

Rhodes and the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Hellenistic-Early Imperial Periods: The Ceramic Evidence

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Introduction

In archaeological material records, local habits can most precisely be defined when reflected upon large and diverse finds ensembles of clearly chronologically confined periods. In regard to past ceramic material culture, local habits can best be recognised when comparing vessels declared as imports with synchronic pottery, presumably native to the site of their recovery.

The Eastern Mediterranean – and the Aegean area in particular – was subjected to diverse influences in the (late) Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods. These influences came through prospering commercial contacts and the movement of individuals.¹ The circulation of goods and people arriving from other territories affected the lifestyle and preferences of ancient society.

Was the external impact powerful enough to cause changes, adaptations or modifications in the local material culture? Or did local and regional traditions survive and further develop their own visual language? Is the co-existence or syncretism of local/regional and external habits traceable?

Engaging with the investigation of ceramic fine ware of the later 2nd and 1st centuries BC excavated at the Papachristodoulou-Karika plot in the necropolis of Rhodes,² patterns of pottery distribution in the Aegean area will be reviewed and accordingly interpreted. The island of Rhodes is well-suited as a case study for this purpose; it is located favourably at trade routes connecting Western Asia Minor, the Aegean, Cyprus and the Levant, having close economic ties with the major commercial centres at that time.³ In the periods of interest, several ceramic production centres in Western Asia Minor had their highest fabrication and export rates.⁴ Is this trend also reflected in Rhodes?

Material Record and Volume

Relatively little evidence of imported ceramics exists or has been published to date in Hellenistic and Early Roman Rhodes.⁵ Preliminary statistical analyses of the ceramics excavated at the Papachristodoulou-Karika plot give a first insight into ceramic exchange, provenance and, as such, cultural networks. Around 15% of the total ceramic assemblage evaluated so far can be classified as imports, indicated by their clay composition and morphological characteristics (fig. 1). Of this proportion, an impressive 12% of the ceramic fragments can be assigned to workshops in Western Asia Minor

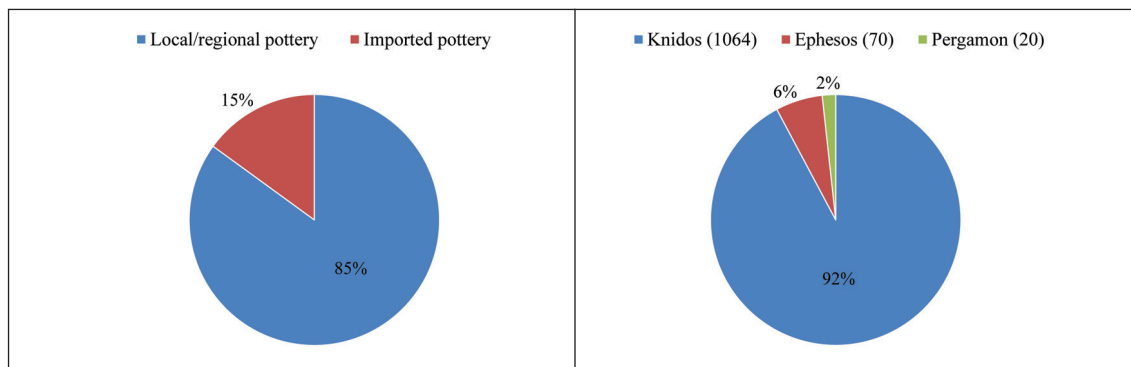


Fig. 1: Percentual representation of local/regional and imported ceramics at the Papa-christodoulou-Karika plot, and attribution of imports to production centres in Western Asia Minor.

(leaving 3% to other imports produced elsewhere). Pergamon, Ephesos and Knidos have been the leading ceramic production centres in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and, therefore, not surprisingly, these three cities are represented by the ceramic items uncovered in Rhodes. More astonishing is the respective percentage allocation of the Western Asia Minor products, as follows (fig. 1): 92% Knidos (n = 1,064), 6% Ephesos (n = 70) and 2% Pergamon (n = 20). The clear domination of Knidian ceramic products is an unusual pattern, and even at excavations within Western Asia Minor, such high quantities of Knidian Fine Ware are rarely documented.

The Repertoire of Imported Ceramics

Ephesian Pottery

Three examples of mould-made Ephesos-lamps are attested in the assemblage from Rhodes. The presence of Ephesos-lamps on the island had already been noted by T. K. Tezgör and T. Sezer when compiling a catalogue of lamps stored in Istanbul Museum. The two lamps discussed by Tezgör and Sezer, however, belong to another, later variant of these lamps than our examples.⁶

Our lamps have the typical biconvex profile, with a bulge around the upper filling hole, a triangular nozzle and an oval base. Although Ephesos-lamps are often signed on the base by their potters, this does not apply to the specimens examined so far on Rhodes. Still, the adornments might be conclusive in allowing an attribution to a workshop and establishing their chronology. The shoulder fragment of lamp Λ5491 is characterised by an egg-and-dart decoration, surrounded by a fish-bone pattern, which ends in a volute at the point where the nozzle is fixed to the ceramic body. Lamps Λ9382 (fig. 2.1) and Λ3090 (fig. 2.2) are both defined by a pattern of undulating waves on the shoulder area, though the formal details of the design of the waves differ slightly. On

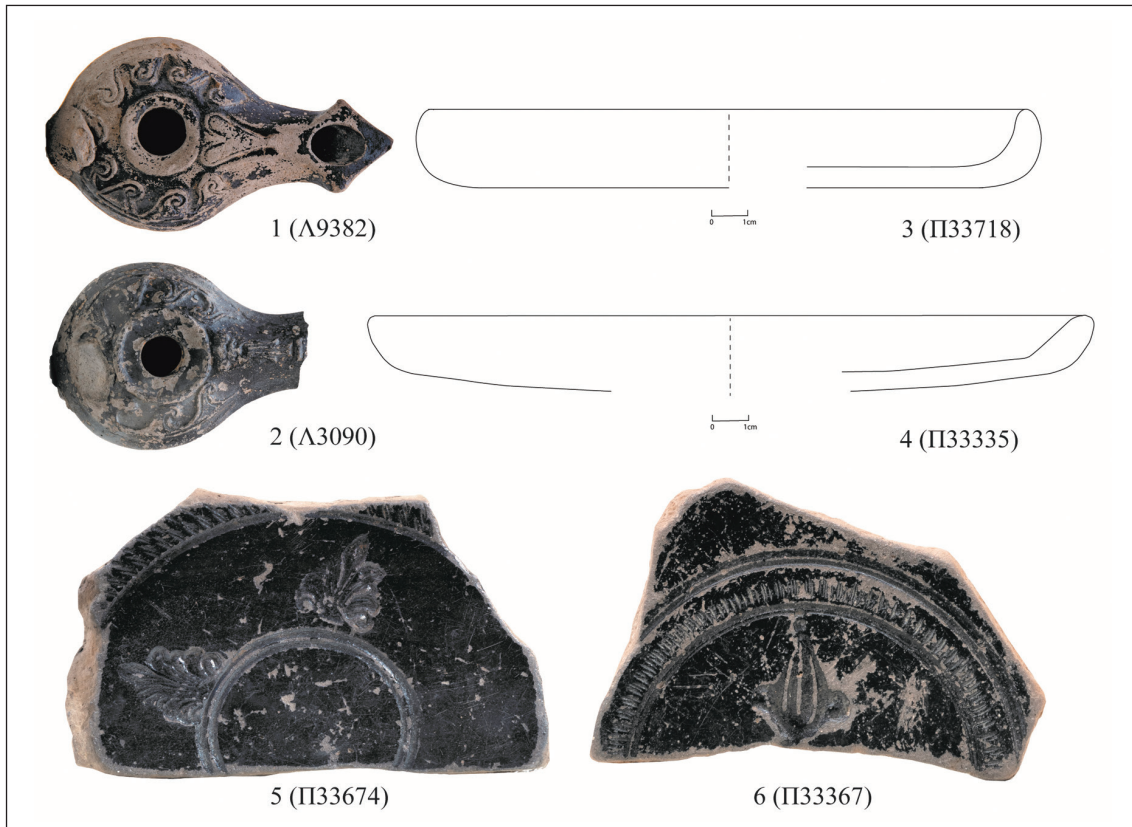


Fig. 2: Ceramic wares from Ephesos. 1–2) Ephesos lamps; 3–4) Ephesian Grey Ware platters, profile drawings; 5) Base of Ephesian Grey Ware with stamped palmettes; 6) Base of Ephesian Grey Ware with stamped lotus motif. Photos not to scale.

the nozzle, a heart (Λ9382) or a bearded mask – based on analogies possibly placed above a column-shaped structure (Λ3090)⁷ – are positioned. Lamps with an identical decorative canon are assigned to the Asklepiades workshop in Ephesos,⁸ as signatures on comparative lightening devices reveal.⁹ The activity period of the Asklepiades workshop has been set to around the mid-1st century BC to the early 1st century AD.¹⁰

Another type of ware to be traced back to Ephesos is the so-called Ephesian Grey Ware, which compositionally¹¹ resembles the Ephesos-lamps. These platters for serving food occur in circular and rectangular shapes in Ephesos, within each of these types also exhibiting variants, e.g. based on the height of the rims or design of the lip. In Rhodes, only one type has been recognised so far; the circular platters with low rim, rounded lip and low ring foot (fig. 2.3–4). Various kinds of palmettes (e.g. Π33674, fig. 2.5)¹² and a lotus flower motif (Π33367, fig. 2.6) are radially stamped in the central portion of the platters.

Some of the examples found on Rhodes were not fully covered with black gloss, but the lower surface of the platter remained plain. It is thought that this is an indicative

feature of Ephesian Grey Ware standing in the late Hellenistic tradition.¹³ A dating of this type in the late Hellenistic period, probably in the middle of the 1st century BC, can be proposed.¹⁴

Knidian Fine Ware

Recently, the ceramic finds of Rhodes associated with Knidos have been presented separately; for this reason, only a brief overview of the most relevant observations will be given here.¹⁵ The vast majority of Knidian Fine Ware in Rhodes is represented by carinated cups. Typological criteria allow their dating to the 1st century BC, which is also verified based on the frog appliqué positioned on the interior surfaces. Lamps of the well-known type Howland 40A¹⁶ further support the main share of the Knidian imports being placed in the first half of the 1st century BC. Occasional fragments of globular lamps yet testify to the arrival of Knidian ceramic products as early as the 2nd century BC, as do hemispherical bowls with rouletting.

Pergamene Appliqué Ware

The final ware to be discussed is the so-called Pergamene Appliqué Ware, which is documented in Rhodes with a few examples which exhibit variability in decorative motifs. Detailed studies of the ware in Pergamon, where its central production has been located,¹⁷ differentiated several types,¹⁸ dating from the mid-2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.¹⁹ A. Giannikouri and V. Patsiada have already noted the influence of Pergamene ceramic products on Rhodes starting from the 2nd century BC.²⁰ Reproductions of the shape have been confirmed for Ephesos²¹ and Knidos.²² A characteristic of true Pergamene examples is the mostly “mottled” appearance of the slip, varying between black and orange colour. Sample Π33574 (fig. 3.1) from Rhodes belongs to this group; its interior is defined by an orange gloss. In the central portion of the ceramic body, two roughly rectangular appliqués are positioned, depicting an erotic symplegma scene with the protagonists resting on a cline – a common motif of appliqué ware.²³ The skyphoi might be compatible with “Typus 1, Form 1” as denominated by Hübner,²⁴ dating to the late production phase of the ware in the early to mid-1st century BC.

The type of Appliqué Ware most frequently encountered in Rhodes is Hübner’s “Typus I, Form 4” with a straight wall and bevelled rim, which can be thickened, and a groove on the interior just below the rim. Sample Π33564 (fig. 3.2) exemplifies the type best. Bundles of ivy leaves and umbels of fruits are horizontally placed on the ceramic body; the gloss has a metallic black sheen. Sample Π33563 (fig. 3.3) corresponds in its general morphology to the vessel described before. However, the bundles of ivy leaves are arranged differently, placed vertically commencing from below the rim, and additional incisions around and below the fragmented handle are present, arranged in vegetal motifs. On top of the reconstructed ring handle, a thumb-rest in the shape of a volute was placed (fig. 3.4). Both features, thumb-rest and incised (vegetal) decoration, in combination with ivy leaf appliqués, are, according to Hübner,²⁵ known from the late



Fig. 3: Appliqué Ware from Pergamon. 1) Symplegma scene; 2) Ivy leaf-fruit garland; 3–4) Skyphos with bundles of ivy leaves and berries, and additional incised decoration; top view of handle plate. Photos not to scale.

phase of appliqué production in the 1st century BC.²⁶ Our examples of Appliqué Ware seem to date from the late Hellenistic and possibly Augustan period, being in concordance with distributional patterns observed in the Aegean area or Delos.²⁷

Imitations and the Rhodian Response to Western Asia Minor Wares

Owing to the imitation of Ephesian, Pergamenian and Knidian ceramic prototypes discussed above, ceramics deviating from the well-known visual appearance of these key shapes might be suspected of being reproductions from elsewhere.

Samples Π33956 (fig. 4.1) and Π33585 (fig. 4.2) can be defined as appliqué ware, but lacking the bichrome colours and surface properties of Pergamene prototypes. In fact,

the clay composition of Π33585 with a grotesque/mask and rosette finds close parallels in the fabrics observed for Ephesian Grey Ware and Ephesos-lamps. Concerning fragment Π33956 with the figure of a naked youth, his shoulders covered with a cape, an Ephesian provenance might also be supposed. Orange-brownish slip colours on both interior and exterior surfaces, as present, have been noticed as a peculiarity of appliqué ware from Ephesian workshops.²⁸

A possible Knidian imitation of appliqué ware is demonstrated by sample Π33927 (fig. 4.3). The fragment belongs to the lower part of a skyphos, having a horizontally incised line below the appliqué decoration and above the carination leading towards the foot. The bunch of ivy leaves has been applied imprecisely, with a blurry appearance to the contours.



Fig. 4: Imported Appliqué Ware, imitations and drinking vessel from Rhodes. 1) Applique of a naked youth; 2) Applique Ware in Ephesian fabric depicting a grotesque/mask; 3) Knidian imitation of Pergamene skyphos with appliqué decoration; 4) possible Rhodian imitation of Pergamene Appliqué Ware; 5–6) Rhodian skyphos with vertical ribbed decoration and thumb-rest. Photos not to scale.

Comparative studies on the ware in Knidos highlight the occurrence of appliqué ware with similar characteristics in the Early Augustan period, having an orange to light brownish slip.²⁹ The most important factor in a likely provenance from Knidos is the clay, developing the characteristic greyish and orange hues in cross-section – identical to patterns observed on synchronic Knidian cups.

An indication that we are dealing with imitations might also be the surface finish of the interior of the skyphoi. The interior surface of Π33927, but also of another example, Π33954 (fig. 4.4), have not been smoothed. Instead, marks of wheel-throwing are preserved. On the latter sample, the bunch of applied ivy leaves looks rough, with indistinct borders – generally complicating its identification. Clay characteristics and surface finish, as assessed on the macroscopic level, might possibly allow us to presume an origin from Rhodes.³⁰ Natural-scientific analyses are required in order to confirm the possible provenance regions of the suspected imitations.

Equivalents in Local Pottery Production

Synchronic with the importation of Pergamene Appliqué Ware, namely in the 1st century BC, workshops in Rhodes were manufacturing skyphoi in a local style (fig. 4.5).³¹ Their most important features are: a hemispherical body; a straight wall and rim; horizontally incised lines below the rim, which can be filled with a pattern of lance-shaped notches (“Kerbschnittdekor”); the central part of the body defined by vertically incised ribbed lines or flutes, individually shaped with a sharp tool; the lower part of the body might have a rouletting pattern; radiating lance-shaped notches below the handle; a ring handle with rotellae; an appliqué attached to the upper part of the handle, forming a thumb-rest (fig. 4.6); the surface is fully covered with reddish to orange-coloured slip.

Obvious analogies between the stylistic idiom of Appliqué Ware and the Rhodian skyphoi with ribbed decoration do exist, for instance regarding the rotellae or the practice of placing appliqués on handle plates.³² The vertical ribbed decoration confirms that our skyphoi stand in a Hellenistic tradition.³³ The skyphoi, as such, represent a hybrid drinking vessel combining elements of several key late Hellenistic ceramic wares.

Parallel examples of skyphoi with ribbed decoration in the Mediterranean are almost absent; P. Kögler depicted only one comparable fragment uncovered in Knidos, which she dated, based on the finds context, to the first half of the 1st century BC.³⁴ Furthermore, N. Fenn published one example of a skyphos with ribbed decoration³⁵ from Priene, without being able to propose a provenance for this fragment. Sporadic examples of the ware have been identified on Delos, e.g. in the “Maison des sceaux”, assigned by S. Élaigne to ateliers on Rhodes.³⁶

Considering the abundance of these skyphoi in Rhodes and their absence at major contemporaneous sites in the Aegean and beyond, we might indeed assume it to be a typical Rhodian style or invention. Resembling in general lines the properties of Aegean

mass-ware and serving the same function, the skyphoi with ribbed decoration might be considered as the Rhodian equivalent or response to common Aegean phenomena in the late Hellenistic period.

The situation is somewhat different for the Knidian carinated cups. Despite principally serving the same purpose as the skyphoi, the drinking traditions connected with the Knidian cups do deviate. Imitations of Knidian cups in local Rhodian fabric are evident,³⁷ but no Rhodian equivalents of carinated cups have been identified at the Papatristodoulou-Karika plot, apart from two exceptions: the carinated cup fully covered with brownish slip and defined by multiple lines of rouletting above the carination or patterns of incised notches (“Kerbschnittdekor”) – similar to those observed on the skyphoi – above the carination. The decorative style of both examples is exceptional and, again, illustrates the combination of different potting traditions.

Export, Import, and Adaptations in Rhodian Ceramic Manufacture

The ceramic evidence from the late Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods from Rhodes demonstrates that imported vessels, considered as standard export items at that time, found their way onto the island.³⁸ Detailed studies on trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean by P. Arnaud attest to the role of Rhodes as a distribution centre for commercial goods. Sea routes to the Black Sea and the northern Aegean operated via Rhodes, and ships sailing towards the Levant or Egypt stopped in Rhodes on their way.³⁹ Certainly, commodities were unloaded and others loaded in the harbours of the island.

Regarding outgoing ceramic goods, the distribution or production of so-called Hellenistic Colour Coated Ware A has been associated with Rhodes by scholars. A peak in the exchange of the ware was reached in the late 3rd and the early 2nd century BC, when Rhodes was the uncontested power in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁰ K. Domzalski explained the occurrence of the table ware with this Rhodian domination in the Pontic area in contexts of that period and the following diminution of the ware with the establishment of the free port in Delos in 166 BC.⁴¹ The distribution of Rhodian ceramic products to Egypt and the Levant, on the other hand, was consistent: table ware from Rhodes⁴² and Western Asia Minor⁴³ arrived, for instance, in Alexandria and Beirut during the entire 3rd and 2nd century BC.⁴⁴

Concerning incoming ceramic products, the advent of vessels from Western Asia Minor initialised the adoption of these key shapes into the Rhodian ceramic repertoire, but with certain adaptations, ultimately leading to the creation of a hybrid skyphos shape and carinated cups in slightly differing style – a combination of various elements of well-known Western Asia Minor prototypes and local traditions.

Notes

¹ Archibald 2011, 45. 46.

² The analysis of ceramic finds from the Papachristodoulou-Karika plot, specifically, the so-called *mavra chomata* assemblage which the discussed ceramics belong to, is part of “The Rhodes Centennial Project” based at Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen (funding: Carlsberg Foundation; project director: V. Gabrielsen) and conducted in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese. For a summary of the excavation: Dreliossi-Herakleidou – Betina 2019 and Dreliossi-Herakleidou 2018. Results described in this paper reflect the state of research in 2018.

³ An overview of trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean has been given by Arnaud 2005, 212–228.

⁴ Poblome – Zelle 2002; Giuliani 2011; Rogl 2004.

⁵ Tezgör – Sezer 1995, 123, Inv. no. 296 and 298; Giannikouri – Patsiada 1997, 106–109; Papachristodoulou et al. 1993, 53.

⁶ Compare Tezgör – Sezer 1995, 123, Inv. no. 296 and 298.

⁷ Giuliani 2001, 47 describes this composition. Our lamps with egg-and-dart decoration and waves belong to “type 1” discussed by Giuliani (Giuliani 2011, 535).

⁸ Giuliani 2001, 46; Giuliani 2007, 174.

⁹ A lamp with the signature of Asklepiades also has been found in the *mavra chomata*, but has not been studied yet.

¹⁰ Giuliani 2001, 48. The type corresponds to “group I” of Bruneau in Delos (Bruneau 1965, 56–64).

¹¹ Archaeometric analyses by Zabełlicky-Scheffenegeger et al. 1996 first proved an Ephesian provenance of the ware.

¹² Rogl 2004, 209. 210 gives reference to the variability of palmette stamps also detected in Ephesos.

¹³ Rogl 2004, 207.

¹⁴ Rogl 2004, 208. 211. Zabełlicky-Scheffenegeger et al. 1996, 45 for a dating of the circular platters with low rim in the late Hellenistic-Augustan period.

¹⁵ Betina 2021.

¹⁶ Bailey 1975, 153. 154.

¹⁷ Workshops in the Ketios-valley: Japp 2013, 165.

¹⁸ Overview of the shape repertoire of Pergamene Appliqué Ware in Hübner 1993.

¹⁹ Japp 2013, 170.

²⁰ Giannikouri – Patsiada 1997, 107–109.

²¹ Natural-scientific analyses supported the attribution of Appliqué Ware to Ephesian production, see Zabełlicky-Scheffenegeger – Schneider 2000, 105 at least in the Augustan period.

²² Kögler 2010, 281 sets the beginning of the production of Appliqué Ware in Knidos at the mid-2nd cent. BC, with its peak being reached in the 1st cent. BC.

²³ For the motifs: Japp 2013, 170; Rogl 2003, 189. 190; Rotroff – Oliver 2003, 156; Schäfer 1968, 79.

²⁴ Hübner 1993; corresponding to Schäfer’s (1968, 67) “Typus A”.

²⁵ Hübner 1993, 50.

²⁶ Similarly: Japp 2013, 170.

²⁷ Bruneau 1991, 610 states that Pergamene Appliqué Ware from Delos, based on their find contexts, dates between 110 and 70 BC.

²⁸ Zabehlicky-Scheffenecker – Schneider 2000, 105.

²⁹ Kögler 2010, 290. 291 (variant b). Imitation of Pergamene Appliqué Ware in Knidos: Kögler 2000, 70. 71; Kögler – Mandel 2004, 89–91.

³⁰ A Rhodian provenance has also been supposed for a few carinated Knidian cups, see Betina 2021, 29. Recently, the Rhodian provenance of carinated cups has been confirmed scientifically.

³¹ X-ray Fluorescence analyses on selected skyphoi are planned in order to prove natural-scientifically production in Rhodes.

³² Hübner's "Type I, Form 4" (see Rotroff – Oliver 2003, 166, for instance Inv. no. 715 and 716).

³³ Patsiada 1990, 159–161.

³⁴ Kögler 2010, 479 (Inv. no. E273). belongs to the late 2nd and 1st cent. BC.

³⁵ Fenn 2016, 117. 118 (see Inv. no. B17).

³⁶ Élaigne 2007a, 522. 523 and fig. 6.1 (Inv. no. 87[16]) for a description and depiction of the Delian example.

³⁷ Betina 2021, 29.

³⁸ Either via Delos (Japp 2013, 167) or, in the case of Knidos and Rhodes, through direct exchange (Arnaud 2005, 224. 225). Rogl 2007 for exchange between Delos, Knidos, Ephesos and Samos. Distribution of Knidian Fine Ware: Kögler 2010.

³⁹ Arnaud 2005, 212–215.

⁴⁰ Fraser 1972, 162–169; Reger 1994, 264–267.

⁴¹ Domzalski 2007, 166–172; Tsakos 1994, 15–17; Rostovtzeff 1941, 771–776.

⁴² A Rhodian provenance has been confirmed through archaeometric analyses (Élaigne 2007c, 118).

⁴³ Élaigne 2007c, 117. 118.

⁴⁴ Élaigne 2007b and Élaigne 2007c, 118–120 reporting for instance bowls and plates of Rhodian production. For trade between Rhodes and Alexandria after 166 BC, see Gabrielsen 2013.

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