 190 x 40 m (Fig. 20). Three features were identified along the western side of the saddle in a slightly sloping area. To the west of the ditch, at its lower part, a monumental gate (*propylaeum*) had been built to provide entrance to the compound. The gate is a solid structure of basalt ashlar with a single profile decoration running along its lower part. Most of the gate was excavated; two square towers, each measuring 6.4 m, flank a 4-m-wide single portal.

30 m north of the *propylaeum*, a public bathhouse was built. Only some of its rooms have been excavated so far: an omega-shaped hall serving as the hot room (*caldarium*), and adjacent to it on the west another room with the remains of benches and a poorly preserved mosaic floor. The bathhouse extends for about 70 m to the north and some of its rooms are very well preserved (although most of them are still covered).

Finally, a theater was recently identified just 30 m north of the bathhouse; several small-scale ex-

cavations have been made there so far. The theater was built on the southeastern corner of the slope, hence the unusual direction of its seating arrangement (*cavea*) to the south. A *vomitorium*, part of the *orchestra* and small part of the *scaena* have been excavated so far.

Though the excavations in the saddle compound are far from complete, the data we have so far indicate a single construction phase in the early 2nd century C.E. and the destruction in the 4th century C.E., perhaps following the 363 earthquake. Judging by the extra-mural nature of the compound and its three main features - *Propylaeum*, bathhouse and theatre - it was most probably a sanctuary dedicated to one of the rustic gods, possibly Dionysos (Eisenberg 2019b).

Hippos Necropoleis

Three necropoleis were identified in the vicinity of Hippos (Eisenberg 2017b, 17–19; 2020, 1–2; Zingboym 2018). The Southern Necropolis, also known as the 'Hill of the Caves,' is the largest burial ground, surveyed and though none of the graves were excavated so far.

The Eastern Necropolis is located to the east of Hippos on a small rocky hill. Dozens of pit graves, basalt covering slabs and one short inscription in Greek on a tomb stone were identified, but no excavations were conducted (Fig. 2).

The Saddle Necropolis stretches ca. 150 m along the southern part of Hippos' saddle, from the saddle's southern tip (the location of the modern parking lot) in the south to the ditch cut in the middle of the saddle in the north (Figs. 2, 4, 20). It was the most prestigious of the three necropoleis, with mausolea, hundreds of limestone and basalt sarcophagi, and pit graves quarried in bedrock. The 7-m-wide protective ditch, cut in the middle of the saddle in the soft limestone, served as a clear border between the necropolis and the polis. One of the most prominent features of the necropolis is a series of 13 funerary podia adjacent to the road on the east. Due to their prominent location,

identical plan, and identical construction, it is likely that the city itself built and sold these expensive real estates to the local elite, who could effort a burial in such a prominent location right next to the main city access. The podia were excavated in 2020 and dated to the Early Roman period (first half of the 1st century CE). The podia as well as the mausolea probably collapsed during the 363 CE earthquake (Eisenberg 2020; Kowalewska and Eisenberg forthcoming).

Discussion

Hippos was founded in the Hellenistic period, during the first half of the 2nd century BCE. However, our knowledge about the Hellenistic Hippos is very limited. The city walls and the sanctuary were apparently erected at the end of the Hellenistic period as well as silos, cisterns and additional remains exposed to the east of the Hellenistic Compound. An investigation of the well-developed urban water supply system of Hippos conducted during the 1990s affirmed that the main water supply system of the city was constructed in the Early Roman period (Tsuk 2018). This water supply consists of two parallel aqueducts, each 24 km long, was built in the first half of the 1st century CE, at the same time as the *decumanus maximus* and the forum. In the 2020 excavation season along the saddle exposed several segments of a pressure water system dated to the late Hellenistic (late 2nd–early 1st BCE) with its water source being the nearby Haruv springs (circa 2 km as the crow flies). It is the first evidence of a running water system up to the city itself during the Hellenistic period (Kowalewska and Eisenberg forthcoming). It may alter some of our ideas concerning the early city plan development, beginning already in the late Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the paved city network, the plaza and most of the main public construction were executed not earlier than the 1st century CE.

The road that led to the sanctuary from the east became, in the Roman period, the *decumanus maximus*, the main street of the city. If this was the case

in Hippos, it is not the only instance in which a processional way becomes in time the main street of a city. Consider, for example, the *via sacra* in Petra where the road that leads towards the main sanctuary in the west of the city, the Qasr el- Bint, turns in the 2nd century CE into a colonnaded street with mostly public buildings on both sides of it. It may be that the *cardo maximus* in Gerasa had also originally been a processional way leading to the sanctuary of Zeus in the southern part of the city. It may be assumed that a similar process occurred with regard to the *decumanus maximus* in Bosra where the road leading to the Nabataean sanctuary, located in east of the city became, after its declaration as the capital of *Provincia Arabia*, the main colonnaded street of the city.

A glance at the urban plan of Hippos, as it has now become apparent, confirms that it resembles the urban plan of Gadara, its neighbour to the south. The main colonnaded street in Gadara is also on an east-west axis and traverses the entire length of the city. Few streets intersect with it in a north-south direction (*cardines*). The urban plan of Gerasa, also one of the cities of the Decapolis, does not differ much from that of Hippos. The main colonnaded street with a north-south axis, the *cardo maximus*, traverses the entire length of the city. Two streets running in an east-west direction (*decumani*) intersect with the *cardo maximus* at right angles. In both Gadara and Gerasa, the street network seems to be very sparse. The street network of Philadelphia (Amman of today), which is the southernmost of the Decapolis cities, consists of only two colonnaded streets. In spite of the fact that Philadelphia was founded by the Ptolemies in the first quarter of the 3rd century BCE, its urban plan and all the public buildings in it, except for the sanctuary on the acropolis, belong to the Roman period. In Roman Samaria, there was only one colonnaded street that crossed the city along its entire width. This street was dated by the excavators of the site to the 3rd century CE. From all the examples given above, it is clear that it does not matter whether this or that city was founded during the Hellenistic period or at the beginning of the Roman period, their urban landscapes were

designed in its final stage in the late 1st or even early 3rd century CE. These had originally consisted of colonnaded streets and public plazas surrounded by colonnades, or structures resembling triumphal arches that created a fascinating urban landscape, rich and impressive. The citizens of the Decapolis cities in the first centuries of the Common Era clung to their *polis* form of government. They were also proud of their Greek culture, but the urban and architectural repertoire of forms through which they expressed their civic pride was very much imperial Roman.

Hippos post-363 CE earthquake and as an early Byzantine bishopric seat lacks most of the Roman public construction and institutions. The odeum, basilica, Southern Bathhouse, the Hellenistic Compound and the Saddle Compound are the main building complexes disappearing from Hippos' cityscape

already in the early Byzantine period. So far, none of the excavated churches predates the mid-5th century CE, but by no means it's prove that churches were not built already at the end of the 4th century, as Hippos becomes an episcopal see already in 359 CE (Schuler 2017).

A decay in the quality of construction, heavy use of secondary building materials, decrease of public space and grandeur are attested already towards the end of the 6th century CE. This public and private weakness strengthens once Hippos is longer the regional capital following the Early Islamic conquest (circa 636 CE) when Ṭabariya became the Umayyad capital of Jund al-Urdunn. Late 7th century–749 CE Hippos is no longer a polis but rather a declining city with small population and probably no running water (Eisenberg, Iermolin, and Shalev 2018).

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Fig. 1. Mt. Sussita and its environs, aerial view towards south (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 2. Vertical aerial view of Mt. Sussita, with *necropoleis* location indicated (Photo: Ofek Aerial Photography, Feb. 2012).



Fig. 3. Map of the Decapolis (drawn by M. Eisenberg).

Fig. 4. Hippos contour map with the main excavation areas assigned (based on a map by Israel National Mapping Agency – SOI).

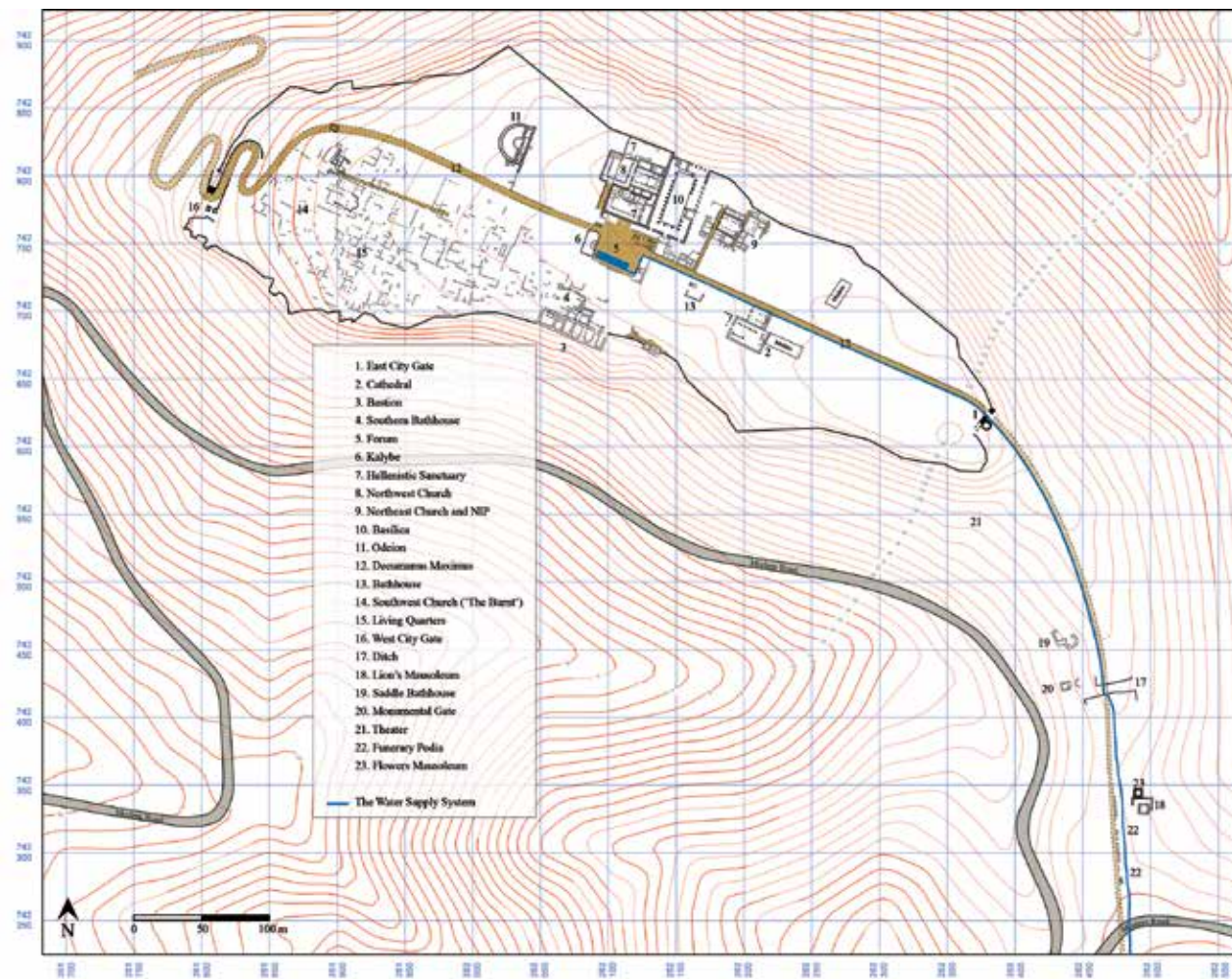




Fig. 5. Mt. Sussita, aerial view towards east (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 6. Hippos city plan (G. Schumacher 1885, ignore the incorrect scale).



Fig. 7. Mt. Sussita, aerial view towards northwest (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 8. The bastion along the southern cliff and the southern bathhouse built above it. The numbers (I–IV) indicate the chamber vaults and two towers (T-1–2) (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 9. The east city gate. A suggested reconstruction (drawn by M. Ralbag).

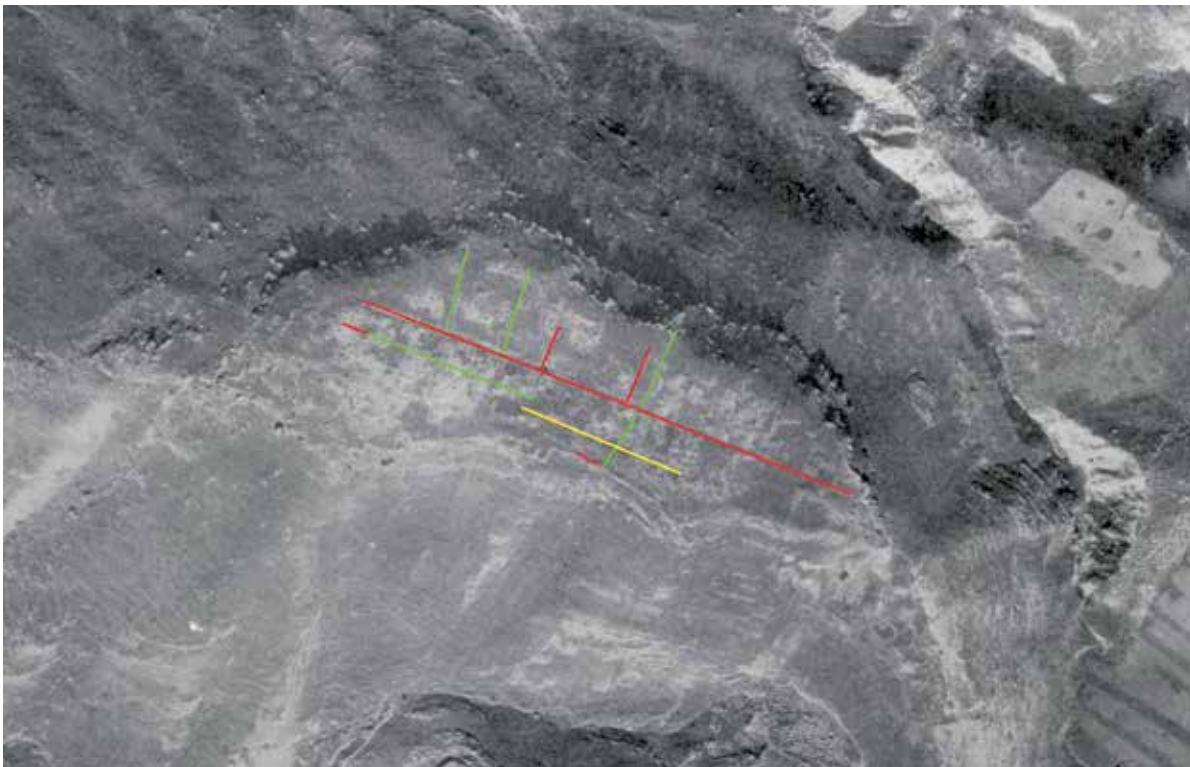


Fig. 10. Hippos, aerial orthophotograph. Conjectural and exposed streets: Red – streets seen on the aerial photograph and exposed during the excavations; Green – streets observed on the photograph only; Orange – hypothetical streets (taken by RAF in 1945. Israel National Mapping Agency – SOI).



Fig. 11. A stretch of the *decumanus maximus* as seen from the forum. Note the two arch piers on both sides of the street. Looking towards east (photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 12. A western segment of the colonnaded *decumanus maximus*. Some of the drums and capitals were reconstructed. Looking towards west (photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 13. The forum in a rainy day. At the far edge is the kalybe and to the right the toppled monolithic granite columns as evident of the 749 CE earthquake. Looking towards south west (photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 14. The forum and an eastern segment of the *decumanus maximus*. Looking towards east (photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 15. The Hellenistic Compound (marked) and the North-West Church erected within it (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 16. The southern wall of the Hellenistic Compound (photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 17. The basilica. An aerial view towards southwest (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).

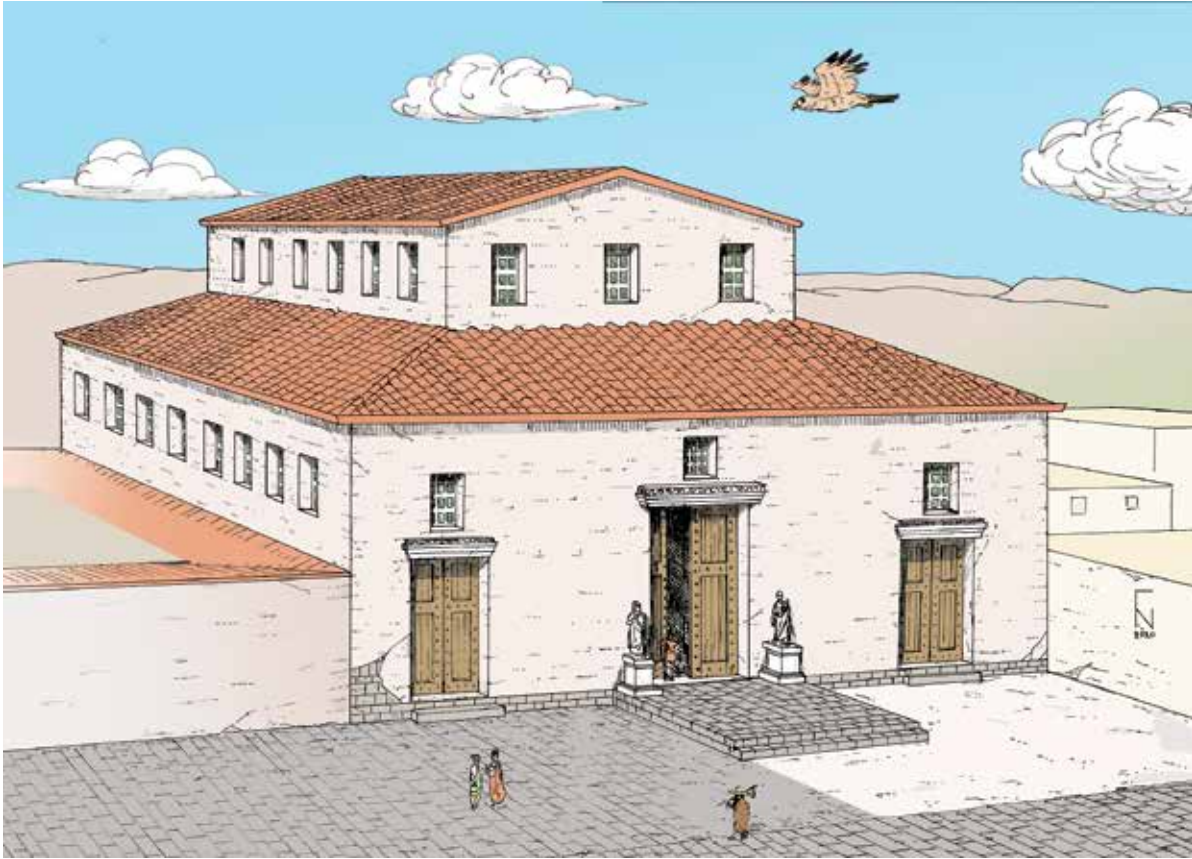


Fig. 18. A suggested reconstruction of the basilica, looking northeast (I. Nakas).



Fig. 19. The odeum. An aerial towards north (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).



Fig. 20. The Saddle Compound and Necropolis. A vertical aerial (drone photo. M. Eisenberg).