Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies

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Plenary Papers

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
23RD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF BYZANTINE STUDIES
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PLENARY PAPERS

Cover illustration: *Personification of Truth*, Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, beginning of the 14th century, fresco.

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The Serbian National Committee of AIEB

Contents

List of Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum*
AB	*Analecta Bollandiana: Revue critique d'hagiographie*
ARCBH	S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. I: *Periods and Places*, vol. II: *Genres and Contexts*, Farnham, UK – Burlington, VT, 2011–2014
AT	*Antiquité Tardive*
BA	Byzantinisches Archiv
BBOM	Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs
BF	*Byzantinische Forschungen*
BHG	*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*
BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CCM	*Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CPG	*Clavis Patrum Graecorum*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LAA	*Late Antique Archaeology*
MEFRA	*Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*
MEFRM	*Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus*, series graeca, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris, 1857–1866

PmbZ	R.-J. Lilie et al. (ed.), *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Erste Abteilung (641–867)*, I–VI, Berlin – New York, 1998–2002
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
REB	*Revue des études byzantines*
RSBN	*Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SH	Subsidia Hagiographica
TM	*Travaux et Mémoires*
ZRVI	*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta*

II

The Byzantine City and the Archaeology of the Third Millennium

Moderator: **James Crow**

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Coming to the End: Early Byzantine Cities after the mid-6th Century

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1. A methodological premise: Early Byzantine cities facing current archaeology

The contemporary idea of Early Byzantine city is the product of the interaction between three different elements:

a) a base of 'objective' knowledge, composed from the gradual stratification of information derived from archaeological investigations in the field;
b) the general context this new knowledge is part of, composed of the information derived from other systems of non-archaeological sources;
c) the development of the contemporary critical thinking about a) and b) and, above all, the interaction between them.

It is therefore a highly dynamic concept, because it is linked also to the wider transformation of general cognitive approaches in archaeology, such as those triggered, for example, by new technologies or by the development of theoretical and methodological reflections about the excavation and the study of finds or, more generally, the development of new and more sophisticated theories of knowledge in archaeology.

To make this picture even more fluid and nuanced, we have to consider the inevitable time lag between the theorizing about the 'nature' of Early Byzantine city and the archaeological verification of the new images produced by that theory. This asynchrony is determined both by the inevitable slowness of the process of construction of archaeological knowledge, related to the physical timing of fieldwork,[1] and by the intrinsic speed in creating new images of the city itself that is typical of the theoretical reflection in the postmodern world.

This asynchrony is more clearly detectable when we try to insert the 'new' knowledge derived from new excavations or from the continuation of long established projects into a general theoretical framework such as that which has emerged concerning the detailed

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[1]   D. Parrish (ed.), *Urbanism in Western Asia Minor: new studies on Aphrodisias, Ephesos, Hierapolis, Pergamon, Perge and Xanthos*, Portsmouth, 2001; O. Dally, C. J. Ratté (ed.), *Archaeology and the cities of Asia Minor in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor, MI, 2011.

critical debate about continuity/discontinuity between ancient *polis* and late antique/early Byzantine city.[2]

Nonetheless, at least five elements may be considered:

1. Several new urban archaeology projects in many of the major cities of Byzantine world; associated with major new infrastructure programmes (Thessaloniki subway or Theodosian harbour at Istanbul)[3] or extensive protection programmes as in the case of Constantinople archaeological survey.[4]

2. The widespread adoption of stratigraphic method in excavations, even in those geographical areas that are objectively complicated in terms of research logistics. This has already produced – and will produce even more in the future, with the extensive publication of the the excavations conducted over the last fifteen years – a truly impressive amount of new information. In the next years our common goal will be to systematize this information and make extensive use of new forms of publication and dissemination of data through the global network.

3. The impact of new digital technologies, in four key areas at least: remote sensing and the so-called 'archaeology without excavation';[5] the application to urban contexts of complex spatial analyses, through extensive GIS; the management and dissemination of information (http://www.tayproject.org/veritabeng.html); the virtual reconstruction of urban architectural complexes, both in terms of dissemination of knowledge (http://www. byzantium1200.com/; http://www.ed.ac.uk/history-classics-archaeology/archaeology/ research/research-projects/constantinople-aqueducts), and as a tool to drive new targeted research.

4. The application to Early Byzantine urban archaeological contexts of archaeometric and palaeobiological research tools (archaeobotany, archaeozoology, Stable Isotope Analysis),

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[2]   W. Brandes, *Byzantine cities in the seventh and eight centuries: different sources, different histories?*, in G. P. Brogiolo, B. Ward Perkins (ed.), *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.* Leiden – Boston – Köln, 1999, p. 25–57; J. H. W. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of Roman* City, Oxford, 2001; Ch. Bouras, *Aspects of the Byzantine City, Eighth–Fifteenth Centuries*, in A. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium*, Washington, 2002, p. 497–528; E. Zanini, *The Urban Ideal and Urban Planning in Byzantine New Cities of the Sixth Century A.D.*, in L. Lavan, W. Bowden (ed.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, Leiden – Boston, 2003, p. 196–223; H. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century. Literary Images and Historical Reality,* Athens, 2006; L. Zavagno, *Cities in Transition, Urbanism in Byzantium between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (500–900 A.D.)*, Oxford, 2009.

[3]   U. Kokabas (ed.), *Yenikapi shipwrecks,* 1, *The "old ships" of the "new gate"*, Istanbul, 2012.

[4]   K. R. Dark, F. Özgümüş, *Constantinople: archaeology of a Byzantine megapolis. Final report on the Istanbul rescue archaeology project 1998–2004,* Oxford, 2012.

[5]   G. Sears, V. Gaffney, R. Cuttler, H. Goodchild, S. Kane, *Deciphering "Lost" Urban Landscapes at Cyrene*, in A. Augenti, N. Christie (ed.), *Urbes Extinctae. Archaeologies of Abandoned Classical Towns*, Farnham – Burlington, 2012, p. 177–205.

which allow us to develop new general understandings of the relationship between men and environment (palaeoclimatology, palaeodemography, palaeonutritional research). These approaches are now deemed to be essential for the study of the large scale variations in the Mediterranean population and their effect on economic systems and the long-term sustainability of the social structure. In this same 'landscape' it will be worth to take into account the studies on the socio-economic effects of great pandemics[6] and major natural disasters such as earthquakes.[7]

5. The impact of new cognitive approaches, in particular post-processualism, which is particularly relevant to the study of urban contexts, now mainly conceived as the place for an archaeology of people and their everyday life instead of an archaeology of monuments.[8]

In this way it has become possible to question older and newer archaeological data produced over the last fifteen years and to create a richer and more articulated image of the cities in the Mediterranean and surrounding regions in Early Byzantine times.[9]

This new image reflects a greater diversity on a regional basis: Early Byzantine cities in different regions are markedly different in their monumental scenery and everyday life places. The very idea of Early Byzantine city needs to be declined in a plural form, underlying the elements of difference and regional specificity. This consciousness will allow us to understand better the structural and superstructural elements that qualify all the cities as part of a wider ensemble that we can define as the Early Byzantine city: for instance, the seats of power, the urban role of religious architecture, the attention to building and maintenance of infrastructural system such as streets, aqueducts, baths etc.[10]

Moreover, the same contemporary image is characterized by an increased focus on material culture, made possible by modern excavations, with the systematic recording of pottery and the other archaeological finds. These materials are today intended as markers of the quality of everyday life in the cities, with a specific reference to the identification

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[6]   D. C. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire. A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics*, Aldershot – Burlington, 2004; A. K. Little (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity: the Pandemic of 541–750*, Cambridge, 2007.

[7]   S. C. Stiros, *The AD 365 Crete earthquake and possible seismic clustering during the fourth to sixth centuries AD in the Easrtern Mediterranean: a review of the historical and archaeological data*, in *Journal of Structural Geology*, 23 (2001), p. 545–562.

[8]   P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study on Mediterranean History*, Oxford, 2000, p. 88–122.

[9]   S. T. Loseby, *Mediterranean Cities*, in Ph. Rousseau (ed.), *A companion to Late Antiquity*, Malden, MA – Oxford, 2009, p. 139–155.

[10]   P. Arthur, *Alcune considerazioni sulla natura delle città bizantine*, in A. Augenti (ed.), *Città italiane tra la tarda antichità e l'alto Medioevo: atti del convegno (Ravenna, 26–28 febbraio 2004)*, Firenze, 2006; J.-U. Krause, C. Witschel (ed.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike. Niedergang oder Wandel?*, Stuttgart, 2006; J. Henning, *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, Berlin, 2007.

of spaces of life and work and the study of transformation of urban fabric following the changing socio-economic conditions both at local and general scale.[11] In this context, mention should be made of the very important pioneering research on physical anthropology and palaeopathology, which is opening new windows on the real quality of life in Early Byzantine Mediterranean cities.[12]

The new image is also made of a more articulated chronology, with an increased focus on the urban life just after the mid-6th century and in the subsequent centuries. As it is known, until a very recent past, the focus of knowledge was mainly centred on the age of Justinian, due to its greater visibility in monumental archaeology and literary sources: most evident case studies being Caričin Grad and Amorium.[13] Mainly thanks to the development of studies on pottery, glass and coinage, our knowledge barrier is moving towards the 7th and, above all, the 8th–9th centuries, that have been really obscure until recently.[14]

The last point of this brief list of innovations should be seen in a new approach to the study of city/countryside dynamics. The traditional image of an Early Byzantine Empire seen essentially as a sum of cities seems to be nowadays superseded by a more articulated imaging of the human settlements into a specific territory. The city is no longer perceived as a separate unit within a territory, but as a part of a dynamic population, where the people could gravitate on a series of minor settlements of different kinds and move between the nodes of this network, concentrating from time to time on the cities, or privileging instead sparse settlement or villages.

2. Early Byzantine cities between change and decline

One of the most interesting contributions to the historical-archaeological debate on Early Byzantine city in the last fifteen years is represented by a clearer perception of the chronological depth and articulation of the complex phenomenon of Byzantine urbanism.

In our current perception, the Early Byzantine city is no longer just the big *floruit* during the first half of the 6th century, followed by a progressive and relentless decline that led, on

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[11]   P. Arthur, *Byzantine and Turkish Hierapolis (Pamukkale): an Archaeological Guide*, Istanbul, 2006.

[12]   Ch. Bourbou, *The People of Early Byzantine Eleutherna and Messene (6th–7th Centuries A.D.): Bioarchaeological Approach*, Athens, 2004.

[13]   See chapter by Vujadin Ivanišević in this volume.

[14]   E. A. Ivison, Ch. S. Lightfoot (ed.), *Amorium Reports 3: The Lower City Enclosure*, Istanbul, 2012; F. Krinzinger (ed.), *Spätantike und mittelalterliche Keramik aus Ephesos*, Wien, 2005; J. Vroom, *Limyra in Licia: Byzantine/Umayyad pottery finds from excavations in the eastern part of the city*, in S. Lemaître (ed.), *Céramiques Antiques en Lycie (VIIe s. a. C. – VIIe s. p. C.). Le Produits et Les Marchés*, Bordeaux, 2005, p. 261–292; J. Vroom, *The other Dark Ages: Early Medieval pottery finds in the Aegean as an archaeological challenge*, in R. Attoui (ed.), *When Did Antiquity End? Archaeological Case Studies in Three Continents*, Oxford, 2011, p. 137–158.

the one hand, to the demise of the concept of classical city – and then the extinction of a more or less great number more of ancient cities – and, on the other hand, to the emergence of a new form of the 'proper' Byzantine city of later centuries.[15]

A wider adoption of the methods and practices of stratigraphic archaeology has inevitably led to a more accurate excavation of the later phases and a better assessment of the information potential of features and artefacts associated with them.[16]

In parallel, the dense critical debate on the dichotomy continuity/discontinuity that characterized since the early 1980s the historical and archaeological thinking about the late antique and early medieval cities in Europe created the conditions for a more articulated perception of the complexity of the changes that the Mediterranean cities underwent during the great transformation of the socio-economic system between the 6th and the 8th century.[17]

The image of a progressive decay of the urban architectural 'carapace' since the end of Justinian's age cannot certainly be denied. But today we perceive much more clearly than before how this phenomenon should be studied using more complex conceptual categories, including: regional differences, possible asynchrony between similar phenomena, if viewed in different geographic areas; close relationship between the transformation of the urban fabric and the parallel development of the human, social, economic and cultural fabric of the same cities.

Some of these phenomena had been identified long ago as a characteristic of this phase: for example the intensification of the Christianisation of urban spaces, or the greater role of the defensive needs in urban planning, or again the progressive alteration of a clear distinction between public and private spaces. But now they appear to us, more clearly than in the past, as the product of an interaction between the shape of the ancient city and the new needs of the men who now live, work and exercise different forms of power in that space; transforming it, enriching it with new buildings or even abandoning or eliminating parts of that space which are now perceived as unnecessary.

2.1. Christianisation of urban space

The intensive and extensive Christianisation of urban spaces is probably the phenomenon of urban transformation currently most visible in the archaeological record of the Early Byzantine cities. This occurs from the dependence of two distinct elements: 1) the objective significance of the phenomenon itself and 2) the specific attention that archaeological research had traditionally reserved for it.

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[15]   H. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century. Literary Images and Historical Reality*, Athens, 2006.

[16]   H. W. Dey, *The Afterlite of the Roman City*, New York, 2015.

[17]   L. Zavagno, *Cities in Transition, Urbanism in Byzantium between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (500–900 A.D.)*, Oxford, 2009.

One would say that the most recent acquisitions in this field may relate essentially to two aspects of a phenomenon that is extremely complex by its very nature: the 'chronological depth' and the multiplicity of forms.

The chronological depth is visible in the progressive enhancement and saturation of urban space with religious buildings. The basic idea that Christianisation of ancient cities was a slow-pace process is now widely accepted and the great 'explosion' of physical Christianisation of urban space in the first half of the 6th century is a universally recognized proof of this. However, this process does not seem to stop with the age of Justinian: it goes on with new churches and, mainly, with other types of religious buildings, such as those related to charitable institutions or the urban monasteries.

The multiplicity of forms in Christianisation is essentially connected with the complex relationship between society and urban space.[18] The need to provide the actual physical spaces for the community's cult was already virtually satisfied with the large foundations of the 5th and the first half of the 6th century. The new religious foundations (or even restoration, reconstruction and maintenance too) now respond primarily to communication needs: those of central and provincial administration that have to concretely demonstrate its presence; those of local elites in transformation that look for means to represent and self-represent themselves;[19] those of the new emerging classes, especially the monks, who claim for a more visible social role.[20]

The completion of physical Christianisation of urban space and the definition of Christian social space in Early Byzantine city go in parallel with the deepening and the articulation of individual's Christianisation. The latter leaves an interesting archaeological trace in two spheres at least: urban burials and the relationship with the urban furniture inherited from pagan times.

The phenomenon of urban burials appears today, in light of recent excavations, as a very characteristic marker in the landscape of Early Byzantine cities from the second half of the 6th century onward. Although the practice of burying the dead within the city perimeter already appears to have started in the late 4th and in the first half of the 5th century, the mid-6th century seems to be a watershed; after that time urban burials became usual and the contiguity between spaces of the living and spaces of the dead was a constant in Mediterranean urban sceneries. This witnessed the final overcoming of the traditional

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[18]   A. Busine, *Religious practices and Christianization of the Late Antique City: 4th–7th centuries*, Leiden – Boston, 2015.

[19]   W. Bowden, *Church builders and church building in late-antique Epirus*, in L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent research in late-antique urbanism*, Portsmouth, RI, 2001, p. 57–68; R. Coates-Stephens, *La committenza edilizia bizantina a Roma dopo la riconquista*, in A. Augenti (ed.), *Le città italiane tra la tarda Antichità e l'alto Medioevo*, Firenze, 2006, p. 299–316.

[20]   A. H. S Megaw (ed.), *Kourion. Excavations in the Episcopal Precint*, Washington, D. C., 2007.

Roman law, which expressly forbade burials *in Urbe*, and recognizing the new dimension that Christianity assigns to the afterlife.[21]

The second item, that of the relationship with the traces of city's pagan past, is a new field of research, that has been explored with some orderliness in recent years and in a few case studies. But the late survival of pagan statuary in the landscape of Christian cities, and then the practice of concealing pagan statues to protect them from destruction with a view to re-use them in some form, is very important evidence of the complex relationship between the inhabitants of Early Byzantine cities and the historical manifestation of paganism in those same cities.

2.2. Militarization of urban space

The second phenomenon that is glaringly visible in Early Byzantine cities of the 6th–8th centuries could be defined as an intensive militarization of urban spaces and features. In this case again, it can be read as a response to two distinct needs: the enhancement of defensive resources against external increasingly aggressive enemies and the constantly growing role of military elites in the administration of cities.

The most obvious sign of the great importance attached to defence needs is made by the incessant activity of maintenance and restoration of the city walls, most of them inherited from previous ages. At the same time, there is an explicit enhancement of their primary functional value – the defence against external attacks – in place of a more 'communicative' complexity that characterized the construction of new defensive devices in the first half of the 6th century and mainly in the time of Justinian.

Thanks to Procopius of Caesarea's encomiastic works, we can perceive how the construction or extensive renovation of a city wall in the first half of the 6th century was associated with the obvious defensive needs as well as with a conceptual definition of a city. Into the narrative cliché of Procopius the presence of strong walls is almost always quoted together with aqueducts, baths, porticoed streets, churches and residences of power holders, as part of a precisely defined aesthetic and functional canon that specifically connotes a city worthy of the name.[22]

In this combination of functionality and communication, the fortified acropolises had certainly a specific role; they became a sort of hallmark both of the new towns (the emblematic case of *Prima Iustiniana*) and the urban re-design of long tradition cities. An extensive survey recently conducted on large and medium urban centres in Crete showed, for example, that the presence of a fortified acropolis had been a very common item in urban

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[21]   A. Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600)*, Tubingen, 2002; E. Tzavella, *Burial and urbanism in Athens (4th–9th c. A.D.)*, in *JRA*, 21 (2008), p. 352–376.

[22]   R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Amplification and Persuasion in Procopius' Buildings*, in *AT*, 8 (2000), p. 67–71.

reorganization in Early Byzantine times.[23] Over a long period, the acropolises of Cretan cities came to play a central role in ensuring the continuity of those nuclei of population during the centuries and decades immediately preceding the Arab conquest of Crete, in the third decade of the 9th century.

The establishment of new defensive needs and the parallel rise of the importance of the military classes in the social structure of Early Byzantine cities, is well represented also by some other 'minor' indicators, that become recently well visible thanks to the updating of stratigraphic excavation techniques. The presence of people belonging to military class is well testified by the elements of personal ornament (buckles, brooches, belts, spurs etc.) that are frequently discovered in archaeological assemblages connected with everyday consumption and/or refuse waste (domestic contexts, garbage dumps, etc.) or in those contexts attributable to the manufacturing of the same objects. The well-known assemblage of a workshop refuse in the area of *Crypta Balbi* in Rome[24] looks to be emblematic in this respect, and recent excavations in some nearby areas certify it was not at all isolated. These kinds of find, often ethnically connoted, could in some cases also emphasize the role played in the defence and control of Early Byzantine cities by barbarian troops that joined, more or less organically, the imperial army.

2.3. Topography of power

The question about the topography of power within cities in deep social transformation is evidently a complex one, because one of the basic characteristic of the 'cities of men' in Early Byzantine world was the structuring of the system of powers, with the increasing number of places where these powers became manifest.

Basically, we can say that just the maintenance and the renovation of cities' urban fabric can be read as an indicator of the continuity of imperial power, that was the first engine of evergetism, both through new foundations and urban reassessment after natural catastrophes or military disasters. Although the archaeological evidence is patchy, if not occasional, we could say that the landscape of Early Byzantine cities of the 7th and 8th centuries was still marked by the traditional places of the central and peripheral power. The acropolises continued to exist, as we have just seen,[25] associating as always the seat of power with

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[23]   K. Armstrong, Ch. Tsigonaki, A. Sarris, N. Coutsinas, *Site Location Modelling and Prediction on Early Byzantine Crete: Methods employed, challenges encountered*, in S. Campana, R. Scopigno, G. Carpentiero, M. Cirillo (ed.) *Keep the Revolution Going* (43rd Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology Conference), Oxford, 2016, p. 659–668.

[24]   M. Ricci, *Produzioni di lusso a Roma da Giustiniano I (527–565) a Giustiniano II (685–695): l'atelier della Crypta Balbi e i materiali delle collezioni storiche*, in M. S. Arena, P. Delogu, L. Paroli, M. Ricci, L. Saguì, L. Vendittelli (ed.), *Roma dall'antichità al medioevo. Archeologia e storia nel Museo Nazionale Romano – Crypta Balbi*, Milano, 2001, p. 331–432.

[25]   E. Triolo, *L'acropoli nelle città protobizantine*, in *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Siena*, 30 (2009), p. 45–71.

defensive needs; in the same manner, the continuity of seats of urban magistrates has to be assumed, at least on the basis of literary sources.

The same applies to other urban spaces, like, for instance, the colonnaded streets, that acted also as settings for public representation of power, with the building – or major restoration – of public monuments; some of which hosted acclamations or celebrating inscriptions.[26] And the same continuity of use and function applies to places connected with the everyday maintenance of power, such as, for instance, the *praetoria* or the courtrooms.[27]

In the Early Byzantine cities of the second half of 6th and the 7th centuries, the Church and in particular the bishops continued to act as the connecting line with imperial power; they received an increasing mandate to administer large sectors of civil life, from the maintenance of aqueducts to the management of defensive systems.

Having rapidly sketched the picture of continuity of traditional powers, it is now decidedly more complicated, but highly intriguing, to pose the question about the archaeological visibility of the places of the multiform power of new urban élites. In this sense it is necessary to interpret a series of phenomena that start to emerge into the archaeological recording, still awaiting a more consistent explication.

The proliferation of new urban religious foundations (large and small churches, oratories, monasteries, hospitals) is indirectly, but evidently, connected with the power of new élites of *possessores et potentiores* and their need for public affirmation and self-representation on the urban social scene. If seen from this point of view, such a diffuse presence of small scale evergetism generated by emerging urban élites should represent a major point of reflection on the mechanism of accumulation and re-distribution of wealth, and the management of power relationships within a society in such a deep transformation.

Even more challenging is the possibility of reading the manifestation of those 'diffuse' urban powers through the residences of the people that exercised power. The presence of residences that qualify for being above the average level in terms of size, functional quality and decoration clearly testifies to the presence of members of an urban elite, especially when a phenomenon of privatization of formerly public spaces and their organic insertion into new residences of prestige is well detectable.[28]

2.4. Maintenance and transformation of infrastructures

The issue of the maintenance of essential urban infrastructure is in many ways closely linked to the topography of power, but it is of great interest also for the study of the transformations of the socio-economic fabric of Early Byzantine cities after the mid-6th century.

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[26] H. W. Dey, *The Afterlife of the Roman City*, New York, 2015, p. 194–199.

[27] Gortyn in Crete: A. Di Vita, *Gortina di Creta quindici secoli di vita urbana*, Roma, 2010.

[28] H. Thür, E. Rathmayr, E. Kanitz, *Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos: die Wohneinheit 6* (Baubefund, Ausstattung, Funde, Forschungen in Ephesos), Wien, 2014.

Urban road systems and, mainly, water supply systems represent in fact the two main indicators for studying a city from the point of view of the people who lived there, being the topographical location of their living and working space, strictly dependent on themselves.

On the one hand, the maintenance of main roads running across the cities and the urban water systems ensured an urban life standard in many ways comparable with that of previous centuries. On the other hand, the often profound changes operated into both systems (opening of new streets intended to reach the new focal points of the cities, mainly the new churches; the reorganization of intra-urban water distribution) constitute a very clear testimony of a deep transformation of urban landscapes.[29]

From this point of view, the case of the so-called Early Byzantine district near the Python shrine in Gortyn (Crete) seems to be a case in point: a new street created in the second half of the 4th century, within a major urban reorganization following a devastating earthquake, saw a progressive stabilization during the 5th and the 6th centuries. At the beginning of the 7th century, the situation changed radically: parts of the street encroached by additions to existing houses and it was changed, most likely, into a sort of oblong private courtyard, serving a rich residence erected in the same time just beside the street itself.

Roughly around the same time the urban water distribution system was also reorganized. In the mid-6th century, the existing Roman aqueduct was restored and improved, and the distribution of drinking water inside the city was re-organized with the building of an impressive network of more than fifty tanks/fountains that spread across much of the urban area. The irregular distribution of tanks/fountains, apparently not strictly related with the street system, can be assumed to be an archaeological indicator of the distribution of the main nuclei of population within the extension of the ancient city. In the 7th century, probably in response to a progressive reduction of water flow caused by difficulties in maintenance of the oversized Roman aqueduct, we can detect a progressive concentration of people and related small craft activities around single tanks/fountains, creating a very interesting archaeological evidence of the theoretical image of a city fragmented into many isolated small nuclei of settlement.

In parallel, in the large mansion we have just discussed, a private water system was organized, fed by rainwater or perhaps even by a direct connection to the public water supply. This image clearly argues for the presence of a member of an urban élite: an individual who had the ability to divert for private use a structure (the street) and a primary resource (water) originally intended for public use, albeit regulated by an urban central authority. This is an archaeological picture that is entirely compatible with the image of the urban society of Early Byzantine cities in the 7th and 8th centuries, as outlined in recent years by historians on the basis of non-archaeological sources.

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[29]   Some different case studies in P. Ballet, N. Dieudonné-Glad, C. Saliou, M, Evina, *La rue dans l'Antiquité: définition, aménagement et devenir de l'Orient méditerranéen à la Gaule*, Rennes, 2008.

3. The transformation of urban space

The processes we have described so far provide a more concrete historical-archaeological dimension to phenomena that have been recognized for a long time in the archaeological record, even though they were roughly labelled as general trends. Of course, the general downsizing of the cities, the infilling of urban spaces and the gradual encroachment of roads are long-term phenomena that we can register, at the same time or in different times, in all regions of the Mediterranean, from East to West and from the 4th to the 7th–8th centuries. After the long period in which these phenomena were generally explained by a multifaceted 'decay of urban civilization', we are now entering the stage of recognition of their concrete historical reality, related with social and economic changes occurring in different times and places in compliance of various causes and contributing factors.[30]

Concerning Early Byzantine cities, research into causes can get particularly complicated, because it is related, on the one hand, to the presence and agency of the members of the new urban élites, but on the other hand it is evidently connected with different social phenomena, such as new forms of mobility of people within cities and a new permeability of the boundaries that separated traditionally the ancient city from the surrounding countryside.

From this point of view, the extremely frequent transformation of abandoned spaces and buildings into areas of life and work can be read as a response to the needs of new social groups. A myriad of more or less precarious walls, that blocked porches, segmented monuments and closed public spaces,[31] designed the places of survival for increasingly larger groups of people who moved from the countryside to the cities or within the cities themselves.

The moving of people from the countryside to the cities has traditionally been explained as driven by the overall increase of insecurity and the need to seek shelter offered by city walls. This image remains of course largely true, but it is worth noting that the phenomenon of 'escape' toward cities seems to have also affected the regions that should have been theoretically far from insecure. In those cases, the archaeologically well recorded movement of people from the countryside to cities could be better framed perhaps in the perspective of new forms of interplay between different levels of density of human settlement within a territory. In this image, the city can be perceived as the place where farmers and artisans found new economic resources and services otherwise unavailable, because the cities had

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[30]   Ch. Kirilov, *The Reduction of the Fortified City Area in Late Antiquity: Some Reflections on the End of the "Antique City" in the Lands of the Eastern Roman Empire*, in J. Henning (ed.), *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, Berlin, 2007, p. 3–24; M. Greenhalgh, *Constantinople to Córdoba: Dismantling Ancient Architecture in the East, North Africa and Islamic Spain*, Leiden – Boston, 2012.

[31]   Available data are summarized in H. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century. Literary Images and Historical Reality*, Athens, 2006, p. 186–208.

become the only point of contact between the microcosm of local economy and the largest network of economic and administrative system of the Early Byzantine empire.[32]

Within this image, I believe we can find a new – and perhaps more convincing – interpretation of the archaeological markers that are frequently classified into the somewhat generic category of 'ruralization' of the Early Byzantine cities in the last stage of their life. More than ruralization of space (read: the entering of the countryside into the urban space), we should discuss in terms of ruralization of people, in the sense that the cities are now populated also by men working permanently or seasonly in the surrounding countryside farming and/or in related craft activities, such as the production and maintenance of the farming tools or the pottery needed for storage and treatment of crops. In this light, I presume, we could explain the increasing evidence of artisanal activities in the cities, more and more strictly inserted into the urban fabric.

In this sense, we might think even better in terms or ruralization of production processes and socio-economic relationships. Within a deeply changed social framework, it is reasonable to assume that the whole socio-economic urban system was more directly tied to land possession and exploitation. Landed property was of course the basis of wealth and power of *possessores/potentiores*; while agricultural and related craft activities were largely the activities of the men and the women who lived and worked in the small and fragmented urban housing units. Finally, local production largely relied upon the supply system, as testified by the sharp drop in amphorae and fine tableware imports from other Mediterranean regions.

3.1. A new 'Mediterranean' chronology?

The last, but very important, item that emerges from recent archaeological fieldwork is a clearer articulation of the 'internal' chronology of Early Byzantine times. This seems to overtake the traditional dichotomy between a *floruit* in the first half of 6th century and a dramatic 'rupture' of the Mediterranean equilibrium during the 7th century, which is suggested mainly by the quantity and quality of non-archaeological sources, pertaining approximately to the age of Justinian.

Recent archaeological research proved that already by the second half and, mainly, the final decades of the 6th century there was major change at a macro-regional scale: a change that sounds even more important as it concerns both large and small cities, central and peripheral cities, 'connected' and isolated cities, frontier cities exposed to warfare and more protected cities on the interior. This change is marked by the transformation of the urban fabric we have discussed just above, with the activation of medium-long processes

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[32]   E. Zanini, *Città, microterritorio e macroterritorio (e mobilità degli uomini) nel Mediterraneo proto-bizantino: il caso di Gortina di Creta*, in G. Macchi Janica (ed.), *Geografie del Popolamento: casi di studio, metodi, teorie*, Siena, 2009, p. 111–122.

that will lead, on the one hand to the birth of new urban forms and, on the other hand to the irreversible crisis of long-established urban centres.[33]

This 'new' line of discontinuity in the Mediterranean chronology seems to be related to the overall transformation of socio-economic landscape of the Early Byzantine empire, in turn connected to a series of complex other items: the deep demographic and productive crisis started with the great plague; the ending of the expansive push of Justinian's *renovatio imperii*; the problems encountered by imperial armies in contesting concentric attacks by Avaro-Slavs and Lombards in the West and Persians in the East; the re-organization of the whole system of circulation of goods inside the Empire, with the progressive prevailing of regional and sub-regional dimension over the Mediterranean one.

The second important contribution of stratigraphic archaeology to urban contexts is a new attention progressively focused on the later and very final stages of the trajectory: the availability of many newly excavated materials, the development of typological and archaeometric studies for dating, and a methodological approach that is surely more sophisticated than the one used in recent studies on the problem of the extended circulation of many materials. Results of these new insights have led to an extended chronology from the mid/end of 7th century until the 8th century, giving us a far more complex picture than the traditional one, that depicted the crisis of population as being fast and irreversible.

In Early Byzantine cities of the 7th–8th century, people carried on their lives much longer and better than we could imagine just fifteen years ago. The scenery is if anything more articulated: some urban centres survived better than other cities, who paid a heavier tribute to the crisis. Within the cities, some social classes preserved their status of recognised urban élites and they invested much of their money in self-representation, with evergetism and consumption of high-quality goods; in this way, they preserved some form of economic circulation within the cities and between them and the major directive centres of the empire.

3.2. The crisis of urban aristocracies and the end of Early Byzantine city

The range of topics discussed above requires a brief final inquiry about the 'engines' that drove such a deep transformation in Early Byzantine urbanism and the reasons for the ultimate crisis of a model of city that Early Byzantine world had inherited from Greek-Roman civilization and Late Antiquity.

Answering such a question is obviously complex, and a first assumption is that the fate of each city was largely determined by very differing contributing factors, which vary on a case to case basis.

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[33] On the case of Sagalassos, M. Waelkens, *The Late Antique to Early Byzantine city in Southwest Anatolia. Sagalassos and its territory: a case study*, in J.-U. Krause, C. Witschel (ed.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike. Niedergang oder Wandel?*, Stuttgart, 2006, p. 199–256.

A first common element could be identified in the progressive weakening in the ties that connected the single cities to that complex set of issues we call 'Byzantine empire'. The latter being a highly problematic term used to designate a number of very different regions, which based its unity mainly on three points: a) the role played by central and peripheral administration in organizing the circulation and re-distribution of economic wealth within the empire itself, mainly using a few fundamental instruments, such as tax-collecting and evergetism seen as a way to redistribute a part of incoming resources; b) the existence of a common system of defence on a large, imperial, scale; c) the Church, with its role in administration and politics.

In other words, those were the three major sections in which the social system of urban élites was organized to be the key contact point between the local micro-ecology of each urban centre (the way in which each city depended essentially on its *chora* for its everyday life) and the macro-economy on a Mediterranean scale (the way in which each city was inserted into the life of the empire). A three faceted élite (administrative, religious, military) that was composed by *possessores* who based their economic power on the local agrarian property, but also by *potentiores* who exercised their local power rightly because they were in close contact with the three main strands of the central government.

When these élites started to loose their touch with the central government, their power survived, but became more and more locally based. This could be, in my opinion, the point of no return for the transformation of Early Byzantine cities. The urban centre became less and less attractive for the members of these élites, until they decided to abandon the cities, probably to fly away to the imperial capital city or to disperse themselves in smaller, maybe fortified, settlements.[34] After the abandonment by the élites, there was even less reason for other people to remain in the cities. In this sense a number of long term urban trajectories came to an end, and the overall image of the city was transformed into something completely different – the middle Byzantine city.

I would argue that much of the archaeological evidence acquired with the development of a proper, modern urban archaeology of Early Byzantine cities points in that direction. It will be up to further research to either validate this hypothesis or replace it by an even more complex pattern.

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[34]   M. Veikou, *Urban or Rural? Theoretical remarks on the settlement patterns in Byzantine Epirus (7ᵗʰ–11ᵗʰ centuries)*, in *BZ*, 103/1 (2010), p. 171–193.

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