

# Goddess of fortune found in Sussita

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A wall painting (fresco) of Tyche, the Greek goddess of fortune, was exposed during the 11th season of excavation at the Sussita site, on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was conducted by researchers of the University of Haifa. Credit: Sussita Expedition/Courtesy of the University of Haifa

A wall painting (fresco) of Tyche, the Greek goddess of fortune, was exposed during the 11th season of excavation at the Sussita site, on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was conducted by researchers of the University of Haifa. Another female figure was found during this season, of a maenad, one of the companions of the wine god Dionysus.

"It is interesting to see that although the private residence in which two goddesses were found was in existence during the Byzantine period,

when Christianity negated and eradicated idolatrous cults, one can still find clear evidence of earlier beliefs," said Prof. Arthur Segal and Dr. Michael Eisenberg of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa, who headed the excavation. The city of Sussita is located within the Sussita National Park under the management of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, which has accompanied and assisted the excavation teams this season in enabling the continuation of excavation work and the conservation of the archaeological finds.

During the course of the excavations conducted by the team from the University of Concordia under the direction of Prof. Mark Schuler, in a residence that appeared, by the quality and complexity of its construction, to belong to one of the city notables, the excavators reached an inner courtyard with a small fountain at its center. Near the fountain they found a fresco of Tyche, who was apparently deified as the city's goddess of fortune. Her head is crowned, her youthful gaze is focused, and she has abundant brown hair beneath her crown. According to the researchers, artistic analysis has indicated that the wall painting may be dated to the end of the Roman period or the beginning of the [Byzantine period](#) (3rd-7th centuries C.E.).

The goddess Tyche was not the only mythological figure to be discovered in this compound. Found on a bone plate was a wonderfully etched relief of a maenad, one of a group of female followers of Dionysus, the god of wine. According to Greek mythology, the maenads accompanied Dionysus with frenzied dances while holding a thyrsus, a device symbolizing sexuality, fertility, and the male sexual organ associated with sexual pleasure. The maenad of Sussita was also depicted as being in the midst of a frenzied dance. The researchers believe that both manifestations of the cult of Graeco-Roman female goddesses can be dated to the end of the Roman period, but there is no doubt that the residence in which they were found continued to exist even after Christianity triumphed over idolatry.



Found on a bone plate during the 11th season of excavation at the Sussita site, on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was conducted by researchers of the University of Haifa, was a wonderfully etched relief of a maenad, one of a group of female followers of Dionysus, the god of wine. According to Greek mythology, the maenads accompanied Dionysus with frenzied dances while holding a thyrsus, a device symbolizing sexuality, fertility, and the male sexual organ associated with sexual pleasure. The maenad of Sussita was also depicted as being in the midst of a frenzied dance. Credit: Sussita Expedition/Courtesy of the University of Haifa



Clay oil lamps were exposed during the 11th season of excavation at the Sussita site, on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was conducted by researchers of the University of Haifa. Credit: Sussita Expedition/Courtesy of the University of Haifa

In this season the city's Roman period basilica (1st-2nd centuries CE) began to be exposed. This is a large-sized building that incorporated the city's central commercial, social and judicial areas. Besides the excellent architectural marble items that were unearthed there, the researchers also found decorations made of "stucco", molded plaster used in the imitation of marble. "We could not fail to wonder how a relatively plebeian city could employ first-class builders and artisans. The stucco decorations demonstrate that despite everything, the city rulers were certainly not sparing of the costs and expenditure of construction," the researchers noted.

Sussita was erected on a mountain top rising to the east of the Sea of Galilee during the 2nd century B.C.E. by the Seleucid rulers who then controlled the country. The city existed during the Hellenist, Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad periods, until it was destroyed by a violent earthquake in the year 749 C.E. Together with Beth Shean and other cities on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, Sussita was one of the cultural-geographical group of Decapolis cities - a region within which

Jesus conducted some of the miracles described in the New Testament.

Provided by University of Haifa

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