

Hippos-Sussita Excavations Unearth Rare Pan Mask

Bible and archaeology news

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A member of the Hippos-Sussita Excavations Project with the recently discovered bronze Pan mask. *Photo: Dr. Michael Eisenberg.*

Archaeologists working this winter at [Hippos-Sussita](#) on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel [have unearthed a large bronze mask of Pan](#), god of mountain wilds, shepherds and flocks. That such a large Pan mask was discovered is rare.

“Most of the known bronze masks from the Hellenistic and Roman periods are miniature,” said Hippos-Sussita Excavations Project director Dr. Michael Eisenberg [in a University of Haifa press release](#).

The [site of Hippos-Sussita](#) sits atop a diamond-shaped mountain 1,000 feet above the Sea of Galilee. In the Roman period, the city was part of the Decapolis, an alliance of primarily ten cities considered centers of Greek culture in northeastern Palestine.

Excavations conducted at Hippos-Sussita since 2000 have uncovered [remains of the well-planned Greco-Roman city](#), including public baths, temples, a theater and a forum. Some of the city’s vibrant art include colorful geometric floor mosaics, a fresco of the goddess Tyche and [a stucco sculpture of Hercules](#). Now joining these fascinating discoveries is the bronze Pan mask featuring the rustic god’s characteristic horns, goat beard and long pointed ears.

*The Galilee is one of the most evocative locales in the New Testament—the area where Jesus was raised and where many of the Apostles came from. Our **free eBook The Galilee Jesus Knew** focuses on several aspects of Galilee: how Jewish the area was in Jesus' time, the ports and the fishing industry that were so central to the region, and several sites where Jesus likely stayed and preached.*

Eisenberg discussed the possible significance of the Pan mask, which was found at the edge of the city near a basalt structure that may have been used for defensive purposes:

The first thought that crossed my mind was, “Why here, beyond the city limits?” After all, the mask is so heavy it could not have just rolled away. The mask was found nearby the remains of a basalt structure with thick walls and very solid masonry work, which suggested a large structure from the Roman period. A Pan altar on the main road to the city, beyond its limits, is quite likely. After all, Pan was worshipped not only in the city temples but also in caves and in nature. The ancient city of Paneas, north of Hippos-Sussita, had one of the most famous worshipping compounds to the god Pan inside a cave. Because they included drinking, sacrificing and ecstatic worship that sometimes included nudity and sex, rituals for rustic gods were often held outside of the city.