

# EARLY BYZANTINE CYPRUS: A VIEW FROM THE SEA

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## ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship on early Byzantine Cyprus has focused on survey and excavation evidence for the dense settlement and economic prosperity that characterized the island during the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. This flourish, due in no small part to the island's well-developed maritime trade within the eastern Mediterranean, is visible not only in land-based research, but also in three complementary bodies of evidence from the underwater archaeological record.

First, the ceramic finds at dangerous reefs and promontories allow insight into the relative scale of trade during this period of prosperity and the individual maritime connections that formed the island's larger economic network. Second, a total of eight verifiable early Byzantine shipwrecks off Cyprus elucidate the many small-scale, individual merchants whose local and regional routes formed the heart of this network. Finally, a growing corpus of evidence for simple, closely-spaced anchorages—often located along stretches of coastline *not* punctuated by advantageous, naturally-sheltered coves—underscores the extent to which rural communities were linked by the sea to the dozen or so larger urban ports that served as redistributive centers during the early Byzantine period.

For maritime economic patterns in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century in southwest Turkey, the Yassıada shipwreck excavation provides the most detailed comparative evidence to date for the Cypriot material. Additionally, the larger corpus of data amassed by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology over three decades of shipwreck survey in the region may allow us to extrapolate from this narrower picture toward a model of a flourishing maritime environment that incorporates significant regional trends along greater stretches of the eastern Mediterranean coastline during this crucial period of transition.