

Spatialities of Byzantine Culture from the Human Body to the Universe

Edited by

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The Other Than Self

Byzantium and the Venetian Identity

Sauro Gelichi

Byzantine Venice represents an age-old problem. Basically, this is a problem of identity. The concept of identity is closely related to a sense of belonging by means of which social groups (or individuals) both perceive and compare themselves with others. Since being part of a group encourages competition, identity is not something static; it is a continuous process.¹ Archaeology, “through its expertise at dealing with material culture”, is capable of adding a material dimension to the understanding of social dynamics as well as through some of these items (such as clothing, the organisation of space, architecture, etc.) and the *habitus*² “can detail how the material world used to engage, and is still engaged, in the articulation of social identity of both the individual and the group”.³ Precisely because archaeology is a dynamic process, it is capable also of chronologically monitoring identity.

With regards to Venice, attention has been paid to its political and institutional aspects;⁴ its architecture and artwork; and, finally on materials, touching upon aspects regarding everyday life. Naturally, we are well aware of the political ties between Venice and Byzantium and it is common knowledge how these bonds were often formalised during important moments of public life, such as during court ceremonies or when official titles that dukes and members of their families demanded from Byzantium were handed down, and then flaunted.⁵ However, is this enough to sustain, as has also been authoritatively endorsed, that for a long time Byzantium was seen as a model of perfect life for Venice, even beyond the constraints of political submission?

1 Hall 1996.

2 On the concept of *habitus*, see Bourdieu 1990, 53 (translated as *Les sens pratique*, Paris, 1980).

3 Díaz-Andreu & Lucy 2005, 9.

4 There is a wealth of literature on the political and institutional history of Venice. With regards to the most ancient stages, it could prove helpful to refer to Cessi 1963; Carile & Fedalto 1978; Ortalli 1992.

5 Ravegnani 1992, 829.

In this specific circumstance, it is important to pursue a similar path, or rather to tackle the same problem (with regards to the relations the Venetian community had with Byzantium, on the one hand, and the mainland communities, on the other) by examining it from an archaeological perspective. This shall be carried out by focusing attention on certain specific aspects of both private (at the dinner table, in the home) and public life (the use of the past, funeral rites): aspects that, always studied from a diachronic perspective, reflect, more or less explicitly, yet clearly voluntarily, the image that the emerging Venetian society (or rather its elite class) intended to give of itself.

This paper discusses the identity created by the community of Venice during the early Middle Ages (8th-10th century) and does so using material indicators: ceramics, sarcophagi, *spolia*. Through the analysis of these indicators, I will try to demonstrate the distance between Venice and Byzantium, with a view to enhancing cultural relations with inland counties.

1 Water and Golden Forks

In 1066, Pier Damiani wrote a long letter to a certain Bianca *comitissa*, who was about to enter a convent. Pier Damiani provided a couple of examples while suggesting the kind of behaviour the widow should adopt once she entered the convent.⁶

One of these examples makes specific reference to Venice. More specifically, it concerns an incident involving the wife of Duke Giovanni Orseolo (984–1006),⁷ a woman named Maria who originated from Constantinople. Maria lived in such a sophisticated manner that, in order to have a wash, she asked the servants to collect, wherever possible, “dew from heaven” (*eius servi rorem coeli stagebant undecumque colligere*) so that “with this water, a bath fit for her could be prepared (*ex quo sibi laboriosum satis balneum procurarent*)”; in

6 The text is very famous: S. Petri Damiani, *Opp. Tomus seu Pars III—Opuscula Varia, Opusculum Quinquagesimum, Institutio Monialis. Ad Blancam ex comitissa sanctimonialem*, cp. XI, col. 743–44 Migne; Ortalli 2005, 309–11.

7 The identity of this woman is definitely not certain, as the name does not appear in the text. Pertusi identify her as Teodora Ducas, sister of Emperor Michael VII, who married the Venetian duke Domenico Silvio (Pertusi 1965, 143–46), who held the Dogado (or Duchy) of Venice between 1071 and 1084. However, the same Ortalli, who also accepts such juxtaposition, expresses a few justified perplexities, given that Pier Damiani's death (1072) would have been too close to the occurrences mentioned in the story. Another option is that it could refer to Maria Argyropoulina, daughter of the Byzantine patrician Argyropoulos, of imperial lineage (*Istoria Veneticorum*, IV, 71, 73 and 75) and the wife of Duke Giovanni Orseolo (984–1006): just as in Frugoni 2001, 114; Ravagnani 2006, 71; and La Rocca 2015.

the meantime “she would never use her hands to eat, yet after ordering her eunuchs to cut the food up into small pieces, she would bring the food to her lips using a gold, two-pronged fork (*Cibos quoque suos manibus non tangebatur, sed ab eunuchis eius alimenta queque minitius concidebantur in frusta; quae mox illa quibusdam fascinulis aureis atque bidentibus ori suo, liguriens, adhibebat*)”.

Beyond the rhetorical resonance coming from a letter with clear educational functions, the tale appears to be accurate. The example of water is both plausible and rather intriguing. There are no known natural springs in Venice and thus the water used was most likely rainwater opportunely collected in water cisterns.⁸ Furthermore, there are no known water cisterns dating back to the historical period specified in Pier Damiani’s account,⁹ though their existence was indirectly mentioned in a few written texts¹⁰ as well as by a substantial number of decorative wellheads representing a truly outstanding phenomenon on the Italian scene at that time (Figure 19.1).¹¹ Among the known

8 The procurement of water was a necessity of paramount importance for the city that did not have its own sources of drinking water: Costantini 2007. The need for water in medieval and modern times seems to have been guaranteed by the collection of rainwater in cisterns or, as documented with certainty only in the late Middle Ages, by means of transport with boats along the rivers flowing through inland areas: Gelichi, Ferri & Moine 2017, 111–12.

9 A very famous collection system and which was used in Venice, consists of the so-called “Venetian water wells” (Penzo 1995, 1–4). These are complex water collection, purification and storage systems, the construction of which regarded both the elevation of buildings (that had to be equipped with eaves and drainpipes) and the actual collection structure itself (a kind of large, generally quadrangular or rectangular-shaped hydraulic cistern full of filtering sand). This type of structures is known both in medieval and modern times, also with archaeological attestations yet which, in the lagoon area, are not known to date back prior to the 12th century. In the most ancient cases of archaeologically-known containers used for the collection and storage of water, it is not possible to establish whether these are just simple cisterns or more sophisticated collection systems, such as the “Venetian water wells” (see Gelichi, Ferri & Moine 2017, 113–14, for both a critical discussion of this information and with regards to the relevant bibliography). During a recent excavation carried out on the island of Murano, some wells dating back to the 11th century were discovered and, at least some of which could originate from around the same time as Pier Damiani’s story was written. One of these had a kind of 2.5 m diameter sand-filled circular crown around its shaft, interpreted as “a sort of filtering device and collection basin”, a forerunner of the more sophisticated water collection systems, or rather the “Venetian water wells”: Cozza & Valle 2014, 34–35, Fig. 38.

10 The oldest documents referring either to wells or wellheads date back to the 11th century (even if it is necessary to consider the lack of Venetian maps dating back to before the year 1000 A.D.): see, once again, Gelichi, Ferri & Moine 2017, 114. From these texts (the oldest is dated 1038) it can be assumed that the wells could already be found on private properties, as shown also in the abovementioned case in Murano (Cozza & Valle 2014).

11 Ongania 1911; Rizzi 1981, 1992, 2007.

Venetian wellheads, those which are particularly worthy of note traditionally date back to the later centuries of the Early Middle Ages (or rather between the ninth and the tenth centuries). This timeline is based on the decorative elements that often accompany them,¹² and is thus rather uncertain, given the long-term use of certain motifs. Even though there is an objective problem of dating and therefore many examples (excluding fakes) could even date back to historical periods later than those indicated by traditional studies, the phenomenon of the Early Medieval Venetian wellheads is still rather unique, both in terms of quantity and quality. Moreover, their presence gave strength to the idea of the central and even symbolic role that water played in the everyday life of the Venetians. However, despite this, the water collected from the Venetian cisterns in Pier Damiani's days could not have been of the best quality, even if, in his opinion, this was not sufficient to justify the princess' demand for water collected directly from heaven.

The other example, concerning the gold fork, is just as interesting. Forks were already known and used in Roman times, and a number of Byzantine archaeological and iconographic references date as far back as the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹³ Naturally, there is little archaeological and iconographic evidence prior to that period.¹⁴ Moreover, those of an iconographic nature have to be subjected to strong critical analysis that directly regards the greater or lesser adherence to reality, the uniqueness of the subject matter, the social environment to which the subject refers, and the iconographic transmission.¹⁵ In the western context, for example, a representation of the fork appears in a couple of illustrations that accompany *De Universo* (otherwise known as *De Rerum Naturis*) (Figure 19.2), a text written by Rabano Mauro (780–865), in a code created in Montecassino in the days of abbot Theobald (1022–1035).¹⁶

12 However, none of these (twenty-four of them were identified and listed) is in its original position and also it was a stroke of luck that these were on the antiques market in the 19th century where both the dispersal and the imitation of such must have been brought about: thus, it is suspected that many of these are fakes (see once again Gelichi, Ferri & Moine 2017, 115–16, listed in Fig. 14).

13 Vroom 2007a.

14 Parani 2010.

15 Vroom 2003, 303–4; Vroom 2007b, 192–95; Parani 2010, 139–41. In any case, I agree with Joanita Vroom (although with a certain amount of caution) when she writes: “does the pictorial and written evidence indicate a clear development in the portrayal of dining scenes? And if so, do the depicted and described artefacts make anything clear about the cultural changing of dining manners?” (Vroom 2003, 304).

16 With regards to the code in general: Rabano Mauro, *De Rerum Naturis Cod. Casin. 132/ Archivio dell'Abbazia di Montecassino* Cavallo; as for the representations, see D'Onofrio,



FIGURE 19.1 Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, medieval wellhead

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However, there is a great deal of uncertainty with regards to the composition of the illustrated part of that code.¹⁷ Furthermore, a representation of the fork appears precisely in Venice, on a tile in the Pala d'Oro in the presbytery in St Mark's Basilica (or better, there are two of them, always appearing together with a knife), in a scene depicting the Last Supper (Figure 19.3).¹⁸ However, as

"Per una filologia delle illustrazioni del 'De rerum Naturis' di Rabano Mauro", in Rabano Mauro, *De Rerum*, 99–176. The images that portray two table companions are in *XVI.4 De civibus* and in *XXII, 1 De mensis et escis*, (respectively referring to D'Onofrio 1995, 161 and 172).

17 D'Onofrio 1995, 102–3 and 107–8. The scholar, who recalls the theories studied by previous researchers, believes that the illustrations of the code could have possibly originated from a Carolingian model, even if they could have been developed on-site (where the Cassinese code was created). However, she also believes that the miniatures derived from examples dating back to the Late Antiquity period, were divided into types that deriving from the Carolingian *scriptoria*. Therefore, one could ask whether the image of the two forks must be attributed to the potential prototype dating back to the Late Antiquity period, to the Carolingian re-elaboration or even to the possibility of being inserted by the miniaturist who worked in Cassino towards the beginning of the 11th century.

18 Volbach 1994, 56, 29, Tab. 31.



FIGURE 19.2 Forks (after Rabano Mauro, *De Rerum Naturis*: XVI.4 *De civibus*; XXII, 1 *De mensis et escis*)

far as is known, the Pala D'Oro is a combined work of art composed of enamels dating back to different historical periods: the one of interest can be found in the lower panel, attributed, along with another twenty-six of them, to the early years of the twelfth century.¹⁹

This lack of documentation (of archaeological, written, and iconographic nature) has led scholars to suppose that in the Byzantine area, the use of the fork had been totally abandoned, in favour of picking up food from a shared plate in the centre of the dining table using one's hands.²⁰ This could be true for the social classes residing in the provinces, perhaps originating from important cities in the Empire, though not necessarily for the Constantinople elite.²¹

19 Lorenzoni 1965, n.31, 6; Volbach 1994, 3. This refers to a panel belonging to the second pall, commissioned by Doge Ordelaaffo Falier (1102–18), moreover, explicitly portrayed in another enamel. Scholars consider this to be a stylistically homogeneous part, even if it has been carried out by several artists. The main artist is believed to be a Byzantine master.

20 Oikonomides 1990, 212.

21 A series of forks, dating back to between the 9th and the 12th centuries, coming from the excavations in Corinth (Parani 2010, 157, Fig. 13).



FIGURE 19.3 Venice, presbytery in St Mark's Basilica, Pala d'Oro: the Last Supper (after Lorenzoni 1965, p. 6, n. 31)

Despite a certain variety of behaviours that also make the Byzantine world a subject to be analysed by paying attention to particulars rather than generalities, one can reasonably sustain that the fork, in those areas, must still have been a widely-used utensil in the period between the ninth and the tenth centuries. In any case, its use must have been perceived as an expression of sophistication within the banquet context. The episode featuring the Venetian princess, therefore, seems to emphasise a cultural distance that was fully perceived at the time and, as such, deliberately written down and highlighted in stories with conspicuous didactic content.

Briefly, the Byzantine princess' affectation, her sophisticated habits and customs, used specifically in this case to represent 'the other', someone different, was outlined by two examples referring to both private and public spheres

(respectively bathing and eating).²² By way of these two examples, it could be assumed that the Venetians, even at the highest levels of power (the entourage referred to is of a ducal nature), led a definitely spartan life in their mealtime rituals. Thus it can also be assumed that their behaviour was significantly different to what was customary in the Byzantine world. Therefore, according to Pier Damiani, the behaviour of the Venetians in the eleventh century no longer resembled that of their “cousins” from Constantinople. They still referred to themselves as dignitaries (*ypati*), noble Patricians (*patrizi*), and notables (*protospatari*)²³ yet they did not eat with a fork!

2 At the Dinner Table

From an archaeological point of view, the likelihood of being able to capture the presence of certain items, that must have been present on the table, is limited by the perishable nature of the products themselves. Metal objects are rarely found during excavations (as they have either been recycled or are recyclable), those made of glass (also potentially recyclable) are generally found in highly fragmented conditions while wooden items can only be found in particular types of soil (and depending on its conditions).²⁴ A few comments can indeed be made on the basis of ceramic findings, as they are present, with a certain continuity, in stratigraphic sequences (however, with the risk that their role is overestimated). Through ceramic artefacts (just as much through their

22 The event has been recently analysed also from another perspective, that of highlighting the different perception given of the ‘foreign woman’, within a socially-changeable context in the Early Middle Ages (La Rocca 2015). Moreover, both cases referred to by Pier Damiani (the one regarding the Duke’s bride must be added to the episode relating to Marchioness Sofia, set in a different environment) would help to emphasise the perception of danger (and misfortunes) that the presence of female figures unrelated to the family entourage could bring. Should she be identified as the princess Maria Argyropoulissa, in fact, she would have died together with her husband Giovanni Orseolo, after a terrible plague had struck all areas of Italy and Venetian territories (as recalled in *Istoria Veneticorum* IV, 75); while Sofia, the other key figure in Pier Damiani’s stories, would have belonged to the same group of relatives as Waldrada, the first foreign wife of the Venetian duke, Pietro Candiano, killed during an uprising in 976 (La Rocca 2015, 412). In any case, in this circumstance, the most important aspect to highlight refers to the examples that are given to express the distance and separation, not so much as to their nature or why they took place.

23 With regards to the Byzantine titles held by Venetian dukes, see Ravegnani 1992, 838–46. More specifically, with reference to *Istoria Veneticorum*, see Berto, 2001, 60–65.

24 Other household objects from textile, lead/tin alloys, horn, leather and parchment are also underrepresented in the soil: Gilchrist 2012, 115.

presence as their absence), it is possible to gain an idea of dietary habits (to the extent that these can be reflected by certain objects) as well as how food was eaten during mealtimes. A comparison made between the information gained from written sources (when these exist) and those from iconographic representations (with all the limitations that this kind of source can entail) can help reconstruct the behaviour associated with conviviality with a certain degree of reliability, even if only in a rather general sense.

Unfortunately, with regards to Venice, there is no quantitative data relating to well-explored and, above all, socially diversified excavations.²⁵ Only from the tenth to eleventh centuries are there a few contexts in which it is possible to make a comparison between certain social categories.²⁶ However, the analysis of the ceramic artefacts, coming from the lagoon, is sufficient enough to roughly outline the sort of domestic equipment existing between the eighth and tenth centuries. At this level, a specific comparison with what occurred in the Byzantine world is possible.

We can start from pottery such as the well-known ceramics called “Early Plain Glazed Ware” and “Glazed White Ware” (Class II–IV), a category of products which was coated in a monochromatic glazing, often with incised and impressed decorations.²⁷ These were from the Byzantine world dating back to between the eighth and the eleventh centuries from both Constantinople and the other areas of Greece, the Aegean Sea, and Asia Minor.²⁸

Formally, the “Early Plain Glazed Ware” and the “Glazed White Ware” include chafing dishes and a number of open forms such as cups, possibly glasses and, above all, large dishes for communal eating.²⁹ These large dishes were, perhaps, used as central table pieces and made up a variation in the table settings that increasingly appeared from Late Antiquity onwards. The production of “Plain Glazed Ware” (and “Glazed White Ware”), therefore, testify to a continuation of sorts of these customs. A chafing dish is a rather particular vessel and is considered to be the most elaborate kind of Byzantine pottery known to

25 As for a summary on these problems, see Gelichi et al. 2017.

26 Monastery of St Hilary of Gambarare: Ferri 2017, 158–68. In particular for the episcopal context of Equilus (Jesolo) Gelichi & Sabbionesi 2018

27 Talbot Rice 1958a, 110–13; and more recently Dark 2001, 63–65; Vroom 2005, 64–65 and 72–77.

28 The initial stages are still uncertain and, at the moment, also the timelines are based on the few well-dated contexts available. A context that is particularly rich in this type of pottery and which is used as a date-based standard is the Saraçhane excavation in Constantinople: Hayes 1992; in the most ancient type, here defined as “Glazed White Ware I”, “the fabric is really not white” (15).

29 Hayes 1992, Figs. 4, 7, 8 and so on; Vroom 2005, Figs. 3.3. and 4.3.



FIGURE 19.4 Athens, Stoà of Attalus, Museum, photograph of a “Glazed White Ware” chafing dish

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date (Figure 19.4).³⁰ This is a container consisting of two connecting, yet separate parts, the use of which has been interpreted in several ways, even if the most plausible hypothesis is that it could have been used to prepare and serve hot sauces, in particular fish sauce (also known as *garum*).³¹ Moreover, it can be rather interesting to notice how the chafing dish was associated by some scholars with the use, at the table, of the two-pronged type of fork.³² In this case, it would be used as an actual fondue pot, where someone would stick a piece of meat or bread onto the tip of their fork and dip it into the warm sauce contained in the upper part.

The chafing dish, depending also on its distribution, was interpreted as a means of identification of a kind of Byzantine cultural or culinary koine.³³ In fact, the distribution map omits North Africa, the Syrian-Palestinian coast and most of the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian area above Rome (Figure 19.5), or

30 Vassiliou 2016.

31 Vassiliou 2016, 252–55. With regards to the hypothesis that it was used for the preparation of mulled wine, see Arthur 1997, 538 (upon suggestion by Mark Whittow).

32 Vassiliou 2016, 254–55, n.21 (with bibliography).

33 Arthur 2007, 15–16, Fig. 1; Vroom 2008, 293–96, Fig. 4 (taken from Arthur 2007, with a few slight variations).

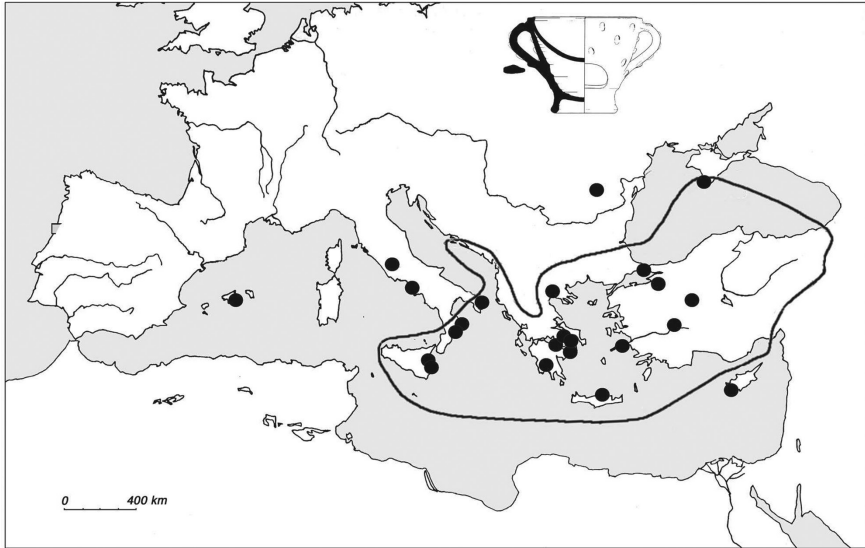


FIGURE 19.5 The distribution of Byzantine chafing-dishes in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (after Arthur 2007, p. 15, Fig. 1)

rather the areas not directly controlled by the Byzantines between the eighth and tenth centuries. With regard to the Italian peninsula, the overall picture already seems to be sufficiently clear.³⁴ Moreover, one very important fact must be highlighted (that, to date, has not been emphasised enough) and that is the abandonment of the use of this vessel over the course of the ninth to tenth centuries, at least in some areas of the Italian peninsula, such as Rome, where instead it was produced locally as from the end of the 8th century.³⁵ This could mean a progressive change in certain habits and dietary habits in that area.

Going back to the “Glazed White Ware”, large, open vessels also fall into this category of pottery. These appear to be fully coherent with the idea perceived of the banquet in the Byzantine area, once again reconstructed according to written, archaeological and above all iconographic sources:³⁶ a large dish (or tray), from which all diners eat from, situated in the centre of the table,

34 For example, a fragment of the chafing dish of “Glazed White Ware” brought to light in the excavations carried out in the monastery of St Hilary of Gambarare (see n.29 both *above* and *below*).

35 Paroli 1992a, 43; Romei 2001, 500.

36 Vroom 2015.

where, at least in representations dating back to a slightly later period (eleventh to twelfth centuries), also other objects start to appear, such as goblets and cutlery.

However, moving from the capital of the empire to the Venetian Lagoon, no trace of these types of ceramics (“Plain Glazed Ware” and “Glazed White Ware II”) can be found. At this time, I only know of a single fragment of a “Glazed White Ware II” chafing dish.³⁷ It can only be stated that this element of typical Constantinopolitan ceramics was not required by the Venetian elite, as would be expected.

This absence could be explained if the functions that this pottery was supposed to carry out would have been fulfilled by others of a similar shape but with different origins. None of all this seemed to have taken place in the lagoon between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. Even open ceramic forms of Islamic design are extremely rare, and none dates to before the mid-eleventh century.³⁸ This could mean that the Venetians used another type of tableware (for example in metal, for which there is no evidence) or that, between the eighth and tenth centuries, they shared the food in another way. In this latter case, this difference could be explained by means of a different dietary regime.³⁹ In the case of the Venice Lagoon, the examples of contexts with quantitative archaeo-zoological data are, to date, very modest, even if some of them appears to indicate a prevalent increase in the consumption of pork compared to beef and mutton/goat.⁴⁰ In any case, it is important to point out that, as

37 The fragment originates from the excavation conducted in the area of the monastery of St Hilary of Gambarare: this is a monastic context (Ferri 2017, 163, Fig. 6.9.6). Moreover, this monastery was closely linked to families belonging to the ducal entourage. With reference to Byzantine pottery discovered in the Lagoon, see D’Amico 2011.

38 Gelichi 2018.

39 For an evaluation of the type of diet on the basis of the cooking pot forms see Arthur 2007, 181–82, Fig. 10 but *contra* Vroom 2008, 301–3.

40 The considerations stated in Bon 2011 (with reference to the medieval contexts of Torcello, Fusina 1 et al., subsequently, in late medieval and modern eras). With regards to the findings discovered in Torcello, where, moreover, a majority of pigs was found, see Riedl 1979. The recent analysis of the findings dating back to Late-Antique contexts (sixth to seventh centuries) in Jesolo also seems to go in the same direction: Garavello 2018, 38–40. However, in more recent excavations conducted in Torcello, the opposite trend was reported, that would represent a constant, significant presence of goats/sheep: Seetah & Pluskowski 2014. Finally, the faunistic sample of a drainage hole examined on the island of St Laurence of Ammiana is modest and in any case poorly recognised, dating back to between the sixth and the seventh centuries: Garavello 2012, 33–34. Contexts originating from the excavations carried out on the island of St James in Paludo date back to a much later period compared with that taken into consideration in this circumstance: Pluskowski, Seetah & Garavello 2014, 145–50.

regards pottery, the findings in the Venetian Lagoon clearly indicate that, in the Early Medieval Age, there was an absence of open-shaped receptacles used to cook food (typical for the Byzantine area), while the most-documented shape within Early Medieval Age is the olla.⁴¹

Going back to table habits, further confirmation that, in this area, no need was felt to either import or locally produce chafing dishes and trays or large shared glazed pottery dishes is given by the fact that a category of glazed pottery was documented in the Venetian Lagoon during the same period. This is the so-called *ceramica a vetrina pesante* (mono-fired pottery covered by a plain, thick, monochrome glaze) and *ceramica invetriata* (Sparse glazed ware):⁴² a type that is very similar to the “Forum Ware” found in the areas of Rome and Lazio⁴³ (Figure 19.6). Based on archaeometric analysis, such pottery could possibly have also been produced in the north of Italy.⁴⁴ The prevalent shapes found in north Italy, dating back to between the ninth and eleventh centuries, were jugs and, in later periods, also small cups with handles. None of this can be found in the Byzantine world where, on the contrary, closed glazed pottery shapes are either rare—if not totally unknown—in this period or they date to a later period than the one under analysis (Figure 19.7).⁴⁵ However, at the same time, this category of products does not include any kind of open shaped vessels (neither small nor large), unlike those found in Byzantium.

Therefore, the presence of forks (mentioned previously), individual and communal serving dishes, and possibly other kinds of containers like chafing dishes, were not in use in Venetian dining halls—let us not forget that between the ninth and tenth centuries Venice qualified as a city.⁴⁶ All this is not much different from what took place in the same period on the mainland, where we find the same type of associations within urban contexts.

41 Up-to-date summaries on this topic are currently lacking. Thus, please refer to Ardizzon & Bortoletto 1996. In this type of context, it would be interesting to explain the function of some of the open shapes that are generally defined as bowls and/or basins and which are used for cooking on an open fire as well as for serving purposes. In any case, the functional and morphological overviews of excavations conducted in the Venice Lagoon refer to similar situations found on the mainland.

42 For a recent summary on this kind of glazed pottery, see Gelichi 2016b (with previous bibliography); Gelichi 2014.

43 Whitehouse 1965, 1968; Mazzucato 1972; Paroli 1992a.

44 The precise location or locations have not been identified as yet. However, based on its distribution pattern, these appear to have been found in the north-eastern area of the peninsula, more specifically in the Ravenna-Ferrara area (on the one hand) and the Venice Lagoon (on the other): Gelichi 2016b, 299–300.

45 For example, see Hayes 1992, 29 (after 10th century?) and 33–34 (late 11th–12th centuries?).

46 Gelichi 2015a, 2015b.

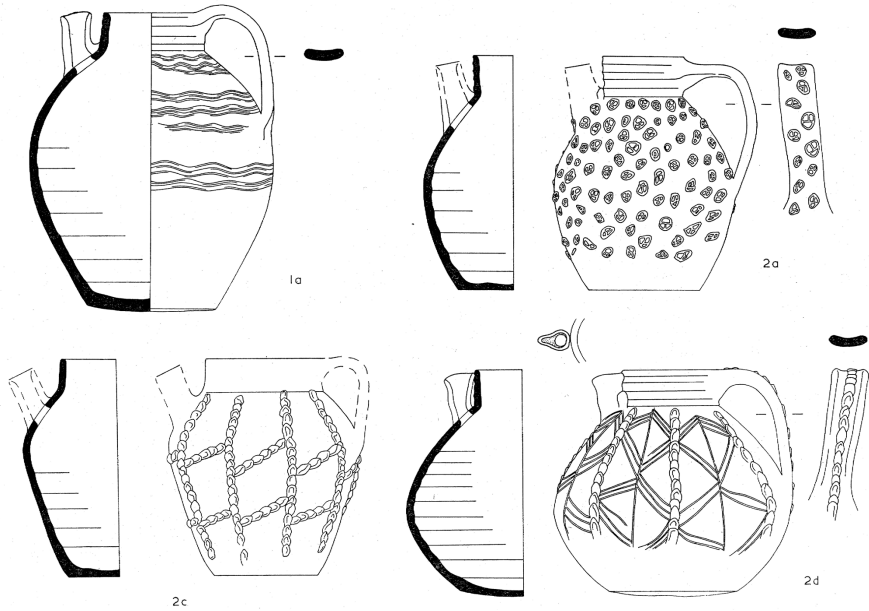


FIGURE 19.6 "Forum Ware" from Rome (after Whitehouse 1965, p. 57, Fig. 16)

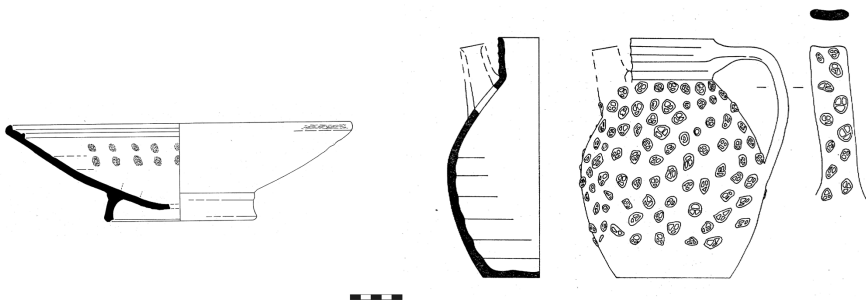


FIGURE 19.7 Comparing "Glazed White Ware" (on the left) and "Forum Ware" (on the right).
Re-elaborations of drawings after Hayes 1992, p. 22, Fig. 7.8 and Whitehouse 1965,
p. 57, Fig.16.2a

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3 *Spolia*, the Legacy of Byzantium and the Ancient World

The problem of the relationship between Venice and Byzantium is also a problem regarding the relationship between the lagoon community and its history, a past which is best remembered for its not so noble origins. In fact, Venice

was never a Roman city, nor did it have any material proof linking it to Rome. Moreover, Byzantium represented a clear, natural connection with the ancient world and, in a certain way, a reference to Byzantium would have also been an indirect link to that past era. Thus, the problem is to establish whether the emerging Venetian elite actually felt the need to establish a link with the past and, in this case, when this need would have started to be noticed in the material documentation. It is generally considered that this link was of a natural, almost predictable nature. However, this is not exactly the case. An analysis of this situation shall be analysed from two perspectives: the first regards the existence of a city wall; the second refers to the use of *spolia*.

An indisputable element attesting to the establishment of a link that was also ideological to the Byzantine world is the material evidence of an element of which there is no longer any trace, yet which was described in the *Istoria Veneticorum*. This text describes the building of a part of a city wall along the Grand Canal as well as a length of chain to close off the canal itself (Figure 19.8).⁴⁷ This large iron chain was positioned across the canal at S. Maria di Zobenigo, attached to one end of the outer face of the city walls and, at the other end, to the side of St Gregory's church.⁴⁸ There is an interesting parallel with Constantinople, a replica of what was present in the capital of the empire.⁴⁹ Since the episode was associated to the life of Duke Pietro Tribuno, with whom the Venetian citizens' character was ratified, it appears evident that these walls were more likely to attest to the existence of a new city than as a defence against external threats.⁵⁰ Thus, perhaps it is not by chance that its presence is cited in only one source (*Istoria Veneticorum*). The *Istoria Veneticorum* is the oldest known text that recounts the events of the duchy

47 Reference to this can be found in *Istoria Veneticorum* III, 39 and relates to the period of the duchy of Pietro Tribuno (†911 A.D.). The text explicitly attributes building works ("edificare cepit") to Pietro Tribuno's efforts—and it is only here in the *Istoria* that the author (probably John the Deacon: see footnote 51) refers to the settlement as a *civitas* ("civitas aput rivoaltum"). See also Cessi 1963, 305.

48 The profile of this wall is described as being essentially linear (*Istoria Veneticorum* III, 39): "Predictae vero civitatis murus a capite rivuli de Castello usque ad ecclesiam Sancte Marie, que de Lubiniaco dicitur, extendebantur". The location of the *rivulus de Castello* is not known exactly (yet it can be assumed with a certain approximation), unlike those referring to the church of Santa Maria Zobenigo and St Gregory. Various hypotheses exist regarding the wall's course, summarised in Fig. 8, but we must immediately stress that no material evidence of this exists, despite the various 'archaeological objects' accredited to it over the years (such as the wall discovered in 1822 near Olivolo: Casoni 1856. In general, on this topic, see Gelichi 2016a).

49 Djurić 1995, 195.

50 Ortalli 1981, 85.

up to the beginning of the eleventh century (when it was composed perhaps by a certain John the Deacon).⁵¹ It is possible to define it as a founding text, in the sense that it contains a whole concentration of events, episodes and characters, appropriately chosen with the aim of constructing the identity of a community. On this occasion, it is not essential to test its factual veracity, but what is important is the fact that John acknowledged the element that had to represent the community. In any case, even if it had existed, as one tends to believe, as a functional masonry structure used to control traffic on the Grand Canal, this structure must also have had a symbolic function, certifying the fact that Venice had become a city. But, until that moment, towards the end of the tenth century, there is very little that can help us corroborate the idea of the conscious construction of an identity founded on a past that was initially Roman and then Byzantine.

Another interesting case could be the use of antique *spolia*.⁵² The re-use of ancient materials can take place according to two main methods: the first is purely functional, while the other is of a functional/ideological nature. Even a seemingly exclusively functional use for *spolia* can in reality conceal a wish to link with the past, which is revealed in the simple fact of its recovery and re-use. However, in the absence of 'active' stone quarries as well as new brick factories, the re-use of ancient materials represents a need, almost an obligation in certain periods, since certain buildings require construction using durable materials.

The re-use of ancient materials is a well-known phenomenon in Venice and its Lagoon⁵³ (Figure 19.9). The case history under discussion, although with a variety of accents,⁵⁴ managed to provide a sufficiently clear overview of the use that was made of stone and ancient building materials throughout the history of the city. From a contextualisation, it is possible to achieve a differentiated overview of the behaviours of Venetian labourers as well as the customers who

51 With regards to the work and its author, see Berto 1999, 7–12.

52 On the concept of *spolia* and their use in the Middle Ages, see Settis 1986a; Greenhalgh 1989; De Lachenal 1995; Greenhalgh 2008. Finally, see the recently published Brilliant & Kinney 2011; Mathews 2015. With regards to a history of the Latin term, see the recent paper published by Uytterhoeven 2018.

53 Brown 1996. See a recent conference: Centanni & Sperti 2015.

54 Pensabene 2015 devotes attention to these specific topics (despite its title the publication appears to be of a more general nature); Calao 2015 pays more attention to a better analysis of the problem from a social-anthropological and contextual viewpoint (in an archaeological sense); finally, Calvelli 2015 deals with the re-use of ancient epigraphs.

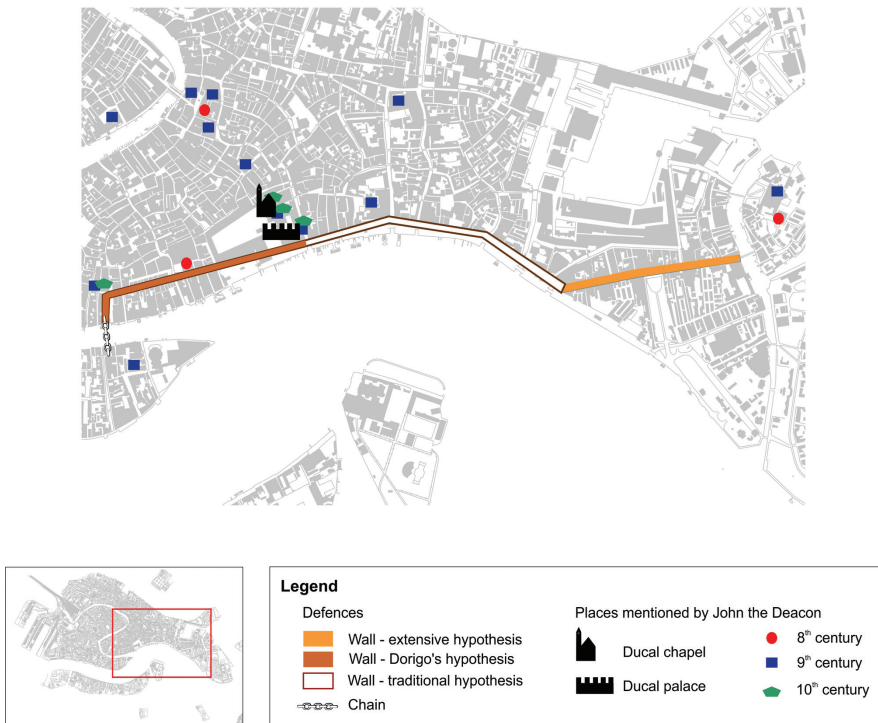


FIGURE 19.8 Map indicating the line of Venice's hypothetical city walls

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were at the root of the use of *spolia*.⁵⁵ The re-use of stones for new purposes over time can be interpreted as part of constructing a different identity.

There is no doubt that building materials taken from antique buildings were re-used in Venetian building construction in the Early Middle Ages; a number of famous written documents attest to this. Among these are Giustiniano Particiaco's last will and testament, which makes explicit mention of the practice.⁵⁶ However, this re-use of building materials seems to be almost exclusively of a pragmatic nature. Somehow, this situation positions Venice and the behaviour of its Lagoon elite populations once again within an entirely

55 As mentioned in Calao 2015.

56 This text is very famous. With regards to one of its editions, see Cessi 1942, n.53, 93–99.



FIGURE 19.9
Roman inscription reused in a Venetian palace
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Italian context: in fact, it was precisely from the Late Middle Ages that the use of ancient materials became apparent and persistent.⁵⁷

This is a far cry from the abundance of exposed marble and stonework that characterised Venice, especially after the Fourth Crusade.⁵⁸ The direct access to the 'antiquities' of Constantinople, although not only for instrumental purposes associated with navigation,⁵⁹ had to favour the arrival of a substantial number of *spolia* into the Lagoon. In this case, these did not include only inscriptions and marble dating back to Roman times, but also stones dating back to either Late Antiquity or the Middle Byzantine period originating from the most remote lands of the empire. It would have actually been these more or less ancient *spolia* that covered the entire new city, now made of bricks and stone, with a touch of antiquity (and Byzantine style). This referred to a sort of late recovery of what was considered ancient and 'Byzantine' rather than a kind of continuity. It was also a phenomenon that, not too surprisingly,

57 Also in this case there is a rich bibliography, see Parra 1983; Esch 2001; and the very recent publication by Mathews, 2018.

58 The problem is particularly evident in the monument that is the symbol of the city, and that is St Mark's Church, to which an entire volume was recently devoted, analysing several aspects of its architecture, including the profile relating to the use of the *spolia*. See Maguire & Nelson 2010 volume in its entirety. Mathews 2015, 72–79.

59 See Lazzarini 2015, 136.

became more frequent the moment Venice abandoned its more or less formal dependence on Byzantium.

In short, both of the cases analysed appear to support the idea that a persistent, intentional juxtaposition with the past (whether of a Roman or Byzantine nature) originated from a relatively late period in the history of the Lagoon settlement.

4 Burials and Kinship Memories

A further interesting field that could be used to put this issue to the test is that of funeral rites. There are no direct written sources that tell of these procedures, and excavations carried out in lagoon cemeteries are rather rare or, in any case, underrepresented (Figure 19.10).⁶⁰ However, it is possible to analyse this phenomenon from another viewpoint by taking into consideration a particular ‘container’ that the Venetian aristocracy used with a certain frequency: the sarcophagus.⁶¹ This makes it possible to develop a few considerations on funeral rituals and the cultural and ideological references that are specifically linked with them.

The Venetian aristocracy adopted the sarcophagus as the container for their burials (Figures 19.11–12).⁶² Even a quick look at known examples shows

60 The excavation of the *Lazzaretto Nuovo* cemetery is an exception, yet it is a rather special context, and, in any case, it dates back to the Late Middle Age and modern period: Fazzini 2004, 157–58. The University of Western Australia and Perth (UWA) Centre of Forensic Science (<https://www.lazzarettonuovo.com/nuove-scoperte-sui-veneziani-antichi-con-lo-scavo-di-anthropologia-2018/>) is currently taking care of the excavations in this cemetery. Data originating from the partial excavations carried out in the Lagoon come from the Island of St Laurence of Ammiana (contexts dating back to the Late Antiquity and Early medieval periods: Ferri 2012, 35–36); by St James in Paludo (context dating back to the Late Middle Ages: Bertoldi & Sisalli 2014, 151–56); and with reference to the Lagoon graves of the monastery of St Hilary and Benedict of Gambarare (context dating back to the Early Middle Ages: Bertoldi and Rasia 2017). On the human skeletons discovered in Torcello in the excavations of the 1960s: Corrain 1961; Corrain & Capitanio 1966–67, 1–15.

61 Unfortunately sarcophagi are often no longer in their original location. See some general yet opportune clarifications made in Wood 1996, 14–18.

62 The phenomenon had been reported for some time and there is a rather significant amount of literature on this topic; however, at this moment, there is a lack of overall studies on this phenomenon. In addition to the data sheets in the archives on Early Middle Age sculptures found in the Lagoon, the phenomenon has been addressed, although not comprehensively in Polacco 1980, 25–27 and Agazzi 2005; and, more recently, also in Tigler 2013. A more recent re-interpretation of the phenomenon from a different perspective can be seen in Gelichi 2015a, 260–66.



FIGURE 19.10 Monastery of St Hilary and Benedict in Gambarare, early medieval grave
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that this custom seemed to be well-established and diffuse in the lagoon and immediate surrounding areas starting from the ninth century.⁶³ The use of sarcophagi, therefore, undoubtedly guides us to antiquity. This is not only because, in general, the sarcophagi used or reused were themselves ancient, but also because the sarcophagus was a traditional and ancient mode of burial. However, a number of observations can be made.

The first is that these sarcophagi were, almost always, reworked. This means that it was intended to be understood as a container dating back to Antiquity⁶⁴ while also supporting new messages. These new messages were delegated to both the decorations and, in certain cases, to inscriptions. In short, though reused, these are objects that we can define as being new, in the sense that they have been regenerated and re-functionalised.

63 Gelichi, Ferri & Moine 2017, with a table that illustrates an initial schematic collection of data (tab. 2).

64 To date, an overall study of these artefacts is lacking, and therefore many questions still need to be answered, starting from, for example, the kind of lithotypes that were used. Another aspect that would be very interesting to study in further detail regards the fact whether these are, as is customary, ancient re-used sarcophagi or if, in certain cases, these are new objects (for example, as occurs in other European countries, such as France, where there is a conspicuous production of sarcophagi in the Early Middle Ages: Cartron, Henrion & Sculler 2015).



FIGURE 19.11 Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, sarcophagus from monastery of St Hilary and Benedict in Gambarare (after Polacco, *Marmi*, p. 27, n. 12)



FIGURE 19.12 Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, sarcophagus from monastery of St Hilary and Benedict in Gambarare (after Polacco, *Marmi*, p. 25, n. 10)

The second aspect that must be highlighted is the fact that these objects were most likely to have been designed to be seen. Naturally, we are well aware of the fact that many sarcophagi dating back to Late Antiquity were buried (also those with decorations):⁶⁵ decorations and texts, however, that alone, are not sufficient to justify their exhibition. However, there are certain elements that encourage the hypothesis that the objects under examination should have been seen; and therefore, were made to be seen. An element that bears witness to this theory consists of the decorations and inscriptions that, whenever present, can always be found only on one side of the sarcophagus, as if it were meant to be put against a wall. A second reason is that it considers a context that is believed to have represented a precedent for this phenomenon, and that is the complex of St Apollinaris in Ravenna, which hosts the sarcophagi of a series of Archbishops from Ravenna, dating back to between the second half of the seventh and the ninth century (Figures 19.13–15).⁶⁶ Some of these sarcophagi date to Antiquity, some to the Early Christian Era, and others were re-worked during the eighth century, such as the ones preserving, for example, the remains of Archbishop Felix (709–23), or John and Gratosus (784–88) (Figure 19.14).⁶⁷ Thus, it is not unlikely that this group of sarcophagi preserved even today in the Basilica of St Apollinaris in Classe could have served as an example; replicas of which can also be found in Ravenna dating to the following century in different fields and religious contexts (Figures 19.15–16).⁶⁸

However, if the Byzantine territory is examined, it is important to notice how this phenomenon did not appear to have existed in Constantinople (and, in general, in the Byzantine world) where, instead, there were significant prototypes, such as the sarcophagi of emperors made of porphyry, but no new or re-worked sarcophagi dating back to either the Early Middle Ages or the Middle Byzantine Period.⁶⁹

65 By way of example, mention can be made of the case of one of the sarcophagi discovered in the church of St Victor in Marseilles: Boyer et al. 1987.

66 Farioli Campanati 1986.

67 With regards to these sarcophagi, see Zucchini & Bucci 1968, 56–57 (the sarcophagus of *Felix*), 58 (the sarcophagus of John) (Fig. 19.13) and 58–59 (the sarcophagus of *Gratosus*) (Fig. 19.14). The tomb of bishop *Maurus*, that was situated in the narthex, is accurately described by Andrea Agnello who focuses on the contents of a commemorative inscription engraved on a “slab of highly polished porphyry” which lies at the foot of the sarcophagus; other sarcophagi must have been accompanied by wall-mounted epitaphs: Farioli Campanati 1986, 168.

68 See yet another extensive case study in Zucchini & Bucci 1968, covering various urban contexts.

69 For an analysis of the phenomenon of the use of sarcophagi in the Middle-Late Byzantine periods, see Pazaras 1988.



FIGURE 19.13 Sant'Apollinare in Classe (RA), sarcophagus of Archbishop *Iohannis* (after Valenti Zucchini and Bucci, *Corpus*, p. 58, Fig. 60)

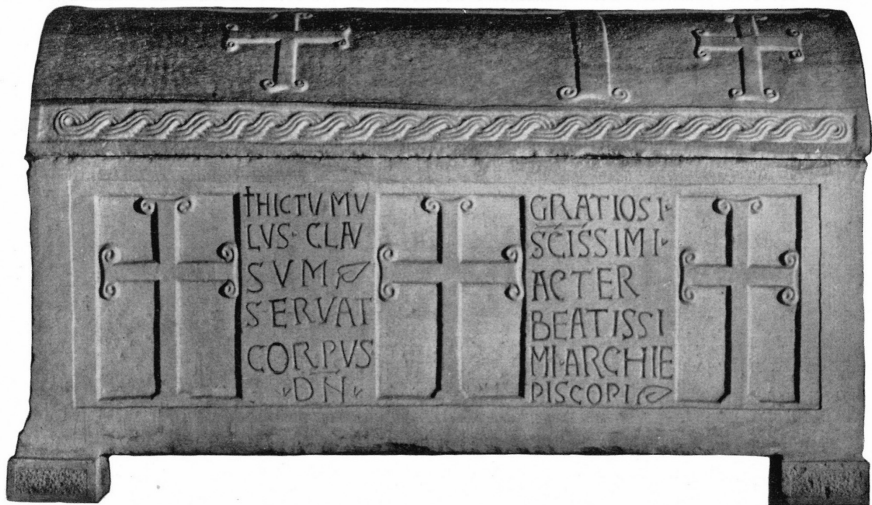


FIGURE 19.14 Sant'Apollinare in Classe (RA), sarcophagus of Archbishop *Gratosus* (after Valenti Zucchini and Bucci, *Corpus*, pp. 58–59, Fig. 61)

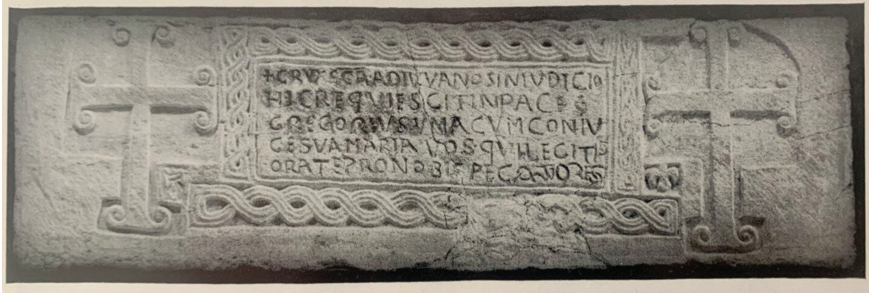


FIGURE 19.15 Ravenna, Museo Arcivescovile, sarcophagus of *Gregorius* and *Maria* (after Valenti Zucchini and Bucci, *“Corpus”*, p. 59, Fig. 62)



FIGURE 19.16 Ravenna, Museo Nazionale, sarcophagus (after Valenti Zucchini and Bucci, *“Corpus”*, p. 60, Fig. 65)

The use of sarcophagi in Venice reiterated behaviours that were stratified and consolidated in the city’s elite, yet which lead, once again, towards more western pattern of behaviour. In fact, the use of sarcophagi in Venice and in the lagoon areas between the ninth and tenth centuries was related to areas in the North Adriatic and more closely linked to Ravenna but, once again, not Byzantium.

5 Byzantine Venice?

At this point, it is important to ask oneself what a Byzantine-Venetian nature means, or what could it have meant to the extent to which it existed, and to what extent it characterised the behaviour of the Venetian elite, compared to,

for example, those belonging to the contemporary communities on the mainland. The further away one moves from written texts and formal references that since their origins have compared the Lagoon elite with those originating from Constantinople, the more distance can also be perceived in several aspects of daily life, both public and private in nature, as well as in the ideological sphere, when this can still be recognised in the materiality of archaeological documentation. This is also fully understandable, considering the geographic area and the socio-political context in which the community was formed and developed. Furthermore, right from the very beginning of the Carolingian Age, the Venetian elite fully integrated into an international market that fixed its gaze on both the Mediterranean and Europe, as is clearly shown by the fact that coins were minted bearing the names of Frankish kings.⁷⁰ If anything, some of the choices (that have been highlighted in this study) referring both to the funerary and convivial spheres, regard another koine and types of traditions that are essentially those referring to the North-Adriatic maritime context. It is in this kind of great gulf that the connection that links society and populations must be identified: and, in all this, perhaps it will be Ravenna (rather than Byzantium or Rome) which will be considered a point of reference. In this respect, and only in this respect, a relationship with Byzantium re-emerges as something that is yet part of the DNA of these populations.

It seems then that there was more distance between Byzantium and Venice than may have been believed and that this Oriental sheen was only a late acquisition, evidence of a more practical and political strategy of a city which, having once acquired and consolidated its autonomy and power, looked for historical symbols which would legitimate and confirm it. At that point, those symbols were distant and even “harmless”.

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⁷⁰ Stahl 2000. This fact, variously explained (see, for example, Rösch 1992, 551–52, 570), poses a few problems of a political nature, since Venice was, following the Treaty of Aachen (812), formally recognised as part of the Byzantine Empire: thus, as far as this can be explained also on grounds of practicality (the need of the Venetians to trade with the mainland), remains a fact of particular significance.

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