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THE DECLINE AND FALL OF SAGALASSOS. A CERAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

When publishing the first extensive overview of the typology and chronology of Sagalassos Red Slip Ware in 1999, it was concluded that, as far as the end of the local production of tablewares was concerned, this 'should be situated … at the end of the sixth or during the first half of the seventh century AD'. However, 'a clear chronological yardstick [was] still lacking … in order to correlate the end of the ceramic production and the abandonment of the site'[1]. Two years later, as reported to the Fautores, 'the end of the pottery production at Sagalassos became more clear, allowing the definition of a specific ceramic assemblage datable to the second half of the sixth and the first decades of the seventh century AD'. Still, however, 'more quantified assemblages [were] needed to gauge the importance of imported products and it [was] therefore … too soon to interpret the wider implications for our knowledge of early Byzantine Sagalassos'[2]. In this paper, we would like to come back to the problem of the end of Sagalassos and its pottery with updated evidence, and sketch some thoughts which may have wider methodological implications for a non-Sagalassos audience.

The Phase 9 ceramic assemblage

Following the logic of the local relative chronological sequence, the final stage of ceramic production at Sagalassos was defined as Phase 9 (provisionally dated to c. 550/75–650 AD). Ongoing archaeometrical analyses and quantification studies indicate that, from a fabric composition point of view, the assemblage of Phase 9 was not necessarily different from the previous stages in the local production. Two major fabric groups still dominated the Sagalassos production line: Fabric 1, being the fabric used mainly for the local tablewares[3], and Fabric 4, being the local/regional jug, cook ware and amphora fabric[4].

As far as the tablewares are concerned, production of Fabric 1 into the second half of the sixth century AD is attested in the local potter's quarter, and as the production technology does not seem to change, we presume that the seventh century workshops remain to be discovered in the same artisanal quarter. What seems to be happening at this stage, however, is that a variety of other fine ware fabrics is now present at the site, such as the Bağsaray fabric[5], the Asia Minor fabric[6], and a new, third group, only identifiable through archaeometrical analyses (**fig. 1**). This fabric consists of a dark-brown heterogenous matrix with elongated pores (500 µm). The mineral content comprises angular sandstone fragments (calcite cement, up to 2 mm in diameter), shell fragments (up to 4 mm large) and quartz (100 µm), pyroxenes and amphibole grains (50 µm).

The typological spectrum of Phase 9 should now be understood as a next and final step in the evolution of Sagalassos Red Slip Ware (**fig. 2**). During Phase 8 the morphological variety had already diminished when compared to imperial times and a further reduction is observed in Phase 9 when mainly bowls and containers were produced. In general, Sagalassos was offering a regional interpretation of the major, more commercial types of tableware and this was not to be different in Phase 9, be it that the logic was perhaps even more internalised. The shapes were not wholly plain and undecorated, as both wavy and straight lines became more common decorative motifs. The quality of the slip was less well-finished and often mottled in character, most probably due to less controlled firing conditions. Morphologically the shapes fit with the major tablewares produced and distributed

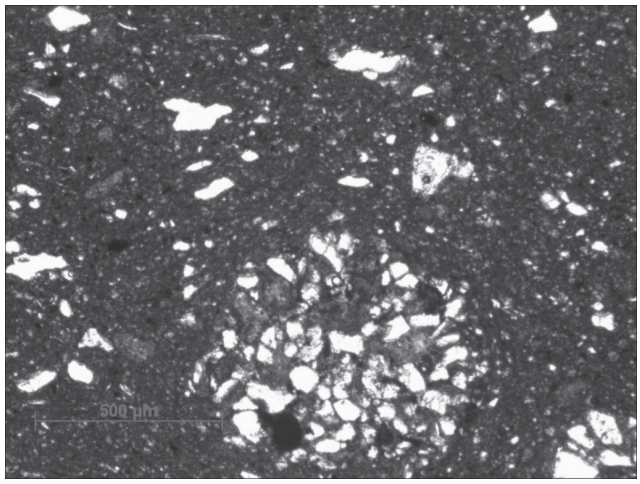

Fig. 1: Micrograph of the newly identified early Byzantine fabric of unknown origin, crossed Nicols.

[1] Poblome 1999, 318.
[2] Poblome et al. 2001, 122.
[3] Poblome 1999. — J. Poblome/W. Viaene/H. Kucha/M. Waelkens/D. Laduron/F. Depuydt, The Clay Raw Materials of Sagalassos Red Slip Ware. A Chronological Evaluation. In: M. Waelkens/J. Poblome (eds.), Sagalassos IV. Report on the survey and excavation campaign of 1994 and 1995. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 9 (Leuven 1997) 507–518.
[4] R. Degeest, The common wares of Sagalassos. Studies in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology 3 (Turnhout 2000). — P. Degryse/R. Degeest/J. Poblome/W. Viaene/R. Ottenburgs/H. Kucha/M. Waelkens, Mineralogy and Geochemistry of Roman Common Wares produced at Sagalassos and their Possible Clay Resources. In: M. Waelkens/L. Loots (eds.), Sagalassos V. Report on the Survey and Excavation Campaigns of 1996 and 1997. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 11 (Leuven 2000) 709–722.
[5] J. Poblome/H.A. Ekinci/I. Öztürk/P. Degryse/W. Viaene/M. Waelkens, An early Byzantine Tile and Lime Kiln in the Territory of Sagalassos. In: M. Waelkens/L. Loots (eds.), Sagalassos V. Report on the Survey and Excavation Campaigns of 1996 and 1997. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 11 (Leuven 2000) 669–684.
[6] Poblome et al. 2001.

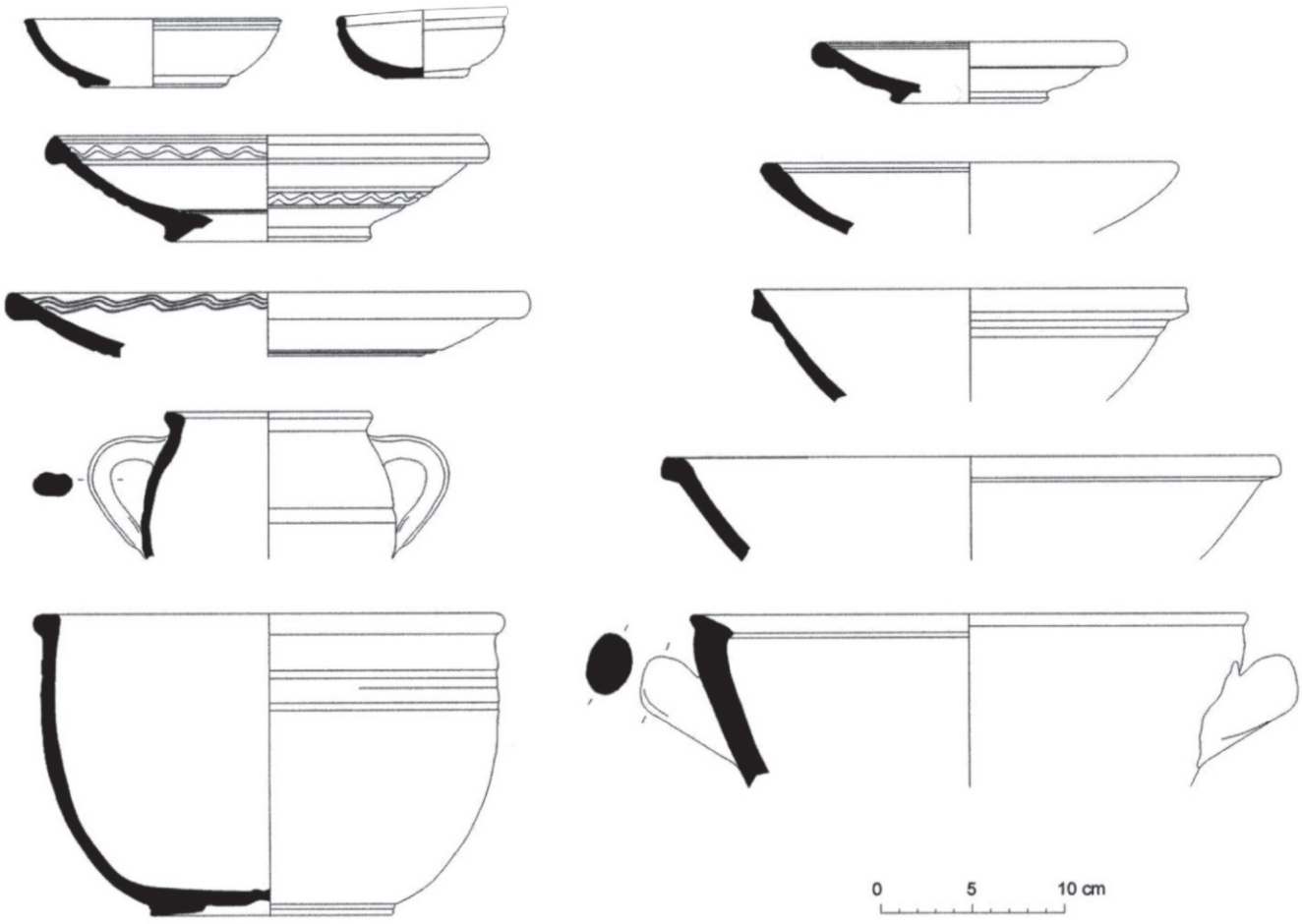

Fig. 2: A reconstructed Phase 9 tableware assemblage.

in the sixth and seventh centuries, which were equally restricted to mainly large open shapes[7].

As far as the common wares of Fabric 4 are concerned, continued interdisciplinary analysis pointed out that this fabric might be seen from a different perspective. First of all, no indications of the production of vessels in this fabric have been found in the local potter's quarter so far. Secondly, some 12 to 15 different compositions within Fabric 4 were identified macroscopically. Finally, the nature of the products in Fabric 4 has to be taken into account as well, including amphorae, cooking wares and other serving vessels. Therefore, we now presume this fabric to be a product of the wider region of Sagalassos, with a multitude of workshops in suburbia and the wider territory geared towards the production of amphorae, in order to pack the agricultural produce, and adding other common wares such as cooking vessels and jugs to the batch[8]. None of these workshops have been discovered yet, but we look forward to mapping this production and distribution in the near future.

Apart from the already mentioned occurrence of new tableware fabric groups, imported fabrics at Sagalassos consisted mainly of amphorae, whereas jugs[9] in several fabrics and late Roman *unguentaria*[10] were found in small but persistent numbers throughout most of the excavated areas. This, in a way, should come as no surprise as Sagalassos provided proficiently in its own pottery, while the amphorae attest to a wish to import a particular range of goods, not necessarily present in the region as such (**fig. 3**). The question to be answered at this point is whether the relative quantities and the fabric variation of the imported fabrics were different between Phases 8 and 9. Therefore quantified data from two functionally comparable units, being the western portico on the upper agora and the so-called shop 7 within the western portico on the lower agora, were collected[11]. The pottery from these two groups of deposits was dated to Phase 8 (c. 450–550/75 AD) and Phase 9 (c. 550/75–650 AD) respectively. Within these units a divergent picture of imported wares became apparent, showing a relative increase of imported pottery. However, the nature of the

[7] Compare for instance with C. Williams, Anemurium. The Roman and Early Byzantine pottery (Toronto 1989). — M. L. Rautman, Two Late Roman wells at Sardis. AASOR 53, 1995, 37–84.

[8] Similar practices mentioned by J. W. Hayes, From Rome to Beirut and beyond: Asia Minor and eastern Mediterranean trade connections. RCRF Acta 36, 2000, 285–297.

[9] R. Degeest/P. Degryse/R. Ottenburgs/W. Viaene/M. Waelkens, Miniature jars of Sagalassos. An analytical, quantitative and typological overview of a series of very small pottery vessels from late antiquity. In: M. Waelkens/L. Loots (eds.), Sagalassos V. Report on the Survey and Excavation Campaigns of 1996 and 1997. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 11 (Leuven 2000) 697–708.

[10] R. Degeest/R. Ottenburgs/H. Kucha/W. Viaene/P. Degryse/M. Waelkens, The late Roman unguentaria of Sagalassos. Babesch 74, 1999, 247–262.

[11] Waelkens et al. in press.

Fig. 3a–c: Import amphorae found at Sagalassos. — **a** LR1. — **b** Agora imitation M 334. — **c** LR5/6.

archaeological contexts may downplay too straightforward interpretations. The material from the upper agora was chronologically consistent but very fragmented and can be considered dumped material in secondary position. The material from shop 7, on the other hand, showed more consistency, both chronologically and functionally, and was much less fragmented, although only few complete vessels (*dolia*, local amphorae and small jars) could be reconstructed, suggesting that at least part of the content of the shop was originally linked to its functioning.

In order to structure future research into these wares a fabric reference collection is being developed. A range of early Byzantine imported amphora fabrics was already included and awaits archaeometrical provenancing, as well as content analyses. We hope that this series of fabrics may fill a gap in our knowledge of exchange patterns in this part of Asia Minor and add to the descriptive framework of the early Byzantine economy in general[12]. Particular fabrics of

[12] B. LEVICK, The Roman economy: trade in Asia Minor and the niche market. Greece & Rome 51, 2004, 180–198. — M. MCCORMICK, Origins of the European economy. Communications and commerce, AD 300–900 (Cambridge 2001) 25–119.

the series were already identified, however. Late Roman 1[13] and 4[14] amphorae were found in some quantity, each in a variety of fabrics, along with a few LR3 amphorae or similar products, an amphora of Syro-Palestinian origin and one amphora Agora imitation M 334. Interestingly, both LR1 and LR4 were found in several distinct fabrics, which may not only point to a different provenance but also differing contents. For the moment, the presence of the imported amphorae seems to be divergent in the various excavation units within Sagalassos[15]. LR1 (variants) were found in the urban palatial mansion and on the lower agora, among others within shop 7. The LR4 amphorae were mainly concentrated in shop 7 and the adjacent room within the western portico of the lower agora, whereas only few examples were found in the urban mansion. The LR3 *amphoriskos* and the Agora imitation M 334 amphora were found within the north-east gate building, an early Byzantine encroachment structure in the north-eastern corner of the upper agora. Detailed quantification may support a diversified picture of spaces and places within the urban area having fulfilled different functions[16]. On the other hand, the observation that in the western portico of the upper agora the amount of imports was negligible, indicates that we should take the specific nature and formation processes of the deposits into account when evaluating patterns of importation.

Problems at the horizon?

Upon original discovery and definition of the Phase 9 assemblage, it was hoped that this pottery could contain new information on when exactly Sagalassos was abandoned. A key area to understand the process of urban abandonment is the western portico of the lower agora[17]. Here, an important destruction caused by an earthquake was noted. A group of inhumation burials was laid out in this earthquake rubble, possibly representing the last inhabitants of a seriously affected and destroyed town. Unfortunately, these burials contained next to no positive chronological indicators. Therefore, the pottery of Phase 9, of which an assemblage was found covered by the earthquake destruction deposits of the western portico of the lower agora, provided us with an ideal opportunity to date this catastrophic event and, along the same lines, the end of human occupation at Sagalassos.

In the meantime, however, various factors have indicated that this may actually be a too deterministic approach of the meaning of the Phase 9 assemblage.

First of all, seventh century deposits do not occur everywhere at Sagalassos. Phase 9 material, for instance, has been rarely and sporadically attested in the intensive urban survey campaigns[18]. In itself this pattern is still difficult to interpret, but at least it does not seem to indicate a concentration of the occupation within the late Roman town walls. Phase 9 material was also not noted in both areas of the site, where in the meantime a mid Byzantine occupation (tenth to thirteenth centuries AD) was identified. These areas seem to have been abandoned in the later sixth/seventh century AD, and the mid Byzantine occupation stands in no relationship to the earlier remains. The general area of the library and the lower part of the slope west of the theatre may also already have been abandoned, and this process may actually have started before the sixth century AD[19]. In general, the presence/absence of Phase 9 material seems to suggest the need for a more careful consideration of the process of abandonment of the urban site of Sagalassos, allowing for more than one scenario to take place within a certain period of time, and not fixed to one particular moment or event.

Secondly, we need to take a look at the nature of the deposits in which Phase 9 material occurred. In general, most seventh century AD material is found under well preserved conditions, suggesting the presence of some primary refuse, be it contained in mostly secondary deposits. Therefore, the presence of the material is related to particular patterns of occupation behaviour, with material being dumped at specific places, with other areas kept clean of rubbish. The earthquake which struck Sagalassos in the course of the seventh century AD possibly prevented the material from being reworked and replaced in secondary fills or dumps, which would be the normal pattern in case occupation continued. The absence of seventh century AD material does therefore not imply that no activity whatsoever was taking place in such areas, but compared to the uniform presence of sixth century AD material, does suggest some type of reduction of the urban landscape.

The earthquake which struck Sagalassos in the course of the seventh century AD[20] could have sealed the fate of organised urban life, including the local pottery producing tradition[21]. The determination of the chronological position of the final pottery assemblage at Sagalassos could provide

[13] M. Decker, Food for an empire: wine and oil production in North Syria. In: S. Kingsley/M. Decker (eds.), Economy and exchange in the east Mediterranean during late antiquity (Oxford 2001) 69–86.

[14] S. Kingsley, The economic impact of the Palestinian wine trade in late Antiquity. In: S. Kingsley/M. Decker (eds.), Economy and exchange in the east Mediterranean during late antiquity (Oxford 2001) 87–106.

[15] Waelkens et al. in press.

[16] see T. Putzeys/J. Poblome/P. Bes, this volume.

[17] M. Waelkens/J. Poblome/E. Paulissen/P. Talloen/J. Van Den Bergh/V. Vanderginst/B. Arýkan/I. Van Damme/I. Akyel/F. Martens/M. Martens/I. Uytterhoeven/T. Debruyne/D. Depraetere/K. Baran/B. Vandaele/Z. Parras/Ş. Yildirim/S. Bubel/H. Vanhaverbeke/C. Licoppe/F. Landuyt/R. Degeest/L. Vandeput/L. Loots/T. Patricio/S. Ercan/K. Van Balen/E. Smits/F. Depuydt/L. Moens/P. De Paepe, The 1996 and 1997 Excavation Seasons at Sagalassos. In: M. Waelkens/L. Loots (eds.), Sagalassos V. Report on the Survey and Excavation Campaigns of 1996 and 1997. Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia Monographiae 11 (Leuven 2000) 367–378. — Waelkens et al. in press.

[18] F. Martens, The archaeological urban survey of Sagalassos (SW Turkey): the possibilities and limitations of surveying a 'non-typical' classical site. Oxford Journal of Archaeology 24, 2005, 229–254.

[19] Waelkens et al. in press.

[20] M. Waelkens/M. Sintubin/P. Muchez/E. Paulissen, Archaeological, geomorphological and geological evidence for a major earthquake at Sagalassos (SW Turkey) around the middle of the seventh century AD. In: W. G. MacGuire/D. R. Griffiths/P. L. Hancock/I. S. Stewart (eds.), The archaeology of geological catastrophes. Geological Society, London, Special Publications 17 (London 2000) 373–383.

[21] M. Waelkens/H. Vanhaverbeke/F. Martens/P. Talloen/J. Poblome/N. Kellens/T. Putzeys/P. Degryse/T. Van Thuyne/W. Van Neer, The late antique to early Byzantine city in Southwest Anatolia. Sagalassos and its territory: a case study. In: J.-U. Krause/C. Witschel (eds.), Die spätantike Stadt. Niedergang oder Wandel? Kolloquium München, 29–31 May 2003, in press.

a *terminus post quem* for the seismic disaster, but the lack of well-defined seventh century AD deposits, especially of the second half of the century, in this part of Asia Minor or the eastern Mediterranean in general, hampers drawing firm conclusions. On strict ceramological grounds there is no necessity to place the earthquake around the middle of the century, any point within the second half of the century being as feasible. On the other hand, the fact that the coin series found at Sagalassos seems to terminate with Heraclius (610–640 AD) or early in the reign of his successor Constans II (641–668 AD) could provide a valuable chronological indication to situate these events. We would like to be cautious in suggesting a strong association with the numismatic evidence, as the stratified contexts are mostly not closed in nature, the circulation and use patterns of the coins remain to be studied, and a general discrepancy between coins and pottery has already been noted at Sagalassos[22]. Yet, the fact that the series as such ends around the middle of the seventh century AD should be considered of importance when establishing the end of Sagalassos and its pottery.

In general, earthquakes and other drastic events can leave dominant traces in the stratigraphy of a site, but their importance and interpretation should never be approached in similar dramatic ways, in order to avoid one-to-one interpretations of the archaeological record. Therefore, we would like to argue for a looser link between the event of the earthquake and the seventh century AD deposits. These deposits attest to an interrupted pattern of activity, but there are no stratigraphical arguments to intrinsically link this pattern with the earthquake. Things may already have been going bad before the earthquake. From a stratigraphical point of view, the earthquake destruction deposits are in a relatively younger position. The end of the accumulation of refuse in the seventh century AD deposits could therefore have occurred in an undefined period before the earthquake struck, allowing a measure of uncertainty whether these deposits may not even have been functionally depleted to a certain degree. The presence of the burials on the lower agora, on the other hand, should allow for some post-earthquake pattern of activity.

In the same way, we would like to be very careful in approaching the differences in the specific nature of the deposits and the assemblages of Phases 8 and 9. This transition is now placed around the middle of the sixth century AD, when the effects of the plague were rampant throughout Asia Minor[23]. It is of course very tempting to suggest a pattern in these events, coupled with indications of architectural degradation. Also in this case, however, we would like to be more circumstantial, as we still do not quite fully understand the logic behind the typological evolution of the Sagalassos wares. We have reconstructed this evolution in relative chronological phases, but what exactly the motivation behind the attested typological changes was, is not clear, nor is the speed of the process or the necessity to lump all the attested changes together in time. Phase 8 and 9 are exactly that, phases, or longer periods in time when each of the deposits may have originated for a multitude of reasons. Linking such changes to drastic events as earthquakes and the plague needs more hard, positive evidence, which in the case of Sagalassos is still missing in our opinion.

One other aspect of the period under discussion is the general perception of decline of sociological patterns, basically picturing the seventh century as negative. Occupation is reduced to squatters and the urban framework declined to rural proportions. Also in this respect, we wish to stress the need for open interpretations of the material. In ceramic terms, sociological patterns can, for instance, be deduced from reconstructing patterns of importation of products and fabrics. We have mentioned the presence of a limited series of imported tablewares at Sagalassos in the seventh century AD. In the context of the period, this could be taken as a sign of decline of the local potting industry, which lost its monopoly on the market, or even suggesting a model of decentralisation of the artisanal production with the urban centre losing out to rural secondary production units. Funnily enough, if the same phenomenon of imported tablewares was to be noted in the first century AD, these facts could be interpreted in a totally different way. In an early imperial context, the attested imported fabrics could be seen as a sign of a well-functioning exchange pattern linking an economical viable Sagalassos to its outer world. The fact that in the very same seventh century deposits we still find bones of Nile fish[24] and HIMT vessel glass[25], possibly also imported from Egypt, could also be used to support this notion.

However, none of these absolute scenarios holds true. There is no need for the mentioned seventh century imported material to come directly from Egypt, but these goods may have arrived in indirect ways, through Pamphylian port towns for instance. If we are correct in presuming that the production of Fabric 4 was organised mainly in the territory of Sagalassos, an important part of the artisanal production was already decentralised at least from early imperial times onwards. The aspect of ruralisation, on the other hand, should also not be approached by contrasting a second century urban landscape with an early Byzantine one, and the logic of both urban landscapes should be understood within their own context, allowing for mixed messages. One local indicator of ruralisation at Sagalassos, is, for instance, the transformation of one of the lower rooms of the baths building into a human waste collector, possibly providing manure for the neighbouring agricultural plots. Yet, at the same time, at least the splendid *frigidarium* and *apodyterium* stayed open on the upper floor of the same building[26].

[22] POBLOME 1999, 276–283.

[23] A. CAMERON, The Mediterranean world in late Antiquity, AD 395–600 (London 1993) 111; 123–124; 164.

[24] W. VAN NEER/O. LERNAU/R. FRIEDMAN/G. MUMFORD/J. POBLOME/M. WAELKENS, Fish remains from archaeological sites as indicators of former trade connections in the Eastern Mediterranean. Paléorient 30, 2004, 101–148.

[25] I. C. FREESTONE/M. PONTING/M. J. HUGHES, The origins of Byzantine glass from Maroni Petrera, Cyprus. Archaeometry 44, 2000, 257–272. — D. FOY/M. PICON/M. VICHY/V. THIRION-MERLE, Caractérisation des verres de la fin de l'Antiquité en Méditerranée occidentale: l'émergence de nouveaux courant commerciaux. In: D. FOY/M.-D. NENNA (eds.), Echanges de commerce du verre dans le monde antique (Montagnac 2001) 41–78. — V. LAUWERS/P. DEGRYSE/J. POBLOME/M. WAELKENS, Le verre de Sagalassos: de nouvelles preuves d'une production locale du verre. In: H. CABART (ed.), Eclats de verre. Annales du 19ième Rencontre de l'Association Française pour l'Archéologie du Verre (Paris 2005) 26–29.

[26] WAELKENS ET AL. in press.

Clearly, this type of material warns us to stay close to the value and speaking power of our evidence. We need the larger context to understand patterns in our evidence, but the very nature of the evidence, being humble bits of broken pottery, should keep us at least as humble, or to put it in a positive way, stay open to many options. The early Byzantine age is one of transformations, and we may have to transform our mind-sets accordingly. In this way, our case-study of the decline and fall of Sagalassos could indicate that archaeology is necessarily as good as it gets, and that the best ways forward are continued methodological scrutiny and advances with the aim of better measuring and comparing the explanatory value of our archaeological data.

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