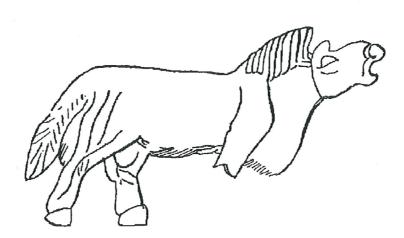


# ARCHAEOZOOLOGY OF THE NEAR EAST IV B

Proceedings of the fourth international symposium on the archaeozoology of southwestern Asia and adjacent areas

edited by

M. Mashkour, A.M. Choyke, H. Buitenhuis and F. Poplin



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# FISH AS INDICATORS OF TRADE RELATIONSHIPS IN ROMAN TIMES: THE EXAMPLE OF SAGALASSOS, TURKEY

Wim Van Neer<sup>1</sup>, Ruud Wildekamp<sup>1</sup>, Marc Waelkens<sup>2</sup>, Allan Arndt<sup>3</sup> and Filip Volckaert<sup>3</sup>

#### Abstract

The fish species found in contexts dating from the Augustan to Early Byzantine periods at the site of Sagalassos are all imported. The ichthyofauna comprises Anatolian freshwater species, marine fish as well as species imported from Egypt (and possibly the Syro-Palestinian area). The research results available thus far are summarized and a description is given of the ongoing field work and laboratory analyses carried out in order to further define the trade connections that existed in the past.

#### Résumé

Les espèces piscicoles du site de Sagalassos mises au jour dans des contextes datés de la période augustéenne au début de la période byzantine sont toutes introduites. L'ichtyofaune comprend des espèces anatoliennes d'eau douce, des poissons de mer, ainsi que des individus importés d'Égypte (et peut-être de l'aire syropalestinienne). Les résultats d'analyse disponibles à ce jour sont résumés ci-dessous. De plus, une description de la fouille en cours et les analyses de laboratoire présentées ici permettront de mieux définir les réseaux commerciaux qui existaient alors.

Key Words: Fish, Trade, Anatolia, Egypt, Near East

Mots Clés: Poissons, Commerce, Anatolie, Égypte, Proche-Orient

# Introduction

Former trade connections or other contacts with distant areas can be illustrated by means of animal remains belonging to species that do not occur in the vicinity of an archaeological site. Such exotic species can arrive at a site as living animals imported as a curiosity, a status symbol or as a tribute, as fresh or preserved food items, as a raw product for the production of objects, as a finished object, or as an item with a symbolic, religious or pecuniary value. In the case of food items, the time that the transport can take is dictated by the efficiency of the preservation methods to prevent spoilage. Unlike mollusc shells (see for instance Reese 1991) or raw materials such as antler or ivory, which can arrive at a site as a result of complex and indirect trade or exchange processes, remains of preserved food are therefore good indicators of former trade connections.

In this article, the use of fish remains for the documentation of short and long distance trade is illustrated for the Antique site of Sagalassos. This town, located in the Burdur district of Turkey (Fig. 1), was an important production centre for pottery from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (Poblome 1996; Waelkens and the Sagalassos team 1997). Since the beginning of the excavations in 1991, faunal remains have been systematically studied (e.g. Van Neer and De Cupere 1993; De Cupere *et al.* 1993; De Cupere 1998). The study of trade and exchange patterns is approached in an interdisciplinary way and involves the interpretation of faunal data, combined with the contribution of the study of ceramics and coinage, epigraphic and historical data.

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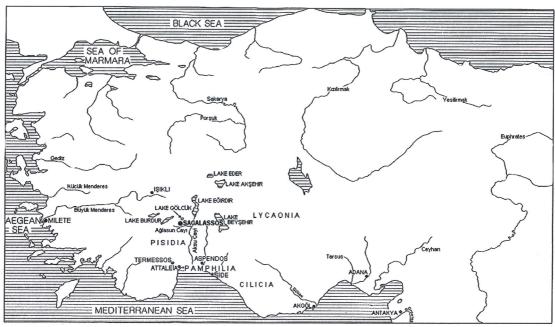


Fig. 1. The location of Sagalassos and the major rivers and lakes mentioned in the text.

# Faunal and archaeological data indicating trade connections with the Mediterranean

The fish remains discovered during the 1990-1994 excavations have already been described (Van Neer *et al.* 1997) and the material from the 1995-1998 seasons is presently being analysed. The species found thus far are from levels dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and comprise Anatolian freshwater fish, Mediterranean species and fish designated as 'exotic freshwater species' (Table 1). Three of the seven marine taxa occur exclusively in the Mediterranean (*Epinephelus* sp, *Auxis rochei*, and *Euthynnus alletteratus*) whereas the four others (*Sardina pilchardus*, *Sarda sarda*, *Scomber japonicus*, and the unidentified sturgeon) live in both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. It is assumed that all this fish was imported from the Mediterranean coast which is closer to the site, at ap-

Table 1. List of fish species identified thus far from Sagalassos

Anatolian freshwater fish	Marine fish
Abramis brama Cyprinus carpio Leuciscus sp. Vimba vimba Silurus glanis Esox lucius	Sardina pilchardus Epinephelus sp. Euthynnus alletteratus Auxis rochei Sarda sarda Scomber japonicus
Anadromous fish	Exotic freshwater fish
Acipenseridae indet.	Clarias sp. Bagrus sp. Tilapiini indet. Lates niloticus

proximately 110 km. Moreover, there were good roads in that direction (Mitchell 1993) and commercial contacts existed primarily with the southern part of the country (Waelkens and the Sagalassos team 1997). The coins found at Sagalassos comprise issues from major contemporary cities in Pisidia (Termessos, Kremna, Selge, and Baris) and Pamphylia (Side, Perge, Attaleia, and Aspendos). Perge was probably used as the major port for export and import by Sagalassos since most foreign city coins found at the site are from that town (Scheers 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1997). This trade with more southerly located towns and settlements is also documented by the export of Sagalassian red slip ware (Waelkens and the Sagalassos team 1997; Poblome 1996, 1999).

### Import of Anatolian freshwater fish

The majority of the fish remains discovered thus far at Sagalassos are from Anatolian freshwater species (Table 1). Cyprinids predominate and within this family the wild carp *Cyprinus carpio* is the best represented species. Low numbers of bream (*Abramis brama*), *Leuciscus* sp. and vimba (*Vimba vimba*) occur as well (Van Neer *et al.* 1997: Table 1). The presence of pike (*Esox lucius*) and European catfish (*Silurus glanis*) are also attested by a few fragments. Interpretation of these finds in terms of the possible fishing grounds from which they may have been derived was hampered by the poor knowledge of the modern distribution of freshwater fish in the area. In 1996, 1997 and 1998, surveys have therefore been carried out of the present-day freshwater fish fauna on and beyond the territory of Sagalassos. The reconstruction of the original ichthyofauna in the different basins was hampered by recent man-made changes to the waterbodies (damming, irrigation projects) and by the introduction of fish (mainly domestic carp and the piscivorous pikeperch *Sander lucioperca*). The fieldwork was carried out by the first two authors in collaboration with the Fisheries Faculty at Eğirdir (S.D.Ü. Eğirdir Su Ürünleri Fakultesi) and involved sampling with electric fishing equipment, seines with a mesh size of 7 millimetres, castnets, driftnets, handnets, fishtraps and rod and line. In addition to the material that was sampled by our own team, the species captured by local fishermen were also noted.

The field work in July-August 1996 concentrated on the territory of Sagalassos and on the Aksu basin (Van Neer et al. in press). The Ağlasun river which runs south of Sagalassos only contained the recently imported rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and is not a suitable habitat for the cyprinids, pike and European catfish encountered at the site. The Aksu river (ancient Kestros) which formed the eastern boundary of Sagalassos' territory in antiquity (Waelkens et al. 1997) runs south towards the Mediterranean coast with which frequent commercial contacts existed. Contrary to expectations, however, only one, non-endemic, Anatolian freshwater species (*Vimba vimba*) may have derived from the Aksu river, whereas all the others must have been imported from areas north, west or east of the site.

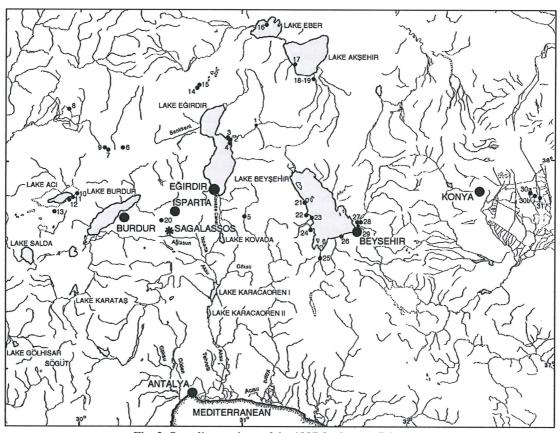


Fig. 2. Sampling stations of the 1997 freshwater fish survey

This was surprising since the major trade routes from and to Sagalassos were directed to the south, towards Perge.

The 1997 fish survey covered the Eğirdir (ancient Limnai) and Beyşehir (ancient Karalis) lakes and their tributaries (Fig. 2). In July-August 1996, the lakes yielded relatively few species, a phenomenon related to the introduction of the pikeperch (*Sander lucioperca*) about 40 years ago. Several species mentioned in the literature were not found in the lakes themselves in 1996. Interviews with local fishermen showed, however, that the rare species may still be found during the spawning season (end April-early May). The 1997 survey of the fish fauna was therefore carried out in early May and showed that small populations of all species previously recorded from Lake Eğirdir still survive in the tributaries. Similar work near Lake Beyşehir showed that all species still survive, except for *Alburnus akili* which was previously a commercially important food fish. During the 1997 survey, it was possible to collect skeletons and formaline specimens of all endemic species (except *Alburnus akili*). Such endemic fish from Lakes Eğirdir or Beyşehir have thus far not been found in the archaeozoological material from Sagalassos, but will be ideal indicators of trade connections if they show up in additional material from the site. The 1997 survey also covered Lakes Akşehir and Eber, as well as a number of basins in the Adana and Antakya region (see below).

The 1998 fieldwork concentrated on the Gediz and Büyük Menderes, but the region north of Sagalassos, especially the Sakarya (ancient Sangarios) basin, still needs to be explored in 1999. The bream (*Abramis brama*) which is rather well represented at Sagalassos has thus far not been found in the surveys and its closest occurrence relative to Sagalassos still needs to be established. The species is mentioned from the Sakarya (Geldiay and Balık 1996), but it is unclear which parts of the basin are inhabited by it.

With the information obtained thus far on the modern distribution of freshwater fishes it can be verified which are the regions from where the fish may have been exported to Sagalassos. Finding the localities most closely situated to Sagalassos in which carp must have lived during antiquity is difficult due to the fact that the domestic form has been introduced during the last two decennia in most natural and artificial lakes. The domestic form has interbred with the wild form and thus far we have found the wild carp in only one locality (number 18 on Figure 2; Karabalut river running into Lake Aksehir). Compilation of the literature, including Turkish papers, and interviews with directors of fishfarms and with local fishermen, enabled a reconstruction of the probable original distribution of wild carp to be made. The closest locality to Sagalassos is Lake Eğirdir. More distant places where they occurred must have been Lakes Akşehir, Eber and Beyşehir. The natural distribution of the species probably also included the Sakarya, the lower reaches of the Büyük Menderes (ancient Maeander) and the Küçük Menderes (ancient Kaystros; Geldiay and Balık 1996). It is unclear if the carp found in small lakes near Işıklı have been introduced or if the wild form was originally living there. The present-day occurrence of carp in Lake Gölcük at 7 km northwest of Sagalassos is believed to be a result of recent introductions as it was not mentioned in the first description of the lake's ichthyofauna (Kosswig and Sözer 1945).

During our surveys we found *Vimba vimba* in the Aksu river, Lake Eğirdir and the Gediz river (ancient Hermos). More distant localities are Eskişehir, along the Porsuk river (ancient Tembris) which is a western affluent of the Sakarya river (Ladiges 1960) and the area adjacent to the Sea of Marmara and the region just south of the Caucasus (Maitland 1978: 164).

The *Leuciscus* finds available thus far are not useful in reconstructing the place of capture since the taxon has various species with a wide distribution. *Leuciscus lepidus* lives in lake Beyşehir and further east, whereas *Leuciscus borysthenicus* was found during the surveys in lakes Karataş and Gölhisar, in the Büyük Menderes basin. It has also been reported from the northeastern part of Turkey (Geldiay and Balık 1996). *Leuciscus cephalus* finally, has been mentioned from Lake Gölhisar, and the lower reaches of the Büyük Menderes, the Gediz River and the Küçük Menderes. With the exception of Lake Gölhisar, the species' presence was confirmed from those waters during our surveys.

Silurus glanis occurs north of Sagalassos in the Sakarya River, to the west it is found in Lake Gölhisar (Kosswig 1963), and large streams such as the Büyük Menderes and the Gediz River. The species could not be obtained during our surveys, but its presence was confirmed by local fishermen.

The pike (*Esox lucius*) occurs in Lakes Akşehir and Eber which are the closest localities that could be found northeast of the site. Further north it occurs in the Sakarya basin. Pike has also been

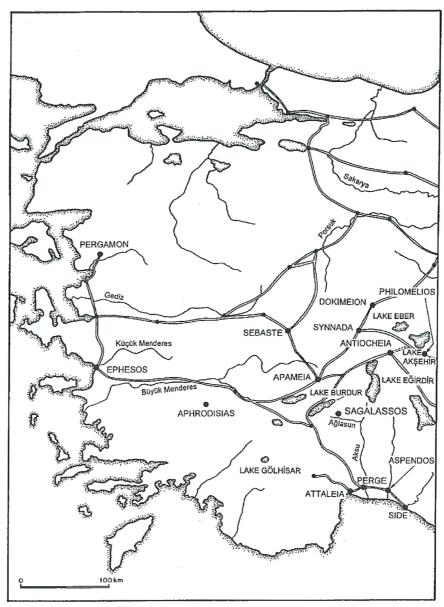


Fig. 3. Major Roman roads in western Anatolia (modified after Mitchell, 1993)

reported from the sources of the Büyük Menderes near Işıklı, from tributaries of the Seyhan River (ancient Saros) and from the northernmost part of Turkey (Kosswig 1969). The Büyük Menderes reports could be confirmed by our finds in Lake Karakuyu.

The data on the modern distribution of the freshwater fish from our survey, combined with data from the literature, hence indicate different origins for the Anatolian fish consumed at Sagalassos. There is only one species, *Vimba vimba*, which may have been derived from the Aksu River although this fish can also be found in Lake Eğirdir, the Sakarya and Gediz Basin. Lake Eğirdir is also the most closely situated waterbody where carp could be found. The importance of fishery in Lake Eğirdir during antiquity is illustrated by a late 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD sepulchral stela set up for a man who had been supervisor of the lake for twenty years. This stela represents among others a fishing scene using a boat and a trident (Pace, 1916-1920). The original distribution of the carp also included Lakes Akşehir and Eber. If transport was organised from one of those two lakes, pike may also have been imported from there. Akşehir (ancient Philomelios) could be reached over Yalvaç (Pisidian Antiocheia)

through a pass crossing the Sultan Dağ mountain range which separates both towns (Figure 3). Sagalassos may have been connected with the Büyük Menderes through the via Sebaste north of Burdur and hence to Apameia (Dinar), in which case this river may have yielded pike and European catfish (Silurus glanis). Near Apameia there was a crucial intersection of two major road systems, one running north-south from Phrygia into Pisidia, the other running east-west from the Meander Valley towards Lycaonia and Cilicia (Mitchell and Waelkens 1998: 4). The Sakarya is most likely the basin from which the bream were imported. This species is lacking in all the aforementioned rivers and lakes. Silurus glanis also inhabits the Sakarya, but is found in addition in Lake Gölhisar near ancient Kibyra (Kosswig 1963), and in large streams such as the Büyük Menderes and the Gediz River. Although still partly speculative, it seems that Lake Eğirdir, Lakes Akşehir and Eber, the Sakarya Basin, and the upper reaches of the Büyük Menderes are the most likely water bodies from where fish were imported to Sagalassos. Archaeological indications for commercial contacts with those areas are supported by finds of Sagalassos red slip ware which was found both to the north and to the west (Poblome 1996: 505, fig. 2). Links with the Sakarya basin are indicated by Sagalassos red slip ware found at Amorion. At the northern tip of Lake Eğirdir this type of ceramic occurs at Antiocheia. Sagalassos red slip ware was found also in the more western part of Anatolia close to the Aegean coast. This indicates that trade along roads following the major east-west running rivers (Büyük Menderes and Gediz) may have been practised. Sagalassos imported marble from central and west Anatolia, i.e. Dokimeion and Aphrodisias (Moens et al. 1997). Roads connected Sagalassos over Apameia (Dinar) with the Büyük Menderes, and from there with Synnada and Dokimeion from where the Sakarya river system in Galatia could be reached. It is obvious from the distances covered that, with the possible exception of fish derived from Lake Eğirdir, fish must have been transported in preserved form to prevent spoilage.

## Import of exotic freshwater fish

The fish remains from the 1991-1994 excavations yielded two taxa that were designated as exotic freshwater species (Van Neer et al. 1997). They comprised several remains of Clarias sp. from Augustan to Early Byzantine contexts as well as a single find of a tilapia (tribe of the Tilapiini). The presence of the latter species has been confirmed by the finds from the 1995-1998 excavations and also additional remains of Clarias sp. have been recovered. Both Clarias and tilapia are basically Nilotic fish that also occur naturally in the Syro-Palestinian area. Tilapia zillii occurs as far north as the Litani basin in Lebanon and also lives in the Jordan basin and the coastal rivers of Palestine. Oreochromis aureus and Sarotherodon galilaeus also occur in the latter two regions, whereas Oreochromis niloticus only lives in the Yarkon river (Trewavas 1983; Krupp 1987). In the Near East, the genus Clarias is represented by Clarias gariepinus, the natural distribution of which is traditionally described as extending as far as the Orontes and Ceyhan (ancient Pyramos) basin in Turkey (Kosswig 1969; Skelton and Teugels, 1992). The available archaeological and epigraphic data point to connections of Sagalassos with both regions and therefore do not contribute to the establishment of the precise origin of the fish specimens found at Sagalassos. Coins from the imperial mints of Alexandreia and Antiocheia are well represented at the site (Scheers 1993a; 1995). Red slip ware lamps and oinophoroi from Sagalassos have been found as far as Pharas in Sudan, Alexandreia in Egypt, and Kapharnaon in Galilaea (Poblome 1996, 1999; Waelkens and the Sagalassos team 1997: Poblome et al. in press). Epigraphic studies have shown that the Sagalassian aristocracy served the Roman army and provincial administration of Syria, Palestina and Egypt almost exclusively during the Imperial period (Devijver 1993; Devijver and Waelkens 1997).

In an attempt to elucidate the origin of the *Clarias* remains, an analysis of the ancient DNA of the bones has been initiated in 1997 by the two last authors. The procedures involved first tissue sampling of modern *Clarias gariepinus* from throughout its natural range across Asia Minor and Africa. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) was isolated and a specific fragment was amplified by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) analysis. Minimum spanning tree (Rohlf 1990) and median network (Bandelt *et al.* 1995) methods were used to construct phylogeographic representations. Both methods consistently grouped North African samples with those of Asia Minor, to the exclusion of other regions of Africa. Most population samples were

characterized by a single predominant mtDNA haplotype. Specimens from four locations along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey (Akgöl, Tarsus, Terliksir Köyü, and Asi Nehri) were identical to the most common Egyptian haplotype. Based on these results, DNA sequence of the mitochondrial control region (850 base pairs) was obtained from all observed haplotypes, as well specimens from all four Turkish sites. Alignment of sequences indicated several variable regions containing point mutations that distinguish Turkish, Syrian, Israeli, Egyptian, and west African haplotypes from each other. Therefore, if DNA can be recovered and amplified from the subfossil material, it should be possible to distinguish the origin of this material. Given the highly degraded nature of ancient DNA, several primer sets were designed to amplify very small fragments (between 100 and 150 nucleotides) containing these informative regions. Attempts at extraction and amplification of DNA from ancient material have started, beginning with the more numerous samples from Apamea, Syria. Abundant, local *Clarias gariepinus* material dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries is available from that site which is located along the Orontes river (Van Neer 1984). Once the protocol has been optimized, the material from Sagalassos will be analysed using the same procedures.

The freshwater surveys yielded additional data on the distribution of *Clarias gariepinus* which blurr the simple picture of import from either the Nile or the Syro-Palestinian area. According to the literature, the distribution of *Clarias gariepinus* in Turkey was restricted to the Asi Nehri (Orontes) and the Ceyhan River, but the fieldwork demonstrated that the species also occurs further west. Its presence was attested in the Seyhan river, the Tarsus river and near Akgöl, which is part of the Göksu Basin (Fig. 1). In the 1980's the species had already been reported from the Tehnelli river (Balık, 1988) which is a branch of the Aksu River and our surveys showed it also to be present in the downstream part of the Aksu River near Güloluk. Moreover, a new find in 1998 shows that Clarias gariepinus is presently also living in the Acisu River (Fig. 2). The presence of this catfish so far west from its 'normal distribution' was initially considered as a possible result of human introduction (Balık 1988 and pers. comm. 1998), although no documents seem to exist that such operations were undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture or the DSİ (Devlet Su İşleri; Turkish Water Management Organisation). The latter agency, responsible for irrigation and drainage projects, regularly stocks ponds and lakes with carp. In the areas where the Clarias were found in the Acisu and lower Aksu, local informants stressed that they had known the species since their childhood, long before fish introductions were practised, whereas leading Turkish ichthyologists consider these catfish to be recent introductions. The new finds between the Seyhan and the Aksu river might indicate that the catfish species was able to colonise several intermediate coastal streams by "hopping" from one basin to the other. As the westernmost localities are situated close to the southward trade routes of Sagalassos, it is vital that this question is solved. A possible way to investigate this problem would be an additional genetic analysis of the present populations in the different river basins. Microsatellite analysis may document roughly how long these populations have been living in the Aksu, Tehnelli and Acisu Rivers. If the populations have been recently introduced, their genetic make-up will not differ significantly from the source populations in the east. A drawback is, however, that modern tissue samples for such a study should comprise at least 30-50 individuals for each basin. In the eastern part of Turkey, Clarias gariepinus is a commercially important species making it relatively easy to obtain tissue samples for DNA analysis. This is not the case further west where this catfish is not regularly captured and where, in addition, no professional fishermen are working in freshwater areas. Tissue samples from these localities have been taken already but are still too small in number to start microsatellite analysis. Further efforts will be made to increase sample size. In addition, more fieldwork should be carried out in order to verify the presence of *Clarias gariepinus* in the numerous rivers emptying into the Mediterranean between the Tarsus and Acisu Rivers. Finds of catfish in these intermediate basins may give further support to the hypothesis of natural colonisation.

Since the moment that the DNA analyses have been set up for *Clarias*, two additional exotic taxa have been found in the ichthyofauna from the 1995-1998 excavations. These new taxa give clear indications for their provenance. Bones from the Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) and a bagrid catfish (*Bagrus* sp.) were found and indicate import from Egypt. It is still unclear, however, if the *Clarias* and tilapia have also been imported from there. An import from the Syro-Palestinian area cannot yet be excluded and, in the case of *Clarias*, the possibility cannot be ruled out for the moment that it was obtained from the Aksu or one of the neighbouring rivers.

#### **Conclusions**

The analysis of the fish remains from Sagalassos indicates a multiple geographic origin. Among the marine fish, species occur that live exclusively in the Mediterranean and which reflect the commercial relationships that existed with Pamphylian towns, especially the port of Perge. The Nilotic species Lates niloticus (Nile perch) and Bagrus sp. indicate long distance trade between Egypt and the Anatolian coast from where the fish were likely brought to Sagalassos along the same route as the Mediterranean species. The geographic origins of the Clarias and tilapia still need to be further investigated. Both taxa may come from Egypt, like the Nile perch and Bagrus, but it is not excluded either that they were brought in from the Syro-Palestinian area with which contacts are documented through archaeological and epigraphic data. For Clarias, it may be possible to decide on a Nilotic or Near-Eastern origin in the future if the analysis of mtDNA proves to be successful. Another matter that still requires further investigation is whether the Clarias populations recently discovered at about 100 km south of Sagalassos are recent introductions or if they represent populations that naturally colonised the Aksu and nearby basins. The Anatolian freshwater fish, finally, indicate that the Aksu basin was not a major source for the exploitation of fish. So far, there is no indication either for fish that may have come from the local river in the valley just south of the town. The freshwater fish at Sagalassos is mainly derived from lakes and rivers located north and west of the site.

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