

‘The Way We Were’: a journey in the last fifty years of Byzantine archaeology (1975-2024)

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Just a few months after Barbra Streisand (as Katie) and Robert Redford (as Hubbell) featured in *The Way We Were*¹, Clive Foss published the first of his many seminal works of the late 1970s and early 1980s.² It focused on the transformation experienced by twenty Anatolian cities cited by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De Thematibus*;³ the main idea was to prove that urban life, upon which the classical Mediterranean culture had been based, came virtually to an end following the Persian invasion and retrenched to villages and fortresses until the tenth century.⁴ ‘These conclusions, of course, apply only to [Anatolia], but ... they would prove valid for the whole Byzantine empire [and] they are based almost entirely on the results of archaeology.’⁵

Foss was not the first scholar to delve into the (scanty and badly published) results of archaeological excavations to examine the trajectories of urban life in the passage from (what was then starting to be called)⁶ Late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages (later known as the Byzantine Dark Ages)⁷. However, his work was pivotal in forcing

1 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070903/?ref_=tt_ch Accessed 1 January 2024.

2 The main contributions on important cities: Ankara (C. Foss, ‘Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977) 27-82); Ephesus (Foss, *Ephesus After Antiquity: a Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish city* (Cambridge 1979); Sardis (Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (Cambridge 1980); Nicaea (Foss and J. Tulchin, *Nicaea. A Byzantine capital and its praises* (New York 1996). Foss also published the results of extensive archaeological surveys conducted in Anatolia and beyond: ‘The Lycian coast in the Byzantine age’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994) 1-52; ‘The cities of Pamphylia in the Byzantine age’, in Foss (ed.), *Cities, Fortresses and Villages of Byzantine Asia Minor* (Burlington VT 1996) IV.1-62; ‘Syria in transition. A.D. 550-750: an archaeological approach’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997) 189-269.

3 Foss, ‘Archaeology and the "Twenty Cities" of Byzantine Asia’, *AJA* 81/4, 469-86.

4 Foss ‘The Persians in Asia Minor and the end of Antiquity’, *The English Historical Review*, 90/357 (1975) 721-47.

5 Foss, ‘Archaeology and the "Twenty Cities"’, 486.

6 A milestone is Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (New York 1971).

7 See e.g. D. Claude, *Die Byzantische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1969); moreover, in the 1950s both Alexander Kazhdan and George Ostrogorsky relied on numismatic evidence as a guide fossil to interpret the trajectories of Byzantine urbanism, though reaching opposite conclusions: (see L. Zavagno,

Byzantinists to reckon with archaeology while swinging the historiographical pendulum away from those syntheses which had till then mystifyingly ignored archaeology.⁸ This did not entail that the dialogue between archaeologists and textual historians became any easier than the one between the two main characters of Sidney Pollack's movie. Nevertheless, the following decades led both sides gradually to acknowledge that entering a conversation was going to make things different: 'not because we'll both be wrong, we'll both lose but because both could win'. For the whole Byzantine millennium, a stress on archaeology is necessary because the written evidence is limited for the period between the seventh and ninth century, and though more extensive from the tenth century on, it does not tell us as much about rural settlement patterns or the economy as we would like.⁹

As Jim Crow puts it: 'the archaeology of the Byzantine world remains a historical archaeology, set in a chronological framework, informed by texts.' Therefore, Byzantinists have often been tempted to use archaeological evidence to illustrate and bolster any historical narrative deriving from written sources.¹⁰ Nevertheless, better and better-published archaeology, as well as a more attentive and chronologically aware analysis of two of the most important material indicators of human activity (pottery and coins) as yielded across several regions of the Byzantine empire, have been increasingly brought to scholarly attention over the last fifty years.¹¹ It has become clear that the relation between texts and material culture is to be acknowledged as complex and mutually enriching.¹²

There is not space here to cite more than a few scholarly contributions: the number of archaeologically excavated sites, extensive surveys, and publications of material evidence has multiplied since Foss.¹³ The selection of scholarly works for this brief overview is based on how Byzantine archaeology, over the past five decades, has provided improved responses to historiographical and theoretical inquiries. These encompass,

'The Byzantine city and its historiography', in N. Bakirtzis and L. Zavagno (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Byzantine City. From Justinian to Mehmet II (ca. 500 – ca. 1500)* (London 2024) 17-36.

8 C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Age: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford 2005) 11-12. Wickham's criticism is mainly directed at A.H.M. Jones, who set the trend of Late Roman studies from the 1930s to the 1960s; see e.g. *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford 1937) and *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: a social, economic and administrative survey* (London 1964).

9 Wickham, *Framing*, 32 and *The Donkey and the Boat*, 271 with further bibliography.

10 J. Crow, 'Archaeology,' in L. James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford 2010) 291-300 (293).

11 For a brief overview of progress in the analysis of these two types of material evidence see A. Gandila, 'Reconciling the 'step sisters': early Byzantine numismatics, history and archaeology', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 111 (2018), 103-24; K. Dark, *Byzantine Pottery* (Oxford 2002); J. Vroom, *Byzantine to Modern Pottery in the Aegean: 7th to the 20th century A.C. An introduction and field guide* (Utrecht 2005).

12 Crow, 'Archaeology,' 293.

13 There is no independent Wikipedia entry for 'Byzantine Archaeology': the entry for 'Byzantine Studies' includes numismatics and epigraphy as 'auxiliary [sic] disciplines' but does not mention archaeology. The sole handbooks of Byzantine archaeology have not been translated into English: E. Zanini, *Introduzione all'Archeologia Bizantina* (Roma 1994); A. Paliouras, *Εισαγωγή στη Βυζαντινή Αρχαιολογία* (Ioannina 2004).

but are not limited to, the transformation of urban landscapes; alterations in rural settlement patterns and modes of production; networks related to the production, distribution, and exchange of goods; the role of fiscal structures and monetary economy; and the socio-cultural, religious, and political profiles of both the elites and the lower classes.¹⁴

I will leave aside the geographical, chronological, and 'infrastructural' objections to the status of Byzantine archaeology as a discipline.¹⁵ I focus my attention here on how the discovery (through planned or rescue excavations, as well as intensive and extensive surveys) and objective analysis of objects (mainly ceramics and coins) shed light on life and society in Byzantium.¹⁶ In the last part of the article, I will briefly address the future of the discipline as it reckons with interdisciplinary methods of investigation (based on palaeoclimatic records, and environmental data as yielded from ice cores, ring trees and palynological evidence) as well as the importance of digitizing and mapping the results of excavations, surveys, and analysis of material culture.¹⁷

14 See e.g. M.F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300—c. 1450* (Oxford 1985); A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900-1200* (Cambridge 1990); M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1205* (Oxford 1996); J. Bintliff, 'Beyond the dots on the map: future directions for surface artefact survey in Greece', in J. Bintliff, M. Kuna, and N. Venclova (eds.), *The Future of Surface Artefact Surveys in Europe* (Sheffield 2000) 3–20; L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era (ca. 680-850). The Sources: An Annotated Survey* (Aldershot 2001); the array of chapters in A. Laiou, *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the seventh through the fifteenth century* (3 vols, Washington DC 2002); M. Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (London 2006); A. Laiou and C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge 2007); M. Decker, *Tilling the Hateful Earth: agricultural production and trade in the Late Antique East* (Oxford 2009); A. Izdubesky, *A Rural Economy in Transition: Asia Minor from Late Antiquity into the Early Middle Ages* (Warsaw 2013); M. Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages* (London 2016); J. Haldon, *The Empire that would not Die: the paradox of Eastern Roman survival, 640–740* (Cambridge 2016); R. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: the building traditions of Byzantium and neighboring lands* (New York 2019); L. Lavan, *Public Space in the Late Antique City* (Leiden 2021); A. Castrorao Barba and G. Castiglia, *Perspectives on Byzantine Archaeology. From Justinian to the Abbasid Era (6th-9th Centuries AD)* (Turnhout 2023). Although only partially focusing on Byzantium, other seminal contributions heavily relying on archaeology and material culture are M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and commerce AD 300-900* (Cambridge MA 2001), Wickham, *Framing*, and *The Donkey and the Boat. Reinterpreting the Mediterranean economy 950-1180* (Oxford 2023).

15 Á. Bollók, 'The archaeology of the Byzantine state – a non-specialist's approach', *Antaeus* 33 (2015) 265-315, esp. 274; also Whittow, *Making*, 14 and M. Rautman, 'Archaeology and Byzantine Studies', in *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990) 137-66.

16 M. Decker, 'The current status of Byzantine archaeology', *History Compass* 16/9 (2018) 1-8, esp. 2

17 H. Baron, 'Introduction – steps towards an environmental history of the Byzantine Empire,' in H. Baron and F. Daim (eds.), *A Most Pleasant Scene and an Inexhaustible Resource. Steps towards a Byzantine environmental history. Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident* 6 (Mainz 2017) 9-14; E. Xoplaki et al., 'The medieval climate anomaly and Byzantium: a review of the evidence on climatic fluctuations, economic performance and societal change', *Quaternary Science Reviews* 136 (2016) 229-52 and 'Modelling climate and societal resilience in the Eastern Mediterranean in the last millennium', *Human Ecology* 46 (2018)

Numerous urban excavations and rural surveys have taken place across the empire since Foss, often adopting a more diachronic approach.¹⁸ This marks a departure from the historical oversight by excavators who, influenced by their classical background, had shown limited interest in Byzantine strata. This shift is evident in recent endeavours, even addressing the neglect experienced by sites initially excavated in the late 1800s or early 1900s, such as Ephesos and Pergamon.¹⁹ Indeed, both the obsession of Byzantinists with ‘the City’ (Constantinople) and the continuous later occupation of the main cities of the empire (Thessaloniki, Smyrna, Nicaea, Ancyra, Attaleia, Antioch, and Nicomedia) have hampered the development of Byzantine urban archaeology.²⁰ Still, an enormous contribution to the comprehension of the urban trajectories has been offered by the investigation and extensive publications of the urban strata and of objects yielded by sites never built over after their abandonment.²¹ I refer here to Amorium, Sagalassos, and Hierapolis in Anatolia, Cariçin Grad and Butrint in the Balkans, Monemvasia in Greece, and Comacchio in Italy; to these one should add the results of emergency excavations in cities like Messene, Thebes, Thessaloniki, Athens (in particular in the area of the Agora) Syracuse, Naples, Otranto, and Ravenna.²²

This does not imply that Constantinople did not continue to occupy the mind (and the trowels) of Byzantine archaeologists, as exemplified by the spectacular results of the excavations at the Theodosian Harbor (Yenikapı)²³, and those (yet unpublished) at the

363–79; A. Olson, *Environment and Society in Byzantium 650-1150. Between the oak and the olive* (New York 2020).

18 See e.g. J. Haldon, H. Elton, and J. Newhard, *Archaeology and Urban Settlement in Late Roman and Byzantine Anatolia: Euchaita- Avkat- Beyözü and its environment* (Cambridge 2018).

19 S. Ladstätter, ‘Ephesos from Late Antiquity until the Middle Ages. An archaeological introduction’, in S. Ladstätter and P. Magdalino (eds.), *Ephesos from Late Antiquity until the Late Middle Ages* (Vienna 2019) 11-72; T. Otten, ‘Das Byzantinische Pergamon- Ein Überblick zu Forschungsstand und Quellenlagen,’ in F. Daim & J. Drauschke (eds.), *Byzanz- das Römerreich im Mittelalter. Teil 2, 2 Schauplätze* (Mainz 2010), 809-30. An exception among historical excavations is Corinth: see G. Sanders, ‘Corinth’, in A. Laiou, *The Economic History*, 633-41) and ‘Bridging the Grande Brèche. Rethinking coins, ceramics, Corinth, and commerce in the centuries following AD 500,’ in A. Dunn (ed.), *Byzantine Greece: Microcosm of Empire* (London 2024) 137–66.

20 Wickham. *Framing*, 626 and C. Bouras, ‘Aspects of the Byzantine city. Eighth to fifteenth century’ in Laiou, *The Economic History of Byzantium*, 483-579, esp. 499-500; ‘Cityist (byzantinist) is a person whose research is defined by the creative, cultural and social imperative of the City life. The city being always with a capital C, none other than the capital city itself, Constantinople.’: N. Tsivikis, ‘Moving beyond the invisible cities of Byzantium’, *EJPCA* 10 (2020), 325-34 (351).

21 J. Shea, ‘The Late Byzantine city: social, economic, and institutional profile’, PhD diss., University of Birmingham 2009; F. Curta, ‘Postcards from Maurilia or the historiography of the dark-age cities of Byzantium.’ *EJPCA* 6 (2016), 89-110; E. Key Fowden, S. Çağaptay, E.Zychowicz-Coghill, and L. Blanke, *Cities as Palimpsests? Responses to antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean urbanism* (Oxford 2022).

22 Detailed bibliography on most of these in L. Zavagno, *The Byzantine City from Heraclius to the Fourth Crusade 610-1204* (London 2021).

23 C. Pulak, ‘Yenikapı Byzantine shipwrecks’, in Z. Kızıltan (ed.), *Istanbul: 8,000 Years Brought to Daylight: Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet excavations* (Istanbul 2007) 202-15; U. Kocabaş, ‘The Yenikapı

so-called Four Seasons Hotel Archaeopark and at the new train station of Kadıköy (Chalcedon)²⁴ as well as the survey of the Theodosian Walls.²⁵ Nevertheless, as Tsivikis concludes, one should note that the need to explore 'real' Byzantine urbanism has laid the ground for 'the numerous works have been produced over the past decades on, though one has to note the great majority of it has been concerned with the Late Roman or Early Byzantine city, only recently breaking more into the formative Early Medieval Byzantium'.²⁶

On the one hand, this shift has given rise to novel trends in Byzantine urban studies. There is a growing focus on the significance of residential dwellings and neighbourhoods as an intermediate stage between official monumental structures and ordinary housing. This approach provides valuable insights into the micro-level histories of cities, shedding light on the socio-economic and political factors influencing urban development.²⁷ Additional trends concentrate on understanding the significance of urban sacred spaces to gain a deeper insight into the connection between religious beliefs, pilgrimage, and urban architectures.²⁸ There is also a growing emphasis on exploring the diverse functions and roles of urban fortifications, moving beyond their traditional defensive functions.²⁹ Another noteworthy trend encourages a closer examination of the infrastructures supporting the two fundamental needs of any urban population: water and bread.³⁰

The increased focus on the actual urban landscape has resulted in the creation of comprehensive regional assessments, encompassing both larger and smaller territories from a diachronic perspective.³¹ Such overviews do not exclusively focus on urban

Byzantine-era shipwrecks, Istanbul, Turkey: a preliminary report and inventory of the 27 wrecks studied by Istanbul University', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 44/1 (2015) 5-38.

24 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/history-being-rewritten-with-archaeological-excavations-at-train-station-in-istanbul/2390473> accessed 1 January 2024.

25 A project initiated by Koç University to bring together relevant visual and written data to create a digital resource on the city walls. <https://istanbulcitywalls.ku.edu.tr/en/page/about> accessed 1 January 2024. For a list of all the excavated sites in the city (to 2012), see K. Dark and F. Özgümüş, *Constantinople: archaeology of a Byzantine megapolis* (Istanbul 2013).

26 Tsivikis, 'Moving beyond', 328.

27 I. Uytterhoeven and A. Ricci, *The Palimpsest of the House. Reassessing Roman, Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic living patterns* (Istanbul 2022); F. Kondyli and B. Anderson, *The Byzantine Neighbourhood. Urban space and political action* (London 2022).

28 S. Yalman and A. Hilâl Uğurlu, *Sacred Spaces and Urban Networks* (Istanbul 2019).

29 N. Bakirtzis, 'The practice, perception and experience of Byzantine fortification,' in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 352-76; N. Kontogiannis, *Byzantine Fortifications: protecting the Roman Empire in the East* (Barnsley 2022).

30 E. Zanini, 'Appunti per una 'archeologia del pane' nel Mediterraneo tardo antico', in G. Archetti (ed.), *La Civiltà del Pane. Storia, Tecniche e simboli dal Mediterraneo all'Atlantico* (Spoleto 2015) 373-94.

31 A. Dunn, 'The transition from polis to kastron in the Balkans (III-VII cc.): general and regional perspectives', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994) 61-80; F. Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2006); J. Albani and E. Chalkia, *Heaven on Hearth. Cities and countryside in Byzantine Greece* (Athens 2013); M. Veikou, *Byzantine Epirus. A topography of transformation.*

sites but encompass the Byzantine countryside. Indeed, they encourage us to transcend the dichotomy of urban vs. rural (or, more precisely, city vs. village) and to differentiate between settlements not only in terms of specific functions but in terms of degree, intensity, and relative settlement hierarchy.³² Until the early 2000s, 'rural' Byzantium remained relatively underexplored and poorly understood.³³ Since then, surveys and excavations have increasingly concentrated on the Byzantine countryside, as well as villages in different areas of the empire.³⁴ Although most of these have focused on the Late Antique period (pre seventh century)³⁵, it is worth noting that Athanasios Vionis and Myrto Veikou embrace a diachronic and 'holistic' approach to the rural landscape and the strategies of agricultural (and other) exploitation: the term 'rural' should not be used to define a space that is not densely inhabited and not heterogeneous.³⁶

This has led Vionis to identify (in particular in Cyprus and Boeotia) a network of sacred and economic landscapes centered on rural establishments (villages and farms) and local centres (market towns, and ports or coastal emporia), often in association with Christian basilicas.³⁷ Veikou, by contrast, points to the importance of a typology

settlements of the seventh-twelfth centuries in southern Epirus and Aetoloacarnania, Greece (Leiden 2012); D. Michaelidis, P. Pergola, and E. Zanini, *The Insular System of the early Byzantine Mediterranean. Archaeology and history* (Oxford 2013); P. Niewöhner, *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia From the End of Late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks* (Oxford 2017).

32 M. Decker, 'What is a Byzantine landscape?', in M. Veikou and I. Nilsson (eds), *Spatialities of Byzantine Culture from the Human Body to the Universe* (Leiden 2022) 243-61, esp. 245.

33 Bollók, 'The archaeology', 279; also Decker, 'The state,' 5.

34 J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, and J.P. Sodini, *Les Villages dans l'Empire byzantin, IVe-XVe siècle* (Paris 2005). Some recent regional overviews are: for Anatolia A. Izdebeski, 'Rural Settlements,' in Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology*, 82-90; for Greece: E. Gerousi 'Rural Greece in the Byzantine period in light of the new archaeological evidence' in Albani and Chalkia (eds.), *Heaven & Hearth*, 31-43 and E. Athanassopoulos, 'Medieval landscape archaeology in southern Greece: an overview and reassessment', in A. Castrorao Barba, D. Tanasi, and R. Micicché, *Archaeology of the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Gainesville FL 2023), 94-114; for Cyprus M. Rautmann, *A Cypriot Village of Late Antiquity: Kalavastos-Kopetra in the Vasilikos Valley (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series #52)* (Portsmouth 2003) and 'The villages of Byzantine Cyprus' in Lefort, Morrisson and Sodini (eds), *Les Villages*, 453-64; T. Papacostas, 'The Troodos Mountains of Cyprus in the Byzantine period: archaeology, settlement, economy', *Cahiers du Centre d'Études Chypristes* 43 (2013) 175-200; also the works of Athanasios Vionis; finally, for Sicily (where the focus has been on the transformations and re-functionalization of Roman villas) see G. Cacciaguerra and A. Castrorao Barba, 'The Sicilian countryside during the Byzantine period', in Castrorao Barba and Castiglia, *Perspectives*, 107-22. See also T. Lewit and A. Chavarría, 'Archaeological research in the Late Antique countryside. A bibliographical essay', in W. Bowden et al., *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside* (Leiden 2004) 1-51; and the overview (limited to the seventh-to-tenth century period) in Decker, *The Byzantine*, 123-52.

35 T. Lewit, 'Stories in the ground: settlement remains and archaeology as narrative in the fourth- to sixth-century Eastern Mediterranean,' in J. Burke et al. (eds), *Byzantine Narrative. Papers in honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006), 475-80.

36 Decker, 'What is a Byzantine landscape?', 246.

37 A. Vionis, 'Understanding settlements in Byzantine Greece: new data and approaches for Boeotia, sixth to thirteenth century', in G. Papantoniou and A. Vionis, 'Landscape archaeology and sacred space in the

of settlements that have been defined as ‘third spaces’: neither fully urban nor fully rural.³⁸ These ‘intermediate and hybrid’ settlements exhibit characteristics of both rural and urban environments, although they are not always linked to any clearly defined and archaeologically traceable physical form (the same is true of gateway communities).³⁹ A prime example of the importance of moving beyond the traditional forms and typologies of settlement (in this case stemming from the unique geomorphological characteristics of the region) is the rock-cut elite residential complex and town-like settlements of Cappadocia as cogently explored by the late Robert Ousterhout.⁴⁰

It is also important to stress that the drastic quantitative and qualitative improvement of urban and rural archaeology in the past fifty years has led to a better appraisal of the main fossil guide for human (economic and social) activity in any pre-industrial society: ceramics. The work of Joanita Vroom, Natalia Poulou, Pamela Armstrong, Paul Arthur, Ian Randall, Smagdar Gabrieli, and (again) Athanasios Vionis have helped Byzantinists to sharpen the focus on Byzantine pottery produced in and circulating across different regions of the empire after the end of antiquity.⁴¹ In this respect, John Hayes’s publication of the material excavated at Saraçhane is still a standard reference point for any study on Byzantine ceramics.⁴² Nevertheless, the disappearance of standardized Red Slip wares from Africa, Phocaea, and Cyprus, along with the abandonment of centralized mass production of pottery (accompanied by the shift away from the fast-wheel technique), has been attributed not only to the end of the Roman tax spine (*annona civica* and *militaris*) but also to the gradual transition toward a more economically fragmented Mediterranean.⁴³ This change has come to be regarded, not as a catastrophic decline, but as a complex process mainly hinging on the identification of material culture markers for the early Middle Ages (glazed pottery as mainly produced in Constantinople from the ninth century on) and Middle

Eastern Mediterranean: a glimpse from Cyprus,’ *Land* 6 (2017) 1-18; A. Vionis and G. Papantoniou, ‘Central place theory reloaded and revised: political economy and landscape dynamics in the longue durée’, *Land* 8 (2019) 36. Vionis’ research is heavily indebted to the historical-geographical theories of Johannes Koder, ‘Land use and settlement: theoretical approaches’, in J. Haldon (ed.), *General Issues in the Study of Medieval Logistics: sources, problems and methodologies* (Leiden 2006), 178–81.

38 M. Veikou, ‘Byzantine histories, settlement stories: kastro, ‘isles of refuge’, and ‘unspecified settlements’ as in-between or third spaces’, in T. Kiousopoulou (ed.), *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις (8ος-15ος αιώνας.) Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις* (Rethymno 2012) 159-207, esp. 172-4.

39 M. Veikou, ‘Mediterranean Byzantine ports and harbors in the complex interplay between environment and society. Spatial, socio-economic and cultural considerations based on archeological evidence from Greece, Cyprus and Asia Minor,’ in J. Preiser-Kapeller and F. Daim (eds.), *Harbours and Maritime Networks as Complex Adaptive Systems* (Mainz 2015) 39-61.

40 R. Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community: art, material culture, and settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington DC 2017)

41 See nn. 43 and 44.

42 J. W. Hayes, *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul. vol. 2: The Pottery* (Princeton 1992).

43 Wickham, *Framing*, 708-20.

Byzantine periods (so-called slip wares called Middle Byzantine Productions).⁴⁴ Moreover, the appearance of small workshops catering to local markets and household production has been similarly interpreted as a return of ‘the background noise’ of local handmade and coarse wares, which until the early seventh century had been extensively drowned out by the clamour of a unified Roman Mediterranean.⁴⁵

Similarly, the identification of the early medieval globular and ovoidal amphorae, which replaced the mass-produced classes of late Roman vessels for trade⁴⁶, has allowed scholars to identify a shared culture of a Byzantine maritime *koine*.⁴⁷ This relied on island and coastal outposts, as Salvatore Cosentino has observed: ‘the seventh and eighth-century islands seem to remain an economic space relatively more developed than northern and central Italy, the Balkans or Asia Minor.’⁴⁸ Certainly, it is on islands such as Cyprus and Sicily, as well as in coastal Aegean sites, that archaeology and material culture provide a clearer understanding of the gradual shift from a centrally controlled and fiscally managed economy, as evidenced by the

44 N. Poulou, ‘Digging in the dark: the islands of the Aegean and Crete from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages (late 6th-9th c. CE.,’ in Castrorao Barba, Tanasi, and Micicché eds.), *Archaeology of the Mediterranean*, 13-52; P. Armstrong, ‘The earliest glazed ceramics in Constantinople: a regional or international phenomenon?’ *Journal of Archaeological Science. Reports*, 29 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2019.102078> accessed 1 January 2024, and ‘Greece in the eleventh century’, in J. Howard-Johnston (ed.), *Social Change in Town and Country in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Oxford 2020), 133–56. For sets of ceramics included in the MBP see S.S. Skartsis and N.Kontogiannis, ‘Central Greece in the Middle Byzantine and Late Byzantine periods: changing patterns of consumption in Thebes and Chalcis’, in J. Vroom (ed.), *Feeding the Byzantine City. The Archaeology of Consumption in the Eastern Mediterranean (ca. 500-1500)* (Leiden 2023), 195-223, esp. 197; also Vroom, ‘Production, exchange and consumption of ceramics in the Byzantine Mediterranean (7th-15th centuries)’, in Vroom (ed.), *Feeding*, 283-338.

45 P. Arthur, ‘From Italy to the Aegean and back again. Notes on the archaeology of Byzantine maritime trade,’ in S. Gelichi and R. Hodges (eds.), *Da un mare all’altro. Luoghi di scambio nell’Alto Medioevo europeo e mediterraneo Atti del Seminario Internazionale Comacchio, 27-29 Marzo 2009* (Turnhout 2012), 337-52; I. Randall, ‘Continuity and change in the ceramic data. The ‘Byzantine problem’ and Cyprus during the treaty centuries’, *Cahiers du Centre d’Études Chypristes* 43 (2013), 273-84; S. Gabrieli, ‘In search of lost centuries. Hand-made pottery in Cyprus between Rome and the Crusaders,’ *HEROM. Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture*, 9 (2020), 447-87, esp. 454-60; A. Vionis, ‘Bridging the early Medieval “ceramic gap” in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean (7th-9th c.): local and global phenomena’, *HEROM. Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture*, 9 (2020) 291-397.

46 On Late Roman production see e.g. S. Demesticha, ‘Late Roman Amphora typology in context’, in N. Poulou-Papadimitriou, E. Nodarou and V. Kilikoglou (eds), *Late Roman Amphorae and Coarse Ware 4 LRCW 4: The Mediterranean: a market without frontiers. BAR Int. S 2616 (I)* (Oxford 2014) 599-606; on the Byzantine globular and ovoidal amphorae see the dedicated issue of the journal *Archeologia Medievale* (AM XLVI (2018).

47 J. Vroom, ‘The Byzantine web. Pottery and connectivity between the southern Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean,’ in S. Gelichi and C. Negrelli (eds.), *Adriatico altomedievale (VI-XI secolo). Scambi, porti, produzioni* (Rome 2017) 285- 313.

48 S. Cosentino, ‘Mentality , technology and commerce: shipping amongst the Mediterranean islands in Late Antiquity and beyond’, in Michaelides, Pergola, and Zanini (eds.), *The Insular System*, 63-76 (72).

standardized capacity and forms of globular amphorae between the seventh and ninth centuries.⁴⁹ This transition is revealed in intricate and geographically intertwined networks of commercial exchange, initially emerging in central and southern Greece and subsequently expanding throughout the Aegean from the mid-tenth century.⁵⁰ This is shown by the analysis of the cargos of amphorae found in the eleventh century Serçe Limanı shipwreck and at Yenikapı. As Vroom states: 'they included piriform shaped Byzantine amphorae of the Günşenin I/Saraçhane 54 type from Ganos on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara. This popular wine container [...] was widely distributed over the Mediterranean and Europe.'⁵¹ Indeed, this was not the only amphora marking the trading lanes linking the Aegean to the Black Sea another elongated type of Byzantine vessel (Günşenin 3/Saraçhane 61) has been identified in several Mediterranean shipwrecks as produced in Chalcis.⁵²

Numismatic evidence is a second material indicator pointing to the fact that the empire entered a period of demographic and economic growth in the tenth century. Coins have also been used to show the collapse of urban (and rural) life in the late sixth (Balkans) and seventh (Anatolia) century.⁵³ Both the absence of ceramic finds and the lack of coins have been regarded as real markers of evidence for absence and not merely an absence of evidence.⁵⁴ For instance, Cecile Morrisson has warned against the relationship between coin finds and settlement history (mainly abandonment of sites): 'coin finds apparently [do] not serve as quantitative indicators of settlement activity [...] but do indicate changes in monetization and the quality of economic transaction.'⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that coins are not simply proxy guides for changes in monetary and fiscal policies and in the development of trade and shipping networks. Andrei Gandila has recently pointed to some methodological issues when encouraging us to 'reconcile' numismatic, historical, and archaeological evidence (mainly focusing on the early Byzantine period); this by stressing the importance of bronze coinage ('on almost every site, they constitute one of the largest assemblages, second only to pottery, but more reliable due to chronological accuracy and unquestionable origin'); the role of the circulation of coins in the long-distance circulation of goods and people; the necessity to gain insights from coin discoveries for establishing comparisons across diverse archaeological sites; and, finally, the opportunity of using numismatic evidence to make sense of cultural interaction between Byzantium and the 'outside world'.⁵⁶

49 Vroom, 'Ceramics', 182-4.

50 Wickham, *The Donkey and the Boat*, 302-16.

51 Vroom, 'Ceramics', 298-9.

52 J. Vroom, 'Shifting Byzantine networks: new light on Chalkis (Euripos/Negroponte) as center of production and trade in Greece (c. 10th-13th c.)', in E. Fiori and M. Trizio (eds.), *The 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies, VI. 1: Proceedings of the Plenary Sessions* (Venice 2022) 453-87.

53 Laiou and Morrisson, *Byzantine Economy*, 84-9.

54 Decker, 'The state,' 5.

55 C. Morrisson, 'Coins', in Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology*, 71-81, esp. 76.

56 Gandila, 'Reconciling', 110-118, esp. 111.

In this light, it is evident that material culture and archaeology can be used to move beyond the traditional frontiers and approaches that characterized the ways ‘we were’ when it comes to Byzantine archaeology. Here, the reference to frontiers is deliberate, for archaeology has recently played a crucial role in examining infrastructural elements and reevaluating political and administrative structures characterizing the frontlines of the empire. This is evident along the Danube in the sixth century and later in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, along the Arab-Byzantine frontier in southeastern Anatolia between the seventh and ninth centuries, along the western Anatolian Seljuk-Byzantine frontier in the Comnenian period, and, finally, in the so-called insular corridor (constituted by the major islands of the Byzantine Mediterranean—from the Balearics to Cyprus— whose agricultural resources Constantinople exploited well into the ninth century).⁵⁷

Moreover, a reassessment of local ceramic productions (like the so-called Slavic ware in the Peloponnese and the matted wares in Sicily)⁵⁸ has led to a better understanding of the mobility and migration of peoples across the frontiers of the empire.⁵⁹ In this light, A full-fledged analysis of the development of types and forms of pottery, as paired with their production technology, has allowed us to grasp the changing dietary habits that reflect the shift of economic strategies on the part of local Byzantine communities.⁶⁰

57 A. Poulter, *The Transition to Late Antiquity. On the Danube and beyond* (Oxford 2007). A. Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: interaction and exchange among Muslim and Christian communities* (London 2014); A.S. Peacock, ‘The Seljuk Sultanate of Rūm and the Turkmen of the Byzantine frontier, 1206–1279’, *Al-Masāq* 26/3 (2014) 266-87; M. Lau, ‘Ioannoupolis: Lopadion as ‘city’ and military headquarters under Emperor Ioannis II Komnenos,’ in N.S.M. Matheou, T. Kampanaki and L.M. Bondioli (eds.), *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities* (Leiden 2016) 435-464; A. Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 10th-12th Centuries* (Leiden 2013); S. Cosentino, ‘Insularity, economy and social landscape in the early Byzantine period,’ *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e NeoEllenici* 55 (2018) 89-104, esp. 102.

58 On Slavic wares see J. Vroom, ‘From one coast to another: early medieval ceramics in the southern Adriatic region’, in S. Gelichi and R. Hodges (eds.), *From One Sea to Another. Trading places in the European and Mediterranean early Middle Ages.*, (Turnhout 2012) 353-92, esp 390-1; on matted wares (‘ceramica a stuoia’) see L. Arcifa and R. Longo, ‘Processi di diversificazione territoriale nella Sicilia di inizi IX secolo. Il Contesto di Rocchicella -Mineo (CT),’ . P. Arthur and M.L. Imperiale (eds.), *VII Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale. Volume II. Sezione IV. Luoghi di Culto e Archeologia* (Florence 2016) 402-7.

59 See L. Zavagno, “‘Encounters at the end of the world’: mobility and cross-cultural interactions on Byzantine islands (ca.550- ca.850) in an archaeological perspective’, in K. Durak and N.Necipoğlu (eds.), *Mobility and Materiality in Byzantine-Islamic Relations, 7th-12th Centuries* (forthcoming).

60 J. Vroom and E. Tzavella, ‘Dinner time in Athens: eating and drinking in the Medieval Agora’, in J. Vroom, Y. Waksman, and R. van Oosten (eds.), *Medieval MasterChef: Archaeological and historical perspectives on eastern cuisine and western foodways* (Turnhout 2017), 145-81; esp. 146-7; P. Arthur, ‘Pots and boundaries. On cultural and economic areas between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages’, in M. Bonifay and J.-C. Tréglià (eds.), *LRCW 2. Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: archaeology and archaeometry I* (Oxford 2007) 15-22.

But what about the 'next frontiers; of Byzantine archaeology? The last decade or so has witnessed the acquisition of new and exciting tools DNA studies, archaeozoology, and environmental data have helped to provide new answers to old historiographical questions like the impact and consequences of the Justinian's plague.⁶¹ Moreover, as we have noted, palaeoclimatic data (pollen analysis and ice cores) have come to be regarded as essential to any picture of the social, economic, and political changes in the Byzantine world.⁶² The increasing number of contributions on issues like global climatic fluctuations and their impact on Byzantium, as well as a thorough analysis of the interactions between humans and the different environments of the empire, bears witness to the centrality of environmental studies for the future of the discipline.⁶³

Finally, digital and digitizing tools have also become paramount in archaeological excavations and surveys and in analysing, processing, and, above all, presenting and mapping the results of any investigation. Here, there is only room to mention both the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* project (an obvious reference point for any research on urban and rural settlement patterns across the empire) and the project led by the Austrian Academy of Sciences aiming at applying spatial network analysis and complexity theory to the socioeconomic and ecclesiastical history of Byzantium.⁶⁴ These projects are also good examples of the way Byzantine archaeology can move in the challenging but compelling direction of 'archaeology of and for the people'.⁶⁵ Indeed – and unlike the unhappy ending of the movie – Byzantine archaeology has left behind its underdog status, no longer the perpetual outsider Katie is in *The Way We Were*.

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61 L. Mordechai and M. Eisenberg, 'Rejecting catastrophe: the case of the Justinianic plague,' *Past & Present*, 244/1 (2019) 3–50, esp. 24–44.

62 J. Haldon et al., 'The climate and environment of Byzantine Anatolia: integrating science, history, and archaeology', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 45/2 (2014), 113–61.

63 A. Izdreski and J. Preiser-Kapeller, *A Companion to the Environmental History of Byzantium* (Leiden 2024).

64 The TIB volumes are available open-access at <https://tib.oeaw.ac.at/> accessed 1 January 2024;

65 On the archaeology of people vs. the archaeology of monuments, see P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study on Mediterranean history* (Oxford 2000), 88–122.