

# "The Christian Community at Hippos"

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## JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

North American Christians today know little about Christianity in other eras and locations. However, much can be learned about faith and mission from our ancestors in the Byzantine Christian tradition who lived at Hippos, Israel, from the 5<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Because of the seminary's involvement since 2006 in the excavation of this site, I am relatively well-positioned to be able to shed some light on these matters.

## OBJECTIVES

Regarding content, this project aims to provide information about a particular site (Hippos), the general area in which it lies (Gaulanitis / the Golan / Roman Syria), and the branch of Christianity which was planted there and which, in turn, Hippos-based Christians helped to propagate more widely in the Roman East (Byzantine / Orthodox Christianity).

Regarding audience, this project seeks to engage three audiences: (1) the CLS community, especially students who might be (or become) interested in participating in the dig; (2) pastors and members of LCC congregations who might also be prospective archaeologists; (3) churchworkers in LCC and/or LCMS who want to learn more about subjects including archaeology, missions, early-church history, and Orthodox (Byzantine) Christianity.

To attain these objectives, this project involves the writing of several articles for different audiences, on related but distinct topics. First: a relatively brief popular article in *The Canadian Lutheran*, describing the site and work and publicizing the excavation. Second: some narrowly focused papers of scholarly depth, to be shared with participants on the Hippos dig. Third: a broader scholarly article (or perhaps two), dealing with Hippos and/or Byzantine Christianity.

## METHODOLOGY

The first phase involved research of a fairly broad nature regarding (1) Hippos in particular and (2) the Decapolis more generally; (3) Christianity in the Hippos area, and (4) Byzantine Christianity more generally.

The second phase focused on research both in scholarly sources and on the excavation site, in the following areas: (1) the establishment of Christianity in the Hippos area; (2) the role of Hippos' churches in ongoing mission-work; (3) practices of piety, charity, and Christian devotion in Hippos and elsewhere; (4) monasticism in Hippos and Roman Syria; (5) the veneration both of holy people (saints) and holy places (pilgrimage sites) in Byzantine Christianity.

## DISCUSSION OR RESULTS / OUTLOOK

As noted above, this project covers a lot of ground! Thus, it achieved only some of its goals in 2007-8, namely the publication of an article in *The Canadian Lutheran* (Nov 2007) and the production of a number of Hippos-themed materials related to the 2008 excavation season (and the E-573 course in Field Archaeology) (June-July 2008). To date, more has been learned (and written) about the narrower topics of this project—the archaeological dimensions of Hippos and the NorthEast Church—than about the broader topics, namely the salient features of Byzantine church-life and mission. The project as a whole will continue in 2008-9.

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