

Pottery Production in the Urbanscape and the Over Regional Commerce: LR1 Amphorae at Elaiussa and Beyond

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When asked to partake in this session of the congress, my immediate thought has been, on the one side, one of gratitude, of course, towards the organizer, Professor Equini Schneider, as an acknowledgment of the results yielded so far by my still ongoing research on related topics.¹ But, on the other, concurrently, a sense of awareness arose, that very little more than what has been said so far on the subject could be added here. Nonetheless, as a stimulating challenge, I decided to answer the call proposing a paper which does not pretend to be exhaustive, but rather tries to provide an appraisal of the present state and of the future addresses of the research. Thus, the purposes of this contribution will aim at adhering above all to an important statement of the panel introduction, i.e. the intention to offer an “assessment of the present knowledge on production exchanges, trade and transport in the Mediterranean [...] outlining an exhaustive picture of the changes involving the region [i.e. Cilicia] throughout the centuries in particular as a result of large-scale economic and social processes”.

In fact, the excavations at Elaiussa Sebaste alone, after over 20 years of activity, have provided a wide range of data and information on the topics into account – to which the results deriving from other investigations in the region should be added: a “body of evidence” that urges the creation of a solid theoretical building for a complete evaluation of these socio-economic processes. Therefore, this paper will proceed through two major headlines: firstly a summarising assessment of this evidence will be offered; this is going to be the bulk of the presentation, in order to set up critical points to be discussed in further investigations. When dealing with chronological matters, the second point of the discussion, it is evident how recent scholarship is still missing any attempt to renovate the analysis of economic processes of the early Byzantine state in light of this massive material; finally, third instance, the question of distribution patterns in chronology will be opened as directly descending from the former two issues.

Reassessment of the Body of Evidence from Elaiussa (under a Regional Perspective)

The results of the site’s excavations and related studies are showcasing the early Byzantine period as a flourishing phase of the city, and thence the city itself is necessarily the starting point (fig. 1). Men and goods were travelling by the sea, and these goods were produced and merchandised in the city, while these men were living and operating within this urbanscape. An urbanscape, which was deeply altered and underwent massive changes, following the dynamics and the phenomena that occurred between late Antiquity and the early Byzantine

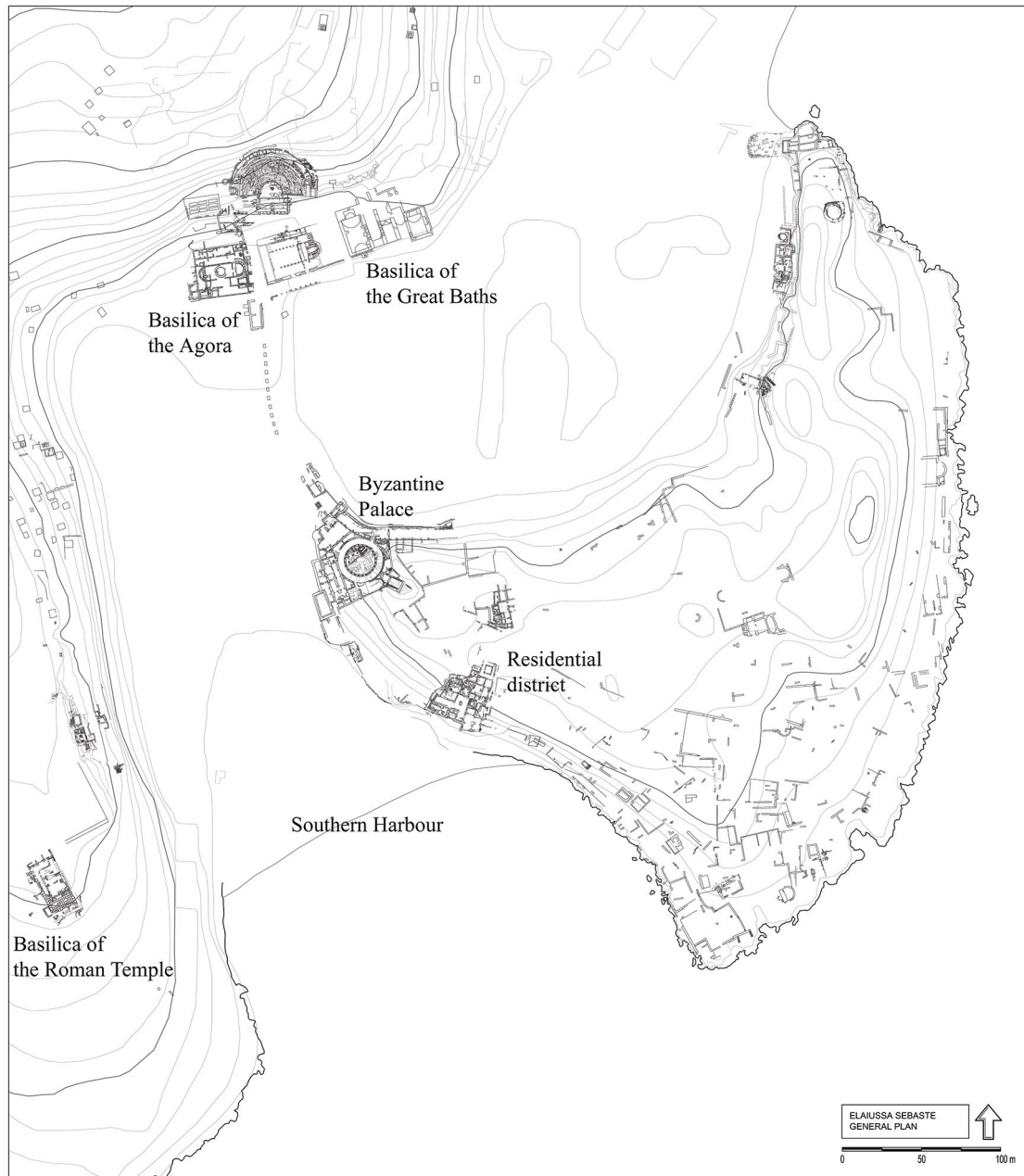


Fig. 1: General map of Elaiussa Sebaste excavations.

period, which are perfectly fitting with the general outlines of the “Byzantine city” (especially when developing from a Graeco-Roman settlement) as presented by E. Zanini:² intense Christianisation of the urban spaces; fading boundaries between public and private spaces; movement of people from the countryside resulting in increasing evidence of artisanal activities integrated in the urban fabric.

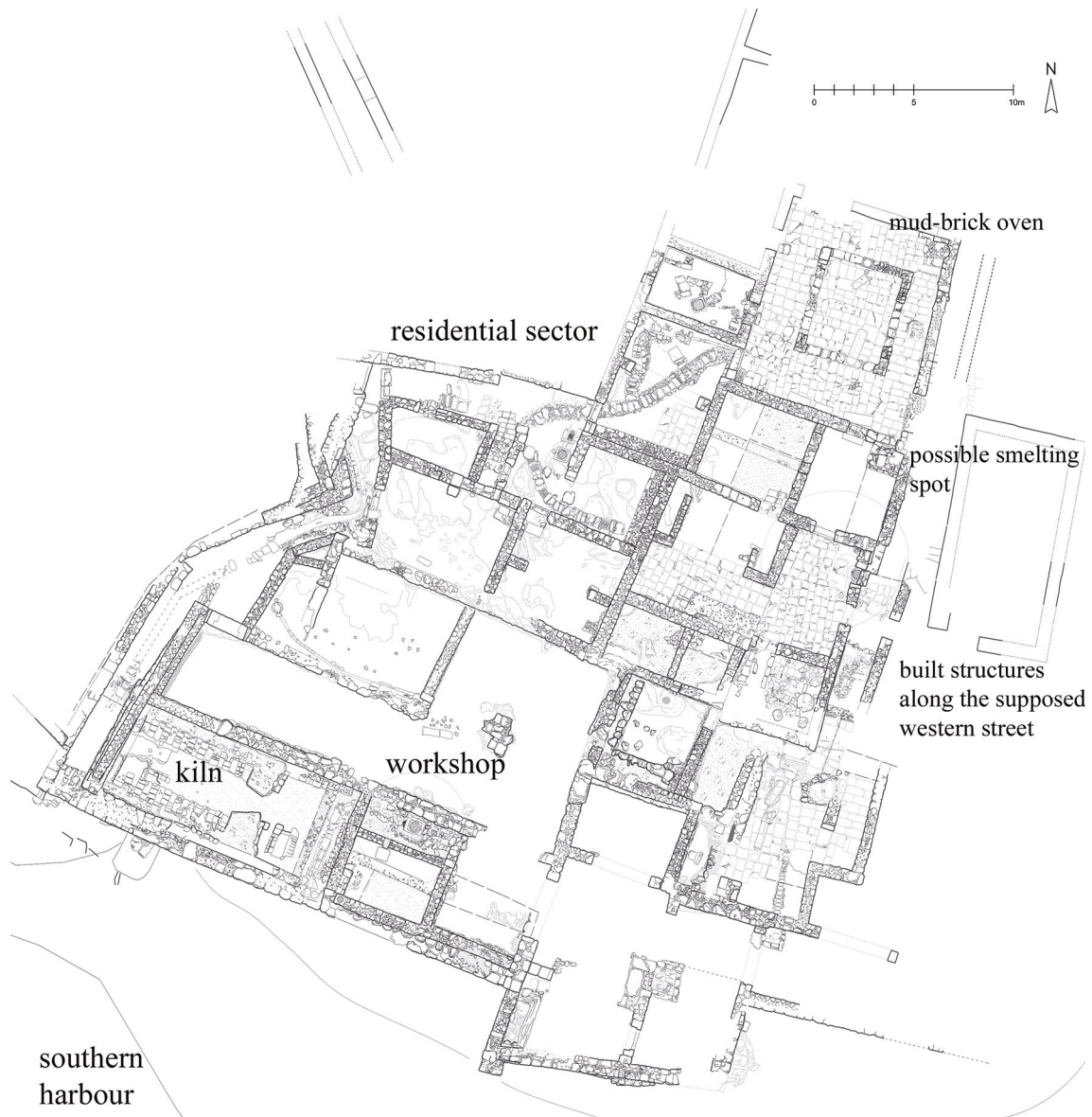


Fig. 2: Plan of the residential district by the southern harbor.

The Christianisation of the urban spaces is the first and most evident change attested at Elaiussa where former public or religious buildings were turned into Christian basilicas – the agora³ and the Great Baths in the monumental center of the city,⁴ the Roman Temple on the southwestern promontory. The changed religious and social needs of the urban (and suburban?) community proved also in the alteration and adjustment of the urban layout in other sectors of the city as well. Seemingly, the phenomenon of the *encroachment* eroded progressively the boundaries between public and private spaces, and a good and exemplary



Fig. 3: One of the room excavated in the residential district.

instance may be observed in the residential district by the southern harbor of the city: here the whole extension of the *insula* cannot be defined in its eastern limits, where seemingly the original north-south oriented street was “invaded” by structures (of private nature?) by the mid-6th c. AD at least (fig. 2).⁵

Returning to Zanini’s elements in the definition of the Byzantine city, encroachment may be also considered by the visible result of formerly suburban artisanal activities progressively converging in the city and occupying its fabric. This aspect as well can be reported in Elaiussa, as occurring especially during the 6th to the mid-7th c. AD. This was the period when workshops occupied both public and private spaces in several sectors of the city, attesting production on both small scale, for the self-sufficiency of the inhabitants, and on a larger scale. In the residential district, small scale productive/stocking activities may be argued by the nature of certain rooms in the heart of the dwelling units (fig. 3), while are quite certain in the uppermost terrace, where the setting of a *tandoori* type oven and a possible metal smelting spot are to be related to the late occupation of the galleries of a pre-existing peristyle.⁶

As mentioned, production is attested also on a larger scale: the settlement and development of LRA1 kilns is the major and most meaningful instance, with workshops meant to supply far beyond self-sufficiency and the needs of the local population. These



Fig. 4: Aerial view of the promontory and the excavated areas by the southern harbour. Both in the area of the Byzantine Palace (on the left) and in the residential district (at the centre) LRA1 kiln have been discovered.

kilns have been found throughout the city. The one in the southwestern necropolis, dating to the beginning of the 5th and in use through the mid-7th c. AD, was created over Roman period tombs and a late Antique productive instalment. Two other kilns were uncovered in the isthmus area overlooking the southern harbor, both dated to the post-palatial phase:⁷ not used concurrently, they were established in the first half of the 6th c. AD, and at the end of the 6th c. AD respectively.⁸ When taking into consideration the results yielded by the excavations in the residential district, a different and deeper insight on these dynamics can be gained: here, in fact, the stratigraphic complexity and completeness documented in the southern section of the investigated area, where the kiln and related workshop were established, allows to outline the whole process from its original arrangement, at least in the late 4th c. AD, undergoing major renovation works in the mid-6th c. AD, until its final abandonment by the mid-7th c. AD;⁹ the capacity of the kiln has been calculated in a possible load up to 250 or 500 amphorae per firing process (fig. 4).¹⁰

As underlined in other contexts, it is clear that such a massive productive potential (as to amphorae) is to be related to likewise massive agricultural background (as to these amphorae contents, i.e. olive oil/wine¹¹). An attempt to offer a wider look on this topic from a

regional perspective has been proposed during the works of the 3rd Landscape Archaeology Conference held in Rome in 2014.¹² Elaiussa Sebaste and Cilician productive patterns in the early Byzantine period were then examined, taking into account productive activities in urban and rural landscape and thus offering a collection of testimonies. To recapitulate what has been presented in that occasion, the archaeological traces are widespread but provide few if any hints on specific and accurate chronology: many productive centers for wine and/or oil are in fact attested, but more frequently they cannot be dated since mostly located in otherwise not investigated suburban contexts – while urban centres other than Elaiussa are scarcely known, at least archaeologically. Epigraphic sources are similarly quite precise in documenting productive activities, but not punctual as to their dating: in particular, reference should be made also here to the well-known documents from the necropolis of Korykos, a *corpus* of about 600 inscriptions (belonging, generically, to the 6th c. AD), with 15 entries related to wine-making, and the most recurring attested job being *kerameus*.¹³ Regrettably, at that time the final remarks were not conclusive, and with the co-author we pointed out how other ‘external’ data (e.g. pottery diffusion) might result indicative for a complete evaluation of the economic pattern of the analysed evidence – an issue, which should be taken again into consideration.

Chronological Issues

Despite all the limits in the knowledge of so many aspects of these economic processes, one can maintain that when observing such large scale productive activities at Elaiussa Sebaste (and in Cilicia) between the late 4th and the mid-7th c. AD, the pattern seems to fit into models, which have been outlined for the late Antique or the early Byzantine period¹⁴ also in other economic compartments – for instance, mining in Anatolia,¹⁵ or the cargo routes and loads¹⁶ – along with a high level of monetization, even in the countryside, possibly due to a rise in the commercialization of the agricultural *surplus*. Unquestionably and not unexpectedly, there is no trace of a capitalistic perspective, when just a multiplication of sub-contractors should be presumed in the vertical organization of the whole system. This is beyond any doubt a topic worth of further investigation.

More specifically, the archaeological remains listed above seem to point to a peculiar moment of expansion of amphorae productive potential: as a matter of fact, Elaiussa’s findings provide the most complete seriation of LRA1 amphorae, with the *floruit* of production during the 6th c. AD as confirmed by the stratigraphy of the uncovered kilns (in particular of the workshop by the residential district). Such an “industrial” increase deserves, in my opinion, a further insight on the economics of the period, and undeniably should be compared with a mapping of the diffusion of the vessel beyond regional borders (see below). In short, what lies behind this *floruit*? Again, as already suggested in past studies,¹⁷ larger attention should be paid to the implications of the passage in the Abydos Tariff where exemption of the custom toll for Cilician *naukleroi* is offered. Despite controversial opinion,

the chronology of the document to the end of the 5th c. AD, during the reign of Anastasius, seem to provide a possible explanation for the Cilician “economic boom” and rises questions about plausible connections to the imperial *annona* – or, at least, to the food supply system of Constantinople. And this second point, as well, is awaiting a thorough reassessment in the wider frame of early Byzantine economic studies.

Future Address of the Research: Distribution Patterns in Chronology

As a matter of fact, many aspects of the whole question seem to be lacking a wider perspective, since reasonably the Abydos Tariff explains the phenomenon only in part. Pottery studies, for instance, are so far missing the point to provide a reliable and detailed mapping of the diffusion of LRA1 throughout the period; a tentative approach in this perspective has been tried by Prof. H. Öviz,¹⁸ and, albeit partial, it may be the beginning of a new course in the research. In this regard, for instance, it occurred to me only by chance, the existence of an interesting and not well known context in northern Cyprus, the underwater site of Cape Andreas, is only partially investigated in 1969–71 and not completely published:¹⁹ it is evident that a total and comprehensive revision of the available data throughout the Mediterranean and in particular in the LRA1 productive/commercial centers is strongly required, along with studies on diachronic/synchronic diffusion patterns. This must be the direction in which to address, both archaeologists’ and ceramologists’, efforts for a better and more complete understanding of LRA1 production in a wider, macro-economic perspective.

Final Remarks

Turning back to the opening statement as presented in the introduction of the panel’s goals, the task of “outlining an exhaustive picture of the changes involving [Cilicia] throughout the centuries” in an economic perspective may be considered as getting more and more fulfilled as to the early Byzantine period. Although necessarily brief, the analysis presented here offers the image of a city, Elaiussa, which preserves not only important but also, I would dare to state, exemplary testimonies of the crucial passage from a Greco-Roman into a Byzantine city with meaningful suggestions as to the economic implications of such changes in the urbanscape – and thence, as a consequence, changes arguable as well for the social fabric of the city’s population, thus covering both micro- and macro-economics all at once.

Regrettably, we are still quite far from a complete “assessment of the present knowledge on production exchanges, trade and transport in the Mediterranean” involving Cilicia in this late 4th–mid-7th c. AD phase, and from an accurate perception of related “large-scale economic and social processes”. These latter still remain elusive

given the fragmented knowledge, from Elaiussa's viewpoint, of the involvement of its agricultural background, and, on a higher perspective, of the final destination of the produce (in particular, those products which were shipped in LRA1). On a side, the organization of the whole system – agricultural activities, city-country exchanges and socio-political relationship, investors and proprietors and related legal practices, access to resources, subcontractors, shipment and so on²⁰ – requires further investigations; on the other, the creation of a comprehensive map to show distribution patterns of the vessels in chronology is highly desirable in order to step forward, from the archaeological record to history making.

Notes

¹ Cp. Iacomi 2010; Borgia – Iacomi 2010; Iacomi 2013a; Cassiani – Iacomi 2014; Iacomi forthcoming.

² Zanini 2016.

³ Equini Schneider 2010.

⁴ Conti – Naspi 2014.

⁵ This is what emerged from the most recent investigations in the area, thanks also to a sondage trench opened during the 2016 campaign. A publication on the excavation activities in the residential and productive district, by the author of this paper, is undergoing revision and is expected to be issued soon.

⁶ On the activities attested in the last phase of use of the peristyle (ca. 630–660 AD), cp. Iacomi forthcoming. Not dissimilar arrangements have been already reported in the agora area, cp. Equini Schneider 2010.

⁷ Short notes on the Byzantine Palace by the isthmus in Tempesta – Pipere – Cassiani in this Congress papers.

⁸ On these kilns and related literature cp. Cassiani – Iacomi 2016.

⁹ The chronology given here is to be considered for the whole complex, which includes also the facilities other than the kiln (pool for clay settling, storage units, etc.); cp. the preliminary indications given in Borgia – Iacomi 2010 and then revised in Iacomi 2013a. The whole question will be entirely re-examined in the forthcoming publication mentioned above.

¹⁰ Borgia – Iacomi 2010.

¹¹ The debate about what was shipped in LRA1 goes beyond the intentions of this paper; see some considerations on the matter in Iacomi - Cassiani 2016.

¹² Iacomi – Cassiani 2016.

¹³ Iacomi 2010, and again but more briefly Iacomi - Cassiani 2016.

¹⁴ McCormick 2001.

¹⁵ See the paper by M. Conti in the proceedings of this same congress.

¹⁶ As discussed at large during this session of the congress.

¹⁷ Iacomi 2010. Cp. also the brief notes in Iacomi - Cassiani 2016.

¹⁸ Öñiz 2016.

¹⁹ Green 1973.

²⁰ Cp. Iacomi 2013b.

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Fig. 1–2: by M. Braini. – Fig. 3: by V. Iacomi. – Fig. 4: Archive of Missione Archeologica Elaiussa Sebaste.

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