

# CITIES AS PALIMPSESTS?



## Responses to *Antiquity* in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism

Edited by  
Elizabeth Key Fowden, Suna Çağaptay,  
Edward Zychowicz-Coghill and Louise Blanke

IMPACT OF THE ANCIENT CITY, VOLUME I

# Cities as Palimpsests?



# Cities as Palimpsests?

Responses to Antiquity  
in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism

*Edited by*

Elizabeth Key Fowden, Suna Çağaptay,  
Edward Zychowicz-Coghill and Louise Blanke

# Chapter 12

## Looking in two directions: Urban (re)building in sixth-century Asia Minor

*Ine Jacobs*

Since the city in late antique Asia Minor was very much a continuation and adaptation of the city of classical antiquity, the metaphor of a palimpsest is rarely applicable on a site-wide scale. Individual buildings may have been dismantled and replaced, but for the most part the built environment that was present in the third century AD remained standing until the end of antiquity and beyond. If we were to compare the late antique city with the biography of a manuscript, it would be more apt to say that marginalia continued to be added in between the lines as well as in the margins. These later additions are not an easy or uniform object of study. They have also long been neglected in favour of the original manuscript text. But that is where the comparison ends. Contrary to manuscripts, where the original content, comprising letters and illustrations, remained meaningful until it was erased, it is much harder to assess the relevance of individual buildings and urban spaces for contemporary society decades or even centuries after they had been created. The continued presence of a building, street or square may have been the result of continuous maintenance as well as thoughtless neglect. The archaeological record, or rather our current understanding of it, very rarely makes it possible to distinguish between these two scenarios. In fact, it is astounding to realise how little we know about the continuous use of large monuments or urban infrastructure after their construction and especially after the start of late antiquity. Stratigraphic evidence occurs only very rarely: in a few cases a stylistic dating of architectural decoration has been possible, at times there may be related epigraphic evidence, and, in some cases, the continued dedications of statuary can indicate the continued importance of certain locations.<sup>1</sup>

Getting a clear idea of what local inhabitants regarded as important buildings and relevant institutions, and, on a larger scale, what they thought their urban

---

<sup>1</sup> For a longer review of the evidence, see Jacobs, 'Clinging to tradition'.

surroundings should look like, is possible only on rare occasions. One of the best ways to do so is through examining choices made when rebuilding after a catastrophic event, when large parts of the urban fabric had collapsed or were severely damaged and suddenly cried out for attention. During such organised campaigns of rebuilding urban palimpsests could be created or, alternatively, the local population could prefer to retrace the original text.

In this brief article I will review three such rebuilding campaigns that took place at the end of the fifth and in the first half of the sixth century in the cities of Aphrodisias, Sagalassos and Assos. More precisely, I will focus on rebuilding made necessary after major earthquakes and the degree to which the renovation campaigns looked back to earlier planning principles in the settlement. Although one should always be careful when using earthquakes to date the destruction or renovation of a single monument,<sup>2</sup> their occurrence and, especially, what happens in their aftermath is very useful to gain insight into the priorities of a community. Earthquakes affected entire cities. Hence, the ensuing necessity-driven responses make it possible to trace community-wide decisions concerning the urban fabric.

The case-studies of Aphrodisias, Sagalassos and Assos represent cities of diverse standing: Aphrodisias was a medium-sized city but had already in the mid-third century become the provincial capital of Caria and in late antiquity was the seat of the metropolitan bishop of the province.<sup>3</sup> Assos and Sagalassos were smaller provincial cities, both with a bishop.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Sagalassos was located inland, high up in the Taurus Mountains, Assos had, at least up until the Roman period, been a busy and well-equipped port.<sup>5</sup> From the fourth century onwards, and after the ascension of Alexandria Troas as the new capital of the area, its importance may have declined but its port remained functional. In all three case-studies a strong argument can be made for earthquakes occurring in the later fifth or the early sixth century, even if we cannot determine the exact date or epicentre. The event that shook Assos may have been the event that brought havoc to the region of the Hellespont in 484. The main source, a late eighth-century author of chronicles known as the Great Chronographer, claims that the buildings on the island of Tenedos, located only 60 km from Assos, were destroyed as a result of this earthquake.<sup>6</sup> Although no reference is made to Assos, the sheer amount of debris and the extent of the changes to the urban fabric in the later fifth and early sixth century makes us believe that the impact here had

<sup>2</sup> Kristensen, “And Christ-loving Antioch”, for a more detailed critique.

<sup>3</sup> Aphrodisias became the capital of the province of Caria in the middle of the third century, see Roueché, ‘Rome, Asia and Aphrodisias’. The city’s bishop is attested for the first time in 325, see Honigmann, ‘The original list’.

<sup>4</sup> The first time a bishop of Assos turns up in literary sources is at the council of Ephesus in 431, see *Notitiae Episcopatum* 1.85, Darrouzès, *Notitiae*, 206; Laurent, *Corpus* 1, 193–196. A bishop of Sagalassos attended the Council of Constantinople in 381, see Belke and Mersich, *Phrygien und Pisidien*, 368–369.

<sup>5</sup> Arslan *et al.*, ‘Der Hafen von Assos’.

<sup>6</sup> Ambraseys, *Earthquakes*, 176. On the Great Chronographer, see Nicholson, *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, 678.

also been great. The seismic event that shook Aphrodisias could have been that of 494 mentioned by Marcellinus Comes as being catastrophic for the cities of Hierapolis, Laodikeia and Tripolis, located at a distance of respectively c. 43 km, 37 km and 41 km from Aphrodisias.<sup>7</sup> A combination of epigraphic and the stratigraphic evidence from the site itself makes it possible to situate a very heavy earthquake between c. 485 and 500.<sup>8</sup> Around the same time, Sagalassos suffered a similar fate. Again, there are no literary attestations for the events, but widespread repairs and renovations dated independently to the same period as well as the nature of the damage make a strong case for a large-scale natural event being the cause.<sup>9</sup>

In these three cities, the population was thus forced to consciously engage with past urban settings and to make decisions and choices about what to leave in ruin, what to restore, re-adapt or even recreate, as well as in which sequence interventions would take place. One can imagine a series of formal meetings of the local government, informal discussions among city-dwellers, and vibrant if not heated debates on how to spend money and how to invest time and energy. As we will see, the outcomes of these deliberations could be extremely diverse. Yet, each of these case-studies makes it possible to further nuance and even counter the still prevalent idea that sixth-century city dwellers lived their life indifferently within the slowly deteriorating framework that they inherited from classical antiquity.<sup>10</sup>

For the sake of brevity and coherence, I will use the urban squares and streets of Aphrodisias, Sagalassos and Assos as a proxy for their entire built environment. The reasons for doing so are threefold. First, they have been well researched in all three cities, making it possible to compare their later history. Second, they are in many ways examples of excessive urban infrastructure that was not necessary for the everyday functioning of the settlement, and yet was more independent from political and religious changes than other traditional forms of architecture such as gymnasia or theatres.<sup>11</sup> And third, a major part of classical and late antique city life took place in its streets and squares. People came here to socialise, play games, sell and buy all kinds of goods, watch and participate in all kinds of processions,

<sup>7</sup> Marcellinus Comes, *Annales* anno 494 (ii Asterii et Praesidii).

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 'Water, nymphs', 134; Wilson *et al.*, 'Excavations in an urban park', 89–90; Wilson, 'Aphrodisias in the long sixth century', 203; Wilson, 'Earthquakes at Aphrodisias', 479.

<sup>9</sup> Sintubin *et al.*, 'Seismic catastrophes', 6–15. The long-supposed date of this earthquake was confirmed in 2012 by soundings underneath the mosaic floor of frigidarium I in the Imperial Baths, see Waelkens, *Sagalassos - Jaarboek 2011-2012*, 104–105. A seismic fault has been identified underneath the city of Sagalassos, see Similox-Tohon *et al.* 'Identification of an active fault', 81, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Depending largely on the background and site experience of the researcher involved, the sixth century has been considered either an extension of classical antiquity, or the prelude to the less prosperous centuries to follow. See for instance the gloomy picture painted by Niewöhner, 'Urbanism', 43–46. For an overview of the state of research, see Jacobs and Elton, *The Long Sixth Century*.

<sup>11</sup> On the fate of traditional entertainment buildings in the sixth century, see amongst others Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows*, 13–74; Saradi, *Byzantine City*, 310–319; Puk, *Römische Spielwesen* for spectacles in general.

hear official pronouncements, see justice done and so on.<sup>12</sup> By extrapolating from attitudes adopted towards these elements of urban infrastructure I will argue that these case-studies are representative of two opposite strategies of urbanism present in sixth-century Asia Minor, both of which reflected local organisation, concerns and also constraints. Aphrodisias and Sagalassos, on the one hand, consciously and actively continued the cityscape and its classical antique functionality. Assos, on the other hand, is representative of another type of urban-like settlement that had been appearing both in Asia Minor and in the rest of the Roman empire already from the fourth century onward, and which would become more prevalent as time progressed.

### Sixth-century Aphrodisias, Sagalassos and Assos

In all three cities, the extent and character of the renovations make it possible to assume the presence of a thoroughgoing strategy. At Aphrodisias, comprehensive interventions datable to the later fifth or the early sixth century are attested in public buildings all over the city centre, including in the bouleterion, the Hadrianic Baths, the North Agora, the Place of Palms, the Tetracylon Street and the Temple-Church.<sup>13</sup> Recent excavations have demonstrated that both in the Place of Palms and in the Tetracylon Street, the main north-south street of Aphrodisias, the scale of the renovation work is astounding.

The Place of Palms, formerly known as the South Agora of Aphrodisias, was a lush urban park just to the south of the North Agora with a length of 212 m, centred on a pool almost 170 m long and provided with plenty of shade by surrounding stoas and palm trees. It was created at some point in the first century and survived into the seventh century. In the later fifth and/or the early sixth century it underwent a complete makeover.<sup>14</sup> Due to the city's rich epigraphic record, the main initiators and additional benefactors of the building works are known. Thus the western stoa of the area was rebuilt by the *clarissimus* Albinus, whose benefaction was commemorated in a series of acclamations eternalised on the stoa's columns and rewarded with a statue.<sup>15</sup> A certain Philippos paid for the creation, or roofing, of part of the south

<sup>12</sup> For activities in streets, see Saradi, *Byzantine City*, 266–267 and the very extensive discussion in Lavan, *Public Space*, 150–262. For a summary on activities on agorai, see Lavan, 'Fora and agorai', 206–234; Lavan, *Public Space*, 308–332, 358–363.

<sup>13</sup> Post-earthquake interventions, renovations to and rebuilding of these monuments are all discussed in Wilson, 'Earthquakes at Aphrodisias' and 'Aphrodisias in the long sixth century'. In addition, for the bouleterion see Hallett and Quatember, 'Three bouleteria', 355–356; for the Hadrianic Baths, McDavid, 'Renovation of the Hadrianic baths', with suggested changes to chronology in Wilson, 'The Olympian (Hadrianic) baths'; for the North Agora see Ratté and Smith, 'Archaeological research', 720; Wilson *et al.*, 'Excavations in an urban park', 89–90; Place of Palms see Wilson and Russell, *Place of Palms*, chap. 4. For a broader overview of building activity throughout the centuries at Aphrodisias, see Dalgıç and Sokolicek, 'Aphrodisias', 269–279, 270 table 23.1. Many of the dates cited in this last article have been slightly adjusted in the meantime.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson *et al.*, 'Excavations in an urban park'; Wilson and Russell, *Place of Palms*, chap. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ala2004*, 82–83; *I Aph2007*, 4.20–4.21.

stoa, which encompassed a whole series of newly carved Ionic capitals.<sup>16</sup> In addition, parts of the masonry wall supporting the theatre hill were rebuilt, and columns and cornice blocks of the north stoa were repaired. The overarching responsibility for the renovation project appears to have been shared by two officials, the provincial governor, Doulkitios, and Flavius Ampelios, *pater tes poleos*. Doulkitios rebuilt the east gate to the area.<sup>17</sup> Flavius Ampelios is said to have restored ‘wonder and beauty to this place of palms’,<sup>18</sup> which its excavators interpret as confirmation that he paid for a whole set of measures ensuring the further functioning of the pool in the centre and of the larger area.<sup>19</sup> They included the repair and re-setting of the stones that constituted the ring drain surrounding the pool, the filling of the ring drain probably to prevent leakage and, most impressively, the raising of the ground level of the entire park with a fill of soil and rubble about 40 cm thick – a measure that also dealt with large quantities of earthquake debris in a convenient manner. The refurbishment project was concluded with the replanting of palm trees, albeit probably in smaller numbers than in the previous phase.

Renovation activities in the Tetrapylon Street were, as far as we can tell, not commemorated with new building inscriptions, but were equally substantial. The Tetrapylon Street was the main street of Aphrodisias, running in a north–south direction and linking some of the city’s main monuments and public spaces.<sup>20</sup> As in the Place of Palms, the level of the street’s pavement was raised considerably in the stretch in between the tetrapylon and the theatre. Whereas the level of the pavement directly in front of the tetrapylon apparently remained constant, some 75 m further south the new pavement was relaid about 1.10 m above the previous level. In front of the propylon to the Sebasteion, the level change was already as high as 1.60 m.<sup>21</sup> Considering that all water was supposed to flow through the Place of Palms before continuing its course to the river Morsynus 2 km to the south-west of the site, a rise in the ground level here was bound to necessitate interventions in adjoining areas. In addition, the colonnades alongside the street were constructed only in this period. The west side of the road was apparently still flanked by a row of columns, whereas the lower storey of the east colonnade consisted of a mixture of piers and columns composed of various building elements, topped by brick arcades and carrying a second storey that belonged to a series of luxurious houses at the back. Only in the very heart of the city centre, where the street passed the east gate of the Place of Palms, was the colonnade uniform, composed of Ionic columns of which the capitals and bases were certainly newly carved in late antiquity (Figure 12.1). In this section, the street’s

<sup>16</sup> Inscription testifying to the rebuilding of the south stoa: *Ala2004*, 66; *I Aph2007*, 4.19. The newly carved building decoration is discussed in Kidd, “The Ionic capitals”.

<sup>17</sup> *Ala2004*, 39–40; *I Aph2007*, 4.202.ii–iii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ala2004*, 38; *I Aph2007*, 4.202.i.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson and Russell, *Place of Palms*, chap. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Sokolicek, ‘Excavations’, 60. The results of the street excavation will be published as Jacobs, *Tetrapylon Street*.

<sup>21</sup> As shown by the 2018 and 2019 excavations.



Fig. 12.1: Late antique ionic capital from the Tetrapylon Street (© Aphrodisias Excavations).

continued importance as a ceremonial setting after the renovations was made clear in a series of acclamations applied (and reapplied) to plaster on columns, one of which praises the Christian God, another the emperor, ‘lord of the inhabited world’.<sup>22</sup>

Excavation of the main drain underneath the new street pavement revealed that the wall sections added on top of the early imperial street drain included a sizeable number of statuary fragments (Figure 12.2). They indicate that the statuary population was being thinned out, a phenomenon to which the later fifth-century earthquake no doubt contributed. However, certainly at Aphrodisias the rich statuary finds retrieved in the site’s excavations demonstrate that enough statues remained in place and new statues were still being added, so that the sixth-century situation could compete with previous centuries. Especially at the Place of Palms, marble statuary was found (in a variety of contexts) in impressive quantities decorating the façade of the park’s east gate and west stoa, as well as the pool edge, into the seventh century.<sup>23</sup>

Both the street and urban park were therefore reinstated with an impressive investment of time and energy. The sixth-century spaces were not identical to their predecessors, but they integrated as much of their predecessors as possible, both physically and in essence. The desire to reinstate urban life as it was before the city was devastated is undeniable.

A similar sentiment can be clearly recognised in the rebuilding operations at Sagalassos. Renovation and rebuilding was initiated all over the city centre.<sup>24</sup> In addition to several churches, the city’s bath complex, monumental fountains and street network were restored in a form that was reminiscent of that of previous centuries. Deserted stacks of building materials ready for re-use suggest that renovation of the Odeion was started, but never finished (Figure 12.3).<sup>25</sup> The east and west stoas of both of the city’s agoras were re-erected upon the old stylobates using a variety of columns, bases and capitals.<sup>26</sup> The colonnades of the main east–west colonnaded street were repaired and a new pavement was installed.<sup>27</sup> The most extensive building project

<sup>22</sup> Tr. Angelos Chaniotis.

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of the statuary still present in the Place of Palms, see Thomas, ‘Sculptural life’. Smith, ‘Three statues’, 293–300 for a preliminary and partial report on statuary found in the Tetrapylon Street. An exact composition of what statues were present where is difficult because of more numerous and intense post-antique interventions in the area of the street.

<sup>24</sup> These interventions are discussed in more detail in Jacobs, ‘Clinging to tradition’.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, 608.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, 178–179.

<sup>27</sup> Martens, ‘Late antique urban streets’, 348.



Fig. 12.2: Sixth-century street drain constructed with mortared rubble and statuary fragments (© Aphrodisias Excavations).

taking place in the second quarter of the sixth century was the renovation of the 10 m wide north–south colonnaded street, the main traffic axis.<sup>28</sup> Its colonnades were reconstructed with a mixture of re-used Corinthian columns placed on a variety of bases as well as brick-and-tuff pillars, all carrying arches.

As at Aphrodisias, statuary remained an integral part of all major renovation projects. However, since Sagalassos did not have a local statuary workshop and its supply had dried out already at some point in the fourth century, older statuary and reliefs were relocated from other sites in the city to be integrated into the more eye-catching sixth-century renovation works. The street section underneath the Lower Agora became the location of an entirely new statuary display comprising at least eight small-scale statues, mounted on top of statue brackets integrated into the brick-and-tuff piers alongside the street. They included an Apollo, a Hygieia or Tyche, a Hygieia with Hypnos, a third Hygieia, an Aphrodite, the central figure from a group of The Three Graces and two smaller statuettes that have disappeared in subsequent centuries.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the town's monumental fountains on the north sides

<sup>28</sup> The sixth-century renovation phase of the street is discussed in detail in Jacobs and Waelkens, 'Five centuries'.

<sup>29</sup> This statuary collection, its origins, reconstruction and meaning is discussed in detail in Jacobs and Stirling, 'Re-using the gods'.



Fig. 12.3: Abandoned stack of column drums discovered in the Odeion at Sagalassos (© Sagalassos Archaeological Research Project).

of both the Upper and the Lower Agora were redecorated with new assemblages of statues: a combination of statues surviving from the original display and newcomers from elsewhere, most of which were retrieved in the excavations.<sup>30</sup>

By contrast, the building works taking place in Assos were of an entirely different nature. Assos is mainly known among archaeologists as a model Archaic to Hellenistic city. Its Archaic Doric temple of Athena on top of the acropolis is a mainstay of books of Greek architecture. Its walls feature in overviews of classical-Hellenistic fortification works;<sup>31</sup> the agora

is a textbook example of Pergamene planning whereby the north and south stoas direct attention to buildings on the short side of the square, in this case a temple and bouleuterion. Apparently, not much changed in the city centre during the first centuries of Roman rule and the Hellenistic framework was largely maintained.<sup>32</sup> Yet on top of the Hellenistic-Roman city, at least on top of its south-western and southern quarters, lies a late fifth-/early sixth-century settlement, which was surveyed and examined only very recently.<sup>33</sup>

This settlement, which developed after the earthquake of the late fifth century, was entirely different in form and organisation from what had been there before. None of the old public buildings retained their function in the new early Byzantine configuration, even though remnants of their architecture remained present. Changes are most conspicuous when we review briefly what happened to the old agora area. In contrast to the situations encountered at Aphrodisias and Sagalassos, the agora of Assos practically ceased to exist after the rebuilding. Even though the American excavations of the late nineteenth century cleared the centre of the square more than a hundred years ago, their plans still show some of the structures that took over the area. They are only indicated as 'late' and not interpreted.<sup>34</sup> The more recent survey of the town has however clarified that the north stoa and the area to the north of it were redeveloped, with new streets leading through and up from the area of the agora.<sup>35</sup> Considering that the temple to the west of the agora was also redeveloped

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the sixth-century building operations comprising re-used statuary, see Jacobs, 'Pagan-mythological statuary'.

<sup>31</sup> For the fortifications, see Türk, 'Befestigungsanlagen von Assos'.

<sup>32</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 224.

<sup>33</sup> Mohr and Rheidt, 'Der Assosurvey 2010–2012', 137–151.

<sup>34</sup> Clarke *et al.*, *Investigations at Assos*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'Assos', 220; 'The glorious sixth century', 228.

as a residence, complete with reception or dining hall,<sup>36</sup> it is logical to assume that the agora was converted into a domestic city quarter. The bouleterion on the short east end of the agora apparently was restored, but only to be reused as storage space, as indicated by finds of animal bones and water jugs.<sup>37</sup>

The road network of the early Byzantine city was mapped by connecting the locations of still-standing doorways of houses. The streets that arose on top of the rubble frequently departed from the old street network, with houses being built with quite diverse orientations on top of the old pavement slabs and passages, and became narrower than their precursors (Figure 12.4).<sup>38</sup> A main street cannot be recognised and street colonnades could have no reason to exist in such an organisation. The Assos archaeological team has suggested that the debris on top of the old street network was so substantial that the streets were cut off at several points, having been too damaged to be used further without substantial interventions.<sup>39</sup> Yet, in theory, clearance of the streets and evacuation of the debris should have been possible. Or, if we compare the situation encountered at Aphrodisias, a continuation of the previous organisation and planning at a higher level should have been an option as well. Although a more extensive inquiry is certainly needed, it does seem that the contemporary local government of Assos decided against a return to the old situation and instead opted to take a new direction that was better adapted to the local topography.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in contrast to both Aphrodisias and Sagalassos, there are no indications that statuary was in any way used in the early Byzantine phase of Assos. A small number of statue bases were found during excavation, including one for a statue of Constantius at the entrance to the agora and bases for Germanicus and his family in the bouleterion.<sup>41</sup> Whereas the first may at least in theory still have carried an imperial statue in the sixth-century phase (if it survived the seismic event), the other two are more likely to have been used as building material in the sixth-century rebuilding of the structure.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore quite clear that statuary did not play the same active part in sixth-century Assos as it did at Sagalassos and certainly not as at Aphrodisias.

## Discussion

The late fifth- and sixth-century officials and populations of Aphrodisias and Sagalassos obviously went through a lot of trouble in recreating prestigious urban spaces, using

<sup>36</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 227–228.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke *et al.*, *Investigations at Assos*, 21; Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'Nothing to remember?', 23–24 for the rebuilding; Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 228.

<sup>38</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 231–234. This course of action was also followed in later centuries in, for instance, Hierapolis, where such houses were found to the west of the Frontinus Gate. This makes sense if the buildings behind the street are too damaged to be repaired.

<sup>39</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 231.

<sup>40</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 230.

<sup>41</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 224 with further references.

<sup>42</sup> Özhan, 'Two inscribed pedestals'.



Fig. 12.4: Roman street built over in the late fifth, early sixth century at Assos (© Assos excavations archive).

inventive solutions when necessary and including statuary to finish the total picture. At both sites, the inhabitants of the late antique cities were treading in the footsteps of their Roman predecessors by again investing in symbols of city status that were inherited from preceding centuries. Moreover, both Sagalassos and Aphrodisias rebuilt not just one but both of their urban open areas, even though other cities may have kept only one functional.<sup>43</sup> The continuity of the Place of Palms at Aphrodisias is especially remarkable in this respect. This urban park was no doubt very pleasant and served, according to the inscription dedicated to Doulkitios, as the location where the Maiouma festival was celebrated in Aphrodisias.<sup>44</sup> Yet it could be argued that a grand park centred on a vast pool and lined with marble columns was not essential for the daily running of the city. The Place of Palms was reinstated as an enjoyable assembly place for citizens of the city to sit and relax on the many benches along the porticoes or at the edge of the water as their parents and grandparents had done before them.

<sup>43</sup> Lavan, 'Fora and agorai', 235–236. In his recent monograph, Lavan no longer thinks this to be the case for Asia Minor, see Lavan, *Public Space*, 357. For further examples of agorae created, renovated or repaired in the sixth century, see Lavan, *Public Space*, 341–346. Note that Lavan, 'Fora and agorai' still assumes a decline in importance for the sixth century.

<sup>44</sup> *Ala2004*, 40; *I Aph 2007*, 4.202.iii. For the celebration of the Maiouma, which involved nocturnal festivities and aquatic shows, see Wilson, 'Water, nymphs', 132–135; Wilson and Russell, *Place of Palms*, chap. 4.

Like the renovation and revitalisation of the Place of Palms, the maintenance of the Tetrasyon Street was, in the strict sense, unnecessary. When the city of Aphrodisias was surrounded by a city wall around 360, the circuit blocked the continuation of the Tetrasyon Street, thereby turning it from a major connection to the hinterland into an inward facing boulevard.<sup>45</sup> The lack of wheel ruts confirms that the late antique street was never used by wheeled traffic.<sup>46</sup> Although with a road surface of just under 8 m wide it was much more modest than some magnificent colonnaded streets in the Roman East, it was still significantly larger than the standard 3 to 4 m wide street, and very much in line with other colonnaded streets in western Asia Minor.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, at Sagalassos, although the location of the main access route to the centre was solidly fixed by the local topography, there was no need to rebuild it on such a monumental scale, including colonnades. The colonnaded street below the Lower Agora was again never used by wheeled traffic. There were no traces of wheel ruts and, moreover, the road incorporated staircases at multiple points.<sup>48</sup> Considering that both the Tetrasyon Street at Aphrodisias and the main colonnaded street at Sagalassos were only used by pedestrians and pack animals, the borders of their pavements could have easily been used for the building of shops and workshops profiting from the many passers-by, or even houses, as happened in the Roman streets of Assos in early Byzantine times.

The contrast between the reconstruction operations in the late fifth and early sixth century makes one wonder what the influencing factors in the decision-making process were. Local topography may have been highly influential. Assos is built on the slopes of a hill, whereas Aphrodisias is located in a valley with a relatively level floor, which makes large open spaces and routes easier to establish and maintain, albeit on a higher level. Alternatively, it may very well be that the extent of the earthquake damage and hence the quantities of debris were much more substantial at Assos. Whereas the debris could be either cleared as happened at Sagalassos or reused to re-establish old patterns at a higher level as was the case at Aphrodisias, the amounts of debris may simply have been too much at Assos. We may also wonder how decisive the exact composition of the local government was for the form of the rebuilding. In a provincial city like Aphrodisias, where there was a larger concentration of wealth, officials and magistrates, and thus a higher number of processions and other official and highly ceremonial events, a greater attachment to traditional authoritative architecture may indeed be easier to explain. At Sagalassos, where at least the spirit, if not quite the extent, of the renovations and interventions was

<sup>45</sup> Sokolicek, 'Excavations', 60; Dalgıç and Sokolicek, 'Aphrodisias', 271.

<sup>46</sup> Wheel ruts have not been identified anywhere in Aphrodisias, which suggest that the city government had strict rules regulating wheeled traffic within the city centre.

<sup>47</sup> For standard street widths in the Roman period, see Adam, *Roman Building*, 280. Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, 127–129 and table 2.5 for comparisons with other main streets in cities of western Asia Minor; Lavan, *Public Space*, 41–43 for comparisons with late antique streets across the Empire.

<sup>48</sup> Overall, no continuous wheel ruts have been discovered in the pavements at Sagalassos so far. Although topographical factors obviously hindered wheeled traffic, it seems highly unlikely that the entire city was off-limits for carts. For a wider discussion, see Martens, 'Late antique urban streets', 340–341.

comparable to Aphrodisias, the enduring presence of a traditional government can be hypothesised, even if it is no longer explicitly mentioned in inscriptions or literary sources. The traditional bouleuterion had already gone out of use before the end of the fourth century, but civic meetings could have continued inside the local odeion, which was being used until the end of the fifth century and for which renovations had been planned. Alternatively, a mosaic inscription in the sixth-century floor of a former frigidarium in the Imperial Baths of Sagalassos mentions that it was a *demosion* or public meeting place. Before the earthquake, a wooden, amphitheatre-shaped auditorium had even been present in the eastern arm of the same large hall.<sup>49</sup> Large halls inside bath complexes were also used as venues for civic meetings in the sixth century elsewhere, as is for instance suggested by the inscriptions referring to the *gerousia* and *boule* found on the opus sectile floor of the so-called Marble Court of the baths of Sardis.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the only authority that can be pinpointed with certainty in the sixth century at Assos is the local bishop who took up residence in a new complex established on a terrace to the south-west of the old agora.<sup>51</sup> Finally, in addition to the presence or absence of traditional elements of government in a settlement, the direction of renovations may have been impacted by very specific and personal factors, whereby certain individuals wielding power at the moment decisions were being made drove renovation in one direction or the other.

On its own terms, nothing about the new organisation of Assos is particularly exceptional for late antiquity. Extensions of classical cities such as Sardis, Skythopolis or Jerusalem no longer incorporated regularly planned quarters with monumental streets and squares.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the focus of modern research on a few, exceptional, newly constructed sites such as Justiniana Prima, Dara-Anastasiopolis, Resafa-Sergiopolis and Zenobia, which indeed had colonnaded streets and open squares, hides the fact that the vast majority of newly founded settlements rarely had regular street plans, main streets with colonnades, monumental urban squares or other large open spaces.<sup>53</sup> As early as the Tetrarchic period, the settlement of Döşeme Boğazi (Pamphylia) had an irregular layout, no recognisable main street and no open square. The settlement has been tentatively identified with the town of Maximianopolis, built in honour of the emperor Maximian, but imperial interest was limited to the site's role in the provisioning of the army.<sup>54</sup> Hence, the only public architecture is an enormous horreum. By the sixth century, such settlements were appearing everywhere in the eastern Mediterranean. The sixth-century site of Mokisos, modern-day Viranşehir in Cappadocia, with more than a thousand houses spread out over about 50 hectares,

<sup>49</sup> Waelkens, *Sagalassos - Jaarboek 2013*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Yegül, *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis*, 49, 51. Yegül, *Baths*, 313, 329 for similar functions in baths elsewhere.

<sup>51</sup> Böhlendorf-Arslan, 'The glorious sixth century', 228–230.

<sup>52</sup> Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, 140.

<sup>53</sup> Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 182–183, 209–216 with examples from the Balkans; Rizos, 'New cities', for a broad overview and further references.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, 'Archaeology in Asia Minor'; Rizos, 'New cities', 36.

is impressively large.<sup>55</sup> Yet, the only non-residential buildings recognisable today are a small fort and several churches, including a centrally located cathedral church and associated episcopal residence that housed the archbishop of the church province *Cappadocia III*. Even Procopius' description of this 'metropolis' only features 'churches, hospices, and public baths that are the mark of a prosperous city', but no characteristically classical elements.<sup>56</sup> The form of the settlement of Assos in the sixth century is therefore remarkable foremost because it diverged so dramatically from what had been there before. In this particular case, the page was scraped clean and it was decided to write down a new text, (quasi-)unconnected to the one that had been there before.

In summary, impressive quantities of labour and equipment could still be rallied for civic projects into the early sixth century. Yet, instead of one unified idea of what should constitute an urban community, two diverging strategies can be recognised. One is aimed at establishing a state of affairs that is a direct descendent of the classical past. The other takes a new direction, abandoning older buildings and spaces altogether. The second strategy, represented in this article by the site of Assos, comes closest to creating an urban palimpsest, with the underlying layer of buildings and streets largely erased and no longer relevant, and its new layer only occasionally and only out of practical considerations engaging with what had been there before. However, it should be noted that this erasure was forced upon the population of Assos by a natural disaster, without which such drastic changes would probably not have come about. The first strategy does not result in a palimpsest. Instead, both main streets and public squares, the most visible parts of the cityscape, were recreated. This may have been partially the result of less extensive damage; scraping the page clean would have been much more labour-intensive than reviving faded but still readable text passages. However, in both Sagalassos and Aphrodisias the nature and the extent of the operations suggests they were fuelled by a genuine desire to create a urban stage that could be put to use in much the same way as it had been in preceding centuries.

The rebuilding of both these cities in the late fifth and early sixth century thus closely adhered to planning principles and architectural forms of the classical age, even though the materials and execution had changed somewhat and the late antique initiators and builders may not have had the funds to carry out reconstruction everywhere. There were certainly modifications compared to previous centuries: building materials were more varied and often recut from older elements, the execution of individual building elements was cruder than before, new elements were integrated next to older ones taken from elsewhere, and the composition of columnar rows was nowhere near as uniform as it had been under the High Empire. But how important is all of this in the face of the continuity of the *idea* of the classical city? Do we focus on piers being added in between marble columns, or on the continuity of shaded walkways? Does it matter that the details of a sixth-century capital were

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed description of the site, see Berger, 'Viranşehir' and 'Mokisos'.

<sup>56</sup> Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 5.4.15–18.

cruder than those of a second-century one or that its ornament was not identical to that of its neighbour? Or is it more important that we can still immediately identify them as Ionic?

The different building materials and skills of execution of later architectural creations have been noticed by modern researchers – often trained as classical archaeologists – and labelled as bad quality copies of older prototypes.<sup>57</sup> However, it is highly doubtful that contemporaries judged their surroundings in such a comparative way. Through a re-establishment of the overall form and function of what was there before, they were enabled to resume all their activities, from spontaneous gatherings to organised political events, in the same location and in the same way as before. If we return to the comparison with a manuscript one last time: the script may have changed, the ink may have been different and individual words may even have been replaced, but the message was carefully preserved.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

Marcellinus Comes, *Annales*, tr. and comm. (with a reproduction of Mommsen's 1894 edition of the text), B. Croke, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus: A Translation and Commentary* (Sydney, 1995).  
Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, ed. and tr. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey, *Procopius: On Buildings. General Index* (Cambridge, 1940).

### Secondary

Adam, J.-P., *Roman Building. Materials and Techniques* (London and New York, 1994).  
Ala2004 = Roueché, C., *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions*, revised second edition (2004) [available at: [www.insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004](http://www.insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004)] (accessed 28 September 2021).  
Ambraseys, N. N., *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity up to 1900* (Cambridge, 2009).  
Arslan, N., B. Böhlendorf-Arslan, E.-M. Mohr and K. Rheidt, 'Der Hafen von Assos' in M. Seifert and L. Zimmer (eds.), *Gateways 3. North meets East. Aktuelle Forschungen zu antiken Häfen. Ein Workshop veranstaltet von Julia Daum und Martina Seifert an der Universität Hamburg vom siebten bis achten Februar 2014* (Hamburg, 2018), pp. 29–60.  
Belke, K. and N. Mersich, *Phrygien und Pisidien, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 7* (Vienna, 1990).  
Berger, A., 'Viranşehir (Mokisos), eine frühbyzantinische Stadt in Kappadokien', *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 48 (1998): 349–429.  
Berger, A., 'Mokisos- eine Kappadokische fluchtsiedlung des sechsten Jahrhunderts' in E. Rizos (ed.) *New Cities in Late Antiquity. Documents and Archaeology, Bibliothèque de L'Antiquité Tardive* 35, (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 177–188.  
Böhlendorf-Arslan, B., 'Assos' in P. Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia: from the End of late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks* (New York, 2017), pp. 217–225.  
Böhlendorf-Arslan, B., 'Nothing to remember? Redesigning the ancient city of Assos in the Byzantine era' in E. Mortensen and B. Poulsen (eds.), *Cityscape and Monuments of Western Asia Minor. Memories and Identities* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 21–28.

<sup>57</sup> The usage of terms like 'copy', 'quotation', 'imitation' and 'decline' is increasingly coming under attack as attempts to imposing modern value judgements on historic material and ancient aesthetic perceptions. See Böhme *et al.*, *Transformation*.

- Böhlendorf-Arslan, B., 'The glorious sixth century in Assos. The unknown prosperity of a provincial city in western Asia Minor' in I. Jacobs and H. Elton (eds.), *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century: Current Research and Future Directions* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2019), pp. 223–245.
- Böhme, H., L. Bergemann, M. Dönike, A. Schirrmeister, G. Toepfer, M. Walter and J. Weitbrecht (eds.) *Transformation: Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels* (München, 2011).
- Clarke, J. T., F. H. Bacon and R. Koldewey, *Investigations at Assos* (London, Cambridge and Leipzig, 1902).
- Ćurčić, S., *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent* (New Haven and London, 2010).
- Dalgıç, Ö. and A. Sokolicek, 'Aphrodisias' in P. Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia. From the End of Late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks* (New York, 2017), pp. 269–279.
- Darrrouzès, J., (ed.), *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris, 1981).
- Hallett, C. H. and U. Quatember, 'Three bouleuteria from Roman and late antique Aphrodisias' in M. Aurenhammer (ed.), *Sculpture in Roman Asia: Proceedings of the International Conference at Selçuk 2013. Sonderschriften des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 56 (Vienna, 2018), pp. 353–364.
- Honigmann, E., 'The original list of the members of the Council of Nicaea, the Robber Synod and the Council of Chalcedon', *Byzantion* 16 (1942–3): 20–80.
- Iaph2007 = Reynolds, J., C. Roueché and G. Bodard, *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* (2007) [available at: [www.insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007](http://www.insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007)] (accessed 28 September 2021).
- Jacobs, I., *Aesthetic Maintenance of Civic Space. The 'Classical' City from the 4th to the 7th c. AD. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 193 (Leuven and Paris, 2013).
- Jacobs, I., (2019) 'Pagan-mythological statuary in sixth-century Asia Minor' in I. Jacobs and H. Elton (eds.), *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century. Current Research and Future Perspectives* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2019), pp. 29–43.
- Jacobs, I., 'Clinging to tradition. Urban and monumental continuity in sixth-century Asia Minor' in B. Böhlendorf-Arslan (ed.), *Assos and Beyond. Changes in Cityscape and Urban Life in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantine Times. Proceedings of the International Symposium held in Mainz, 18.–20.11.2015* (Mainz, forthcoming).
- Jacobs, I. and H. Elton (eds.), *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century. Current Research and Future Perspectives* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2019).
- Jacobs, I. and L. Stirling, 'Re-using the gods. A 6th-c. statuary display at Sagalassos and a re-evaluation of pagan-mythological statuary in early Byzantine civic space', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 29 (2016): 101–125.
- Jacobs, I. and M. Waelkens, 'Five centuries of glory. The colonnaded street of Sagalassos in the first and the sixth century AD', *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 63 (2014 [2013]): 219–266.
- Kidd, A., 'The Ionic capitals from the south stoa of Aphrodisias' urban park: a case study of urban design in late antiquity', *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 68 (2018): 209–244.
- Kristensen, T. M., "And Christ-loving Antioch became desolate": Roman sculpture, earthquakes, and late antique urban survival' in T. M. Kristensen and L. M. Stirling (eds.), *The Afterlife of Classical Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices* (Ann Arbor, 2016), pp. 68–89.
- Laurent, V., *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantine V.1: L'église de Constantinople* (Paris, 1963).
- Lavan, L., 'Fora and agorai in Mediterranean cities during the 4th and 5th c. AD' in W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge and C. Machado (eds.), *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity, Late Antique Archaeology* 3 (Leiden and Boston, 2006): 195–249.
- Lavan, L., *Public Space in the Late Antique City. Volume 1: Streets, Processions, Fora, Agorae, Macella, Shops, Late antique archaeology (supplementary series)* 5.1 (Leiden and Boston, 2020).
- Leyerle, B., *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley, 2001).
- Martens, F., 'Late antique urban streets at Sagalassos' in L. Lavan, E. Zanini and A. Sarantis (eds.), *Technology in Transition A.D. 300–650, Late Antique Archaeology* 4 (Leiden, 2007), pp. 321–365.

- McDavid, A., 'Renovation of the Hadrianic baths in late antiquity' in R. R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5, Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement 103* (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 209–223.
- Mitchell, S., 'Archaeology in Asia Minor (1990–8)', *Archaeological Reports* 45 (1998–9): 125–192.
- Mohr, E.-M. and K. Rheidt, 'Der Assosurvey 2010–2012. Neue Forschungen zu Stadtstruktur und Entwicklung von den Anfängen bis in die römische Zeit' in N. Arslan, E.-M. Mohr and K. Rheidt (eds.), *Assos. Neue Forschungsergebnisse zur Baugeschichte und Archäologie der südlichen Troas, Asia Minor Studien* 78 (Münster, 2016), pp. 129–157.
- Nicholson, O., *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2018).
- Niewöhner, P., 'Urbanism' in P. Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia: from the End of late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks* (New York, 2017), pp. 39–59.
- Özhan, T., 'Two inscribed pedestals from Assos', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 44 (2011), pp. 170–172.
- Puk, A., *Das römische Spielewesen in der Spätantike* (Berlin and Boston, 2014).
- Ratté, C. and R. R. R. Smith, 'Archaeological research at Aphrodisias in Caria, 2002–2005', *American Journal of Archaeology* 112 (2008): 713–751.
- Rizos, E., 'New cities and new urban ideals, AD 250–350' in E. Rizos (ed.) *New Cities in Late Antiquity. Documents and Archaeology, Bibliothèque de L'Antiquité Tardive* 35, (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 19–38.
- Rouché, C., 'Rome, Asia and Aphrodisias in the third century', *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 103–120.
- Saradi, H., *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century: Literary Images and Historical Reality* (Athens, 2006).
- Similox-Tohon, D., et al., 'The identification of an active fault by a multidisciplinary study at the archaeological site of Sagalassos (SW Turkey)', *Tectonophysics* 420 (2006): 371–387.
- Sintubin, M., P. Muchez, D. Similox-Tohon, G. Verhaert, E. Paulissen and M. Waelkens 'Seismic catastrophes at the ancient city of Sagalassos (SW Turkey) and their implications for seismotectonics in the Burdur-Isparta area', *Geological Journal* 38 (2003): 359–374.
- Smith, R. R. R., 'Three statues and a portrait head: four new finds of public statuary' in R. R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5, Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement 103* (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 293–302.
- Sokolicek, A., 'Excavations in the Tetracylon street, 2012–14' in R. R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5, Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement 103* (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 59–75.
- Thomas, J., 'The sculptural life of the place of palms, first to seventh centuries', in A. I. Wilson and B. Russell (eds.), *The Place of Palms: An Urban Park at Aphrodisias* (Wiesbaden, forthcoming).
- Türk, H., 'Bemerkungen zu den Befestigungsanlagen von Assos' in N. Arslan, E.-M. Mohr and K. Rheidt (eds.), *Assos. Neue Forschungsergebnisse zur Baugeschichte und Archäologie der südlichen Troas, Asia Minor Studien* 78 (Münster, 2016), pp. 1–12.
- Waelkens, M., *Sagalassos - Jaarboek 2011–2012. Twee jaren van succes. De onderzoeks- en opgravingscampagnes in 2011 en 2012* (Leuven, 2012).
- Waelkens, M., *Sagalassos - Jaarboek 2013. Vijfentwintig Jaar Graven. De onderzoeks- en opgravingscampagne van 2013* (Leuven, 2013).
- Wilson, A. I., 'The Olympian (Hadrianic) Baths: Layout, operation, and financing' in R. R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5, Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement 103* (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 168–194.
- Wilson, A. I., 'Water, nymphs, and a palm grove: monumental water display at Aphrodisias' in R. R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5, Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement 103* (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 100–135.
- Wilson, A. I., 'Aphrodisias in the long sixth century' in I. Jacobs and H. Elton (eds.), *Asia Minor in the Long Sixth Century: Current Research and Future Directions* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2019), pp. 197–221.

- Wilson, A. I., 'Earthquakes at Aphrodisias' in C. Draycott, R. Raja, K. Welch, and W. T. Wootton (eds.), *Visual Histories of the Classical World: Essays in Honour of R. R. Smith*, *Studies in Classical Archaeology* 4. (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 469–488.
- Wilson, A. I. and B. Russell (eds.) *The Place of Palms: An Urban Park at Aphrodisias* (Wiesbaden, forthcoming).
- Wilson, A. I., B. Russell and A. Ward, 'Excavations in an urban park ("South Agora"), 2012' in R. R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 5*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplement* 103 (Portsmouth, 2016), pp. 77–90.
- Yegül, F. K., *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis. Archaeological Exploration of Sardis. Reports* 3 (Cambridge, 1986).
- Yegül, F. K., *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1992).