

Organisation of Labour, Subsistence and Material Production in a Model of Urban Pull Dynamics. The Case of Sagalassos and Environs from Achaemenid to Middle Byzantine Times

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This paper presents an overview of long term patterns of organisation of labour, subsistence and material culture production at Sagalassos (southwest Anatolia) from Achaemenid to Middle Byzantine times (5th century BC–13th century AD), as part of a model of urban pull dynamics. Urban scaling research has shown that socio-economic growth is generated in urban systems through increased population density, spatial proximity and heterogeneity of interaction.¹ Economies of scale in infrastructure allow growing cities to operate more efficiently, while also providing increasing returns to scale in social dynamics. Combined, these processes may generate the development of an urban hub pulling in people, energy and resources from a wider catchment.

In the specific case of Sagalassos, the oldest material culture that can be linked to the genesis of a (village) community at the site has been dated to the late 5th century BC.² The first attestations of urban development can be traced back to the 2nd century BC, with the construction of a first public square, followed by a series of associated monumental buildings.³ At this time, material production processes markedly intensified, transforming from a locally-oriented productive landscape centred on least effort raw material economies, to a more specialised productive landscape oriented towards the wider microregion.⁴ The urbanisation of Sagalassos was associated with the development of a political territory, as well as the emergence of economic networks that connected Sagalassos to the wider region, testified by extended pottery distribution patterns, however, the primary catchment remained important for basic resource procurement and subsistence strategies. In Roman imperial times, the development of a specialised line of pottery production called Sagalassos Red Slip Ware,⁵ indicated further production specialisation and intensification, driven by interaction spill-overs and economies of scale generated by the construction of a potter's quarter in the eastern part of town. Specialisation of artisanal production increased in the early Byzantine period, mirrored by diversification and specialisation in subsistence strategies throughout the territory of Sagalassos.⁶ Some works that are currently in progress have shown that this prolonged intensification of production and subsistence processes, starting already in early Hellenistic times, coincided with a marked increase of human impact onto the surrounding territory of Sagalassos.

The 7th century AD can be considered as a schism in the history of Sagalassos. In this century, Sagalassos acquired a distinctively less urban character, an earthquake destroyed most of the public infrastructure and Arabs started to raid the Anatolian inland. At this point, the process of specialisation and production intensification came to an

end, as Sagalassos de-agglomerated into a series of hamlets surrounding a *kastron*.⁷ This fortified centre retained certain political, military and religious functions, but the extent of its territorial reach remains uncertain. As Sagalassos, according to middle Byzantine sources, is the closest bishopric and/or *kastron* within the region coinciding with the previous Roman imperial territory, it is safe to assume that it at least could still rely on its primary catchment area. This development can again be traced in material culture as local production of pottery ceased and was replaced almost exclusively by imported ceramics.

It can be suggested that the prolonged specialisation and intensification of production processes and subsistence strategies from early Hellenistic to early Byzantine times was made possible by the urban pull generated by Sagalassos, operating as an important system hub within the wider (micro)region. These urban pull dynamics allowed human impact on the landscape to be offset against energy and resources derived from the wider area. Once this urban pull ceased in the 7th century AD, and Sagalassos returned to a social organisation characterised by a village economy, the human impact of the settlement returned to the levels prior to the first urbanisation phase. This suggests that on the long term, a village organisation can be considered a ‘natural’ level of social organisation that is most ideally adapted to circumstances within the local environment. The urban phase of Sagalassos can then be considered an ‘exceptional’ phase within this long term perspective, made possible by the establishment of a regional system which redirected political, economic and social flows of energy and resources from a wider environment onto this system hub.

Notes

¹ Bettencourt et al. 2007.

² Daems – Poblome 2017.

³ Poblome – Taloen 2016.

⁴ Daems – Poblome 2016.

⁵ Poblome 1999.

⁶ Kaptijn et al. 2013.

⁷ Poblome et al. 2017.

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