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3

FROM ONE SEA TO ANOTHER
TRADING PLACES IN THE EUROPEAN
AND MEDITERRANEAN EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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BREPOLS

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Adriatic Sea trade in an European perspective

‘On the far western periphery of Eurasia, in western Europe, is a savage but nimble race of warriors, skilled forgers of arms and armour, clever with clockworks and other trinkets but dependent on crude iron and cruder steel, and with no skills in production of silks, fine cottons, or other rich textiles, nor in the production of ceramics, lacquers, nor any resources of precious jewels, jade, spices and aromatics, or other valuables. From the perspective of Europe (and of the rest of Eurasia), the Orient is the fountain of all riches; thus, the western Europeans scheme on how to get there.’ (Goldstone 2000: 181)

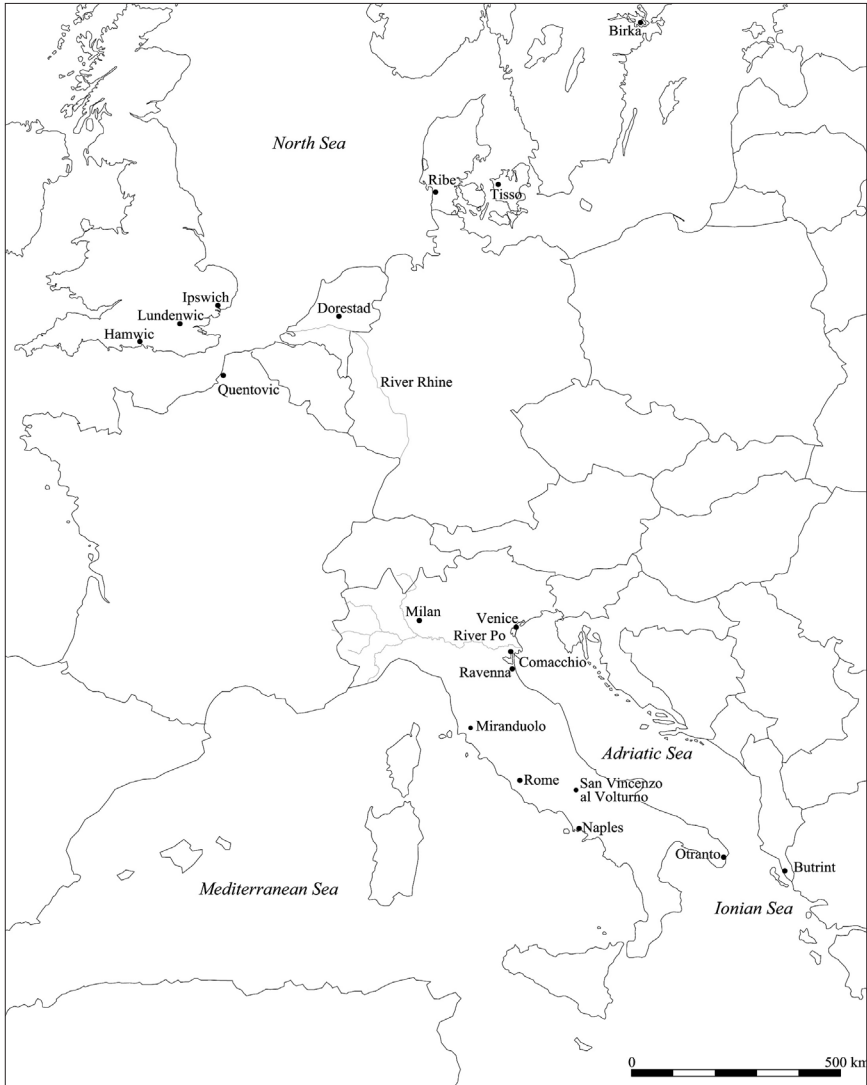
‘Western Europe is seen for what it was: a minor hinterland of two flourishing, though rival, empires in the Near East, centering on Constantinople and Baghdad respectively. Or, if one chooses to give greater weight to the trade of Frisians and Norsemen in the North and Baltic seas, the continent appears as a barrier between two unequal zones of maritime activity.’ (Hohenberg, P.M. and Lees, L.H. (1995) *The making of urban Europe 1000-1994*, Harvard, Harvard University Press: 62)

Introduction: three models

The discovery of the emporium at Comacchio matters to European history. Its importance far exceeds its place close to the mouth of the Po. Its historical reach extends far beyond the Adriatic Sea. For Comacchio is tied like an umbilical cord to Venice, as Sauro Gelichi has shown, and the history of Venice, in common with a small number of places, is a cornerstone of the history of post-Roman Europe¹. Gelichi’s excavations have challenged Michael McCormick’s assessment that this was no more than a tiny port with parochial horizons, showing improbably that the “peddlars of salt and small packets of spices up and down the Po river crossed the great sea to

¹ S. Gelichi, «Flourishing places in north-eastern Italy: towns and *emporia* between late antiquity and the Carolingian age», in *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. 1. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin, 2007, 77-104.

² M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, Cambridge, 2001, p.118.



1. Map showing places mentioned.

Alexandria or elsewhere to get a few ounces of pepper”². Comacchio, in fact, has a key role in the making of urban Europe. In this essay I wish to examine how its discovery alters our current view of early medieval Europe.

Three very different economic models exist to describe the rise of urbanism in post-Roman Europe, each taking account of contemporary archaeological evidence. Two of these are the work of historians; the third is essentially an archaeological construct.

First, there is the trade model – effectively an argument that long-distance trade generates culture process and with this, urbanisation. This model has a long genesis in archaeology, numismatics and medieval history. Herbert Jankuhn's ground-breaking excavations at Haithabu, Germany³ were constructed around this premise; Wim van Es's excavations at Dorestad took trade between the Rhine and the North Sea coast as their fundamental point-of-departure⁴. *Dark Age Economics*⁵ pursued this model vigorously: its argument was simple. The small-scale trade in prestige goods, manipulated by the leaders of tribal societies for strategic political purposes was at the heart of the thesis. In certain circumstances, so went the thesis, these leaders might accumulate wealth through gift exchange of prestige goods (rather than redistribute the wealth), leading ultimately as a result of competition to more centralized authority. With centralized authority came tax-based political economies, articulated by the 11th or 12th centuries through market-places. Prestige goods or exotica, in other words, including specialized utilitarian items like metals, soapstone and quernstones were motors of change.

Michael McCormick has majestically developed this thesis in his *Origins of the Medieval Economy*⁶, elegantly presenting the extraordinary data for long-distance trade as the motor of economic development. In addition, following Sture Bolin's thesis⁷, McCormick looks to connections with the Umayyads and especially the Abbasids in the Near East as the cause of development⁸. Slaves are the primary export from Christendom and Scandinavia; silver and precious goods are imported in small but politically significant amounts. These imports, he argued, fuelled the take off of the political economies of Latin Christendom and the west Baltic communities. McCormick concludes: "So in a paradoxical and profound sense, perhaps Pirenne was right, even when he was wrong: without Mohammed, there would have been no Charlemagne⁹". Today, most archaeologists still find the trade model to be

³ H. Jankuhn, *Haithabu. Ein Handelsplatz der Wikingerzeit*, Neumünster, 1986.

⁴ W.A. van Es, «Dorestad centred», in *Medieval Archaeology in the Netherlands*, eds. J.C. Besteman, J.M. Bos, H.A. Heidinga, Maastricht, 1990, p. 151-82.

⁵ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, London, 1982.

⁶ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*.

⁷ S. Bolin, «Mohammed, Charlemagne and Ruric», *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, I (1953), p. 5-39.

⁸ M. McCormick, «Where do trading towns come from? Early medieval Venice and the northern *emporium*», in *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. I. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin, 2007, p. 41-68.

⁹ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 798.

seductive since their primary sources consist of provenanced artifacts invariably associated with regions dominated by central places¹⁰.

The second model could not be more different. Chris Wickham argues in his encyclopedic and wide ranging *Framing the Middle Ages*¹¹ for the rise of a medieval economy that is based upon seven criteria¹²:

1. Simple fiscal structures.
2. Relative aristocratic weakness.
3. "Peasantries were, nearly everywhere, more autonomous. Sometimes they were even more or less entirely independent of aristocratic domination even in their economic logic, and their economy can be described as being a separate, peasant, mode of production¹³".
4. Aristocracies changed substantially their culture and identity.
5. The post-Roman centuries showed much more regional divergence than the period immediately preceding.
6. Regionalization of social development, joined to the weakness of most states and external powers, permitted a notable fluidity in most local societies.
7. The dissolution of Roman imperial unity set off all these trends.

This challenging book purports to be an archaeological picture presented within a historical frame. In fact, it is a compelling re-reading of the historical debate about the rise of feudal Europe within which, rather in the manner of George Seurat's pointillist paintings, Wickham uses archaeological evidence to affirm his post-*Annales* (French) paradigm.

The third model is less well defined but no less compelling. Johann Callmer¹⁴ has made the case for traders and craftsmen as the drivers of economic change¹⁵. Callmer acknowledges the association of emporia with po-

¹⁰ Cf. D. Skre, «Post-substantivist towns and trade AD 600-1000», in *Means of Exchange. Dealing with silver in the Viking Age*, ed. D. Skre, Aarhus, 2008, p. 327-41.

¹¹ C. Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2005.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 824-30.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 828.

¹⁴ Tacitly supported by J. Henning, «Early European towns: the way of the economy in the Frankish area between dynamism and deceleration 500-1000 AD», in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. I. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin/New York, 2007, p. 3-40.

¹⁵ J. Callmer, «North-European trading centres and the Early Medieval craftsmen. Craftsmen at Åhus, north-eastern Scania, Sweden ca. AD 750-850», in *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods*, vol. 6, eds. B. Hårdh, L. Larsson, Lund, 2002, p. 125-57; J. Callmer, «Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe, ca. AD 700-1100», in *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. I. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin, 2007, esp. p. 240-41.

litical elites, but argues that they were not ‘initiators’. Instead, the role of these political elites was ‘one of passive profiteers’. More explicitly than Henning, he identifies “the leading groups of the traders and organisers of shipping” as the “active agents at the emporia¹⁶”. He mediates this conclusion with the speculation that “a balanced mutual relationship between agents of trade and local elites is likely¹⁷”. In a sense Callmer is making use of an aspect of the archaeological record – craft production – that archaeologists can identify as readily as provenanced (traded) artifacts. No less important, Callmer, without being explicit, effectively finds common cause with the origins of Georges Duby’s third order: *laboratores*, or those who work, (the other two being those who pray and those who fight). *Labores*, who after they are first identified in the 9th century, become a prominent force in the making of the productive cities that long ago Max Weber, in search of the origins of capitalism, distinguished the consumer cities of the Middle Ages from those of antiquity¹⁸.

All three models are compelling and all three merit some revision in the light of the increasing body of archaeological information.

First, both McCormick and Wickham are right to emphasize the collapse and fragmentation of the Roman Mediterranean. Its impact far beyond the Mediterranean is still being measured. For Callmer and Henning, principally concerned with late Iron Age western Scandinavia, the aftermath of the Roman Empire is not important. Yet the evidence from late and post-Roman Italy, given the circumstances in the North Sea, cannot be ignored. It is now undeniable that the late Roman countryside in Italy, for example, collapsed in the mid 6th century, and the last vestiges of long-distance trade in the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian ports date no later than the early 7th century¹⁹. After this, only major administrative centers such as Ravenna²⁰, Naples²¹ and Rome²² sustained

¹⁶ J. Callmer, «North-European trading centres».

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ G. Duby, *The Three Orders: Medieval Society Imagined*, Chicago, 1982; M. Weber, (translated by T. Parsons), *Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, New York, 1958; cf. M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, London, 1999 (new edition).

¹⁹ Cf. M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 115-9.

²⁰ E. Cirelli, *Ravenna: Archeologia di una città*, Florence, 2008.

²¹ P. Arthur, *Naples, from Roman town to city-state: an archaeological perspective*, London, 2002.

²² P. Delogu, «Rome in the ninth century: the economic system», in *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. I. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin, 2007, p. 105-22.

prominent long-distance trade relations. By contrast, long-distance trade around the North Sea, perhaps following earlier Roman patterns, took a consistent form certainly from the later 6th century, growing incrementally in the 7th century²³. Significantly, the early 7th century involved the adoption of institutional features such as customs, borrowing governance concepts from Italy²⁴. Clearly this was an era of change, as Andrew Reynolds has put it: “the seventh century was a pivotal era in England...The increasing physical boundedness of early medieval populations can be linked to changes in agricultural practices, where stock farming perhaps takes on a greater significance, while the need to formalize and regulate both the rural environment and determine places of commerce can be read as a response to the growth of a monetary economy and the levying of taxes by emergent polities²⁵”. By the end of the century, in the short period ca.675/700, major urban centres were created – perhaps first on the periphery of Francia at Dorestad and Quentovic²⁶, and then, soon afterwards, in certain Anglo-Saxon and Danish territories – at Hamwic (Saxon Southampton), Lundenwic, Ipswich and Ribe. In other words, as long-distance trade disappeared in the central Mediterranean, it emerged in locations around the North Sea using Byzantine customs and other institutional concepts.

Linked to the rise of these new planned urban centres was, as Reynolds noted²⁷, an equally striking change in rural production. In the past, the scale of this agrarian transformation has either been understated²⁸ or tacitly ascribed to the procurement need to provide provisions for the new urban centres²⁹. The collapse of Roman agrarian systems in Italy occurred as marked investment was being made in transforming agricultural out-

²³ See C. Loveluck, D. Tys, «Coastal societies, exchange and identity along the Channel and southern North Sea shores of Europe, AD 600-100», *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*, 1 (2006), p. 140-69.

²⁴ N. Middleton, «Early Medieval port customs, tolls and controls of foreign trade», *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), p. 330.

²⁵ A. Reynolds, «On farmers, traders and kings: archaeological reflections of social complexity in early medieval north-western Europe», *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), p. 115-16.

²⁶ S. Coupland, «Trading Places: Quentovic and Dorestad Reassessed», *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 209-32.

²⁷ A. Reynolds, «On farmers, traders and kings».

²⁸ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, p. 130-50.

²⁹ H. Hamerow, «Agrarian production and the *emporia* of mid Saxon England, ca. AD 650-850», in *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. 1. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin, 2007, p. 219-32.

put in the Anglo-Saxon³⁰, Irish³¹, and Danish³² territories. For example, two recent projects have identified the origins of the medieval English open field systems and the associated husbandry in the later 7th century, much earlier than was previously supposed. In western Wessex, on the edge of Exmoor, the evidence of new arrangements of fields that have survived until today is compelling³³. This area lay far beyond the procurement catchment of the kingdom's premier market-place at Hamwic (Southampton)³⁴. In Mercia, the evidence for organized landscapes including arrangements for common land that endured into the Middle Ages is now no less compelling³⁵. In line with these agrarian managerial changes new, regionally arranged economies were taking shape³⁶. Anglo-Saxon England was not the only area radically adapting its agrarian strategies. In Ireland a parallel transformation led to new cattle-ranching systems³⁷, the deployment of engineered horizontal mills³⁸ and the proliferation of small farmsteads – *raths*³⁹ and their development as centres of grain-growing estates⁴⁰. Similar rural intensification also characterizes northern France in this era⁴¹, showing that – as with the adoption of Byzantine trading customs – there was a widespread sharing of economic

³⁰ Cf. A. Reynolds, «On farmers, traders and kings».

³¹ M. Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, Dublin, 1997; D.B. Gibson, «Chieftoms and the emergence of private property in land», *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 27 (2008), p. 46-62; T.D. Kerr, G.T. Swindles, G. Plunkett, «Making hay while the sun shines?», *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 36 (2009), p. 2868-2874.

³² T.L. Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict: State Formation in the South Scandinavian Iron Age*, New York, 2001.

³³ S.J. Rippon, R.M. Fyfe, A.G. Brown, «Beyond villages and open fields», *Medieval Archaeology*, 50 (2006), p. 31-70.

³⁴ Cf. B. Palmer, «The hinterlands of three southern English *emporia*: some common themes», in *Markets in Early Medieval Europe. Trading and 'Productive' Sites*, eds. T. Pestell, K. Ulmschneider, Bollington, 2003, p. 58-60.

³⁵ S. Oosthuizen, «The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and the origins and distribution of common fields», *Agricultural History Review*, 55 (2007), p. 153-80.

³⁶ J. Naylor, *The archaeology of trade in Middle Saxon England*, British Archaeological Reports British Series 376, Oxford, 2004.

³⁷ F. McCormick, «Cows, ringforts and the origins of Early Christian Ireland», *Emania*, 13 (1995), p. 33-7.

³⁸ C. Rynne, «Water power in Medieval Ireland», in *Working with water in Medieval Europe*, ed. P. Squatriti, Leiden, 2000, p. 1-50.

³⁹ M. Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*.

⁴⁰ T.D. Kerr, G.T. Swindles, G. Plunkett, «Making hay while the sun shines?».

⁴¹ I. Catteddu, *Archéologie médiévale en France. Le premier Moyen Âge (V^e-XI^e siècle)*, Paris, 2009.

concepts. Not surprisingly, then, the new urban centres were supplied with cattle in significant large numbers: at Hamwic these were cattle driven into the town; at Lundenwic the cattle were raised in farms on the edge of the town⁴². The same agrarian intensification appears to be occurring in western Denmark⁴³, but it is not until the 9th century that cattle become the principal form of livestock for the new emporium at Birka, Sweden⁴⁴. Contrast these new findings with the important excavated data now available from two very different types of site in Italy: the hilltop village of Miranduolo, Tuscany⁴⁵ and the Benedictine monastery, San Vincenzo al Volturno⁴⁶. Ample evidence shows that at both may have followed a Roman rural dietary culture, as beef only became important during the 9th century. The agrarian economy of Miranduolo is quintessentially based upon subsistence resources mobilized by the households, which were radically transformed with seigneurial investment in the village during the 9th century. Miranduolo, although a small community, appears to be normal for the era, testifying to the fragmentation of regional agrarian systems in peninsular Italy, and their 9th-century revival. Two centuries, then, appear to separate the adoption of medieval agrarian systems in Anglo-Saxon England, and possibly western Denmark, from their adoption in much of Italy.

Long-distance trade and rural production, it is now clear, went hand in hand around the North Sea. The nuances of this urban and mercantile history, as Adriaan Verhulst pointed out⁴⁷, are important. Given the evidence of agrarian production on a substantial scale, the vicissitudes of the new towns may offer tantalising hints about the political economies of the time. Here, Grenville Astill's perspicacious comments merit citing: "It is perhaps the change in the nature of kingship rather than the state of international contacts that was the context for the rise of the emporia; otherwise it is difficult to see why wics had not been developed earlier because the trade had clearly existed before...The wic may represent a relatively short-lived experiment in the exercise of royal power, similar perhaps to the granting

⁴² H. Hamerow, «Agrarian production».

⁴³ Cf. T.L. Thurston, *Landscapes of Power*.

⁴⁴ B. Wigh, *Animal Husbandry in the Viking Age Town of Birka and its Hinterland: Excavations in the Black Earth, 1990-5*, Stockholm, 2001.

⁴⁵ M. Valenti, *Miranduolo in alta val di Merse (Chiusdino – SI)*, Florence, 2008.

⁴⁶ G. Clark, «“All must refrain from eating the flesh of quadrupeds”: the mammal bones from the workshops area», in *San Vincenzo Maggiore and its workshops*, eds. R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, London, 2011, p. 335-92.

⁴⁷ A. Verhulst, *The rise of cities in North-West Europe*, Cambridge, 1999; A. Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy*, Cambridge, 2002.

of exemption from tolls at about the same time...⁴⁸”. Certainly, from the second and third quarters of the 8th century and indeed up until 790, the history of urbanism is less straightforward. Urban Hamwic, Anglo-Saxon Southampton, is an important case study. Here, the central gravel road in Hamwic – the *cardo* of a classical city in all but name – was repaired regularly throughout the 8th century but the surrounding ditch was abandoned⁴⁹. Likewise, Lundenwic⁵⁰, Ipswich⁵¹ and Ribe⁵² show uneven histories, but continuous occupation. Conceivably, the pace of urban development halted or slowed as the annual wars in Francia and beyond had an impact upon these explicit manifestations of the political economy. Presently there is not enough quantified information about the second phases – mid-8th century phases – of these places, but we should not envisage a uniform and constant, progressive development. Momentum may well have been lost at certain places within the North Sea economy until the last decades of the 8th century. Thereafter, the economies of many kingdoms around the North Sea palpably expanded at different speeds. Illustrative of this is the creation of second-tier markets in many territories, almost certainly precursors of ranked regional market-places of the later first millennium. Within and beyond the shadow of the Carolingian Empire, the long 9th century undoubtedly began with greater regional production and inter-regional commerce. What happened, then, to Italy and the region around the Adriatic Sea?

The Carolingian connection in Italy?

Charlemagne’s invasion of Italy in AD 787 coincided with a new energy in the peninsula. This is a chicken and egg situation. Was he drawn by the energy of the Lombard kingdoms harrying the Papal state, or was

⁴⁸ G. Astill, «General Survey 600-1300», in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Vol. 1, ed. D. M. Palliser, Cambridge, 2000, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Cf. V. Birbeck, *The Origins of Mid-Saxon Southampton*, Dorchester, 2005; A. Morton, *Excavations at Hamwic*, Vol. 1, London, 1992.

⁵⁰ L. Blackmore, «The origins and growth of *Lundenwic*, a mart of many nations», in *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods*, vol. 6, eds. B. Hårdh, L. Larsson, Lund, 2002, p. 273-301; J. Leary, *Tatberht’s Lundenwic*, London, 2004.

⁵¹ C. Scull, «Ipswich: development and contexts of an urban precursor in the seventh century», in *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods*, vol. 6, eds. B. Hårdh, L. Larsson, Lund, 2002, p. 303-16.

⁵² C. Feveile, S. Jensen, «Ribe in the 8th and 9th century. A contribution to the archaeological chronology of north western Europe», *Acta Archaeologica*, 71 (2000), p. 9-24.

he attempting to forestall a Byzantine incursion? Equally, was he cognisant of the economic possibilities of reaching out to the Abbasids, as McCormick has recently implied⁵³? Certainly, the period AD 780-810 marks a moment of change in Italy as it does in the Baltic Sea. This is as evident in Rome, where Popes Hadrian and Leo instigated the renewal of many churches⁵⁴, as it was in the extraordinary re-envisioning of the privileged Benedictine monastery of San Vincenzo⁵⁵. Nevertheless, as Alessia Rovelli has shown recently, monetary use in Italy was still highly underdeveloped by comparison with its use in regions around the North Sea⁵⁶. No-one now, of course, will describe the later 7th to early 9th centuries in Italy as economically aboriginal, and yet production was extremely limited. We need look no further than the diminutive scale of the secular buildings in Rome⁵⁷ and their apparent absence in other ancient urban centres from Milan to Naples. Look at the equally diminutive productive capacity of papal farms – *domuscultae* like Santa Cornelia⁵⁸. As an estate centre assembling agrarian produce for Rome's most powerful 'family', its limited storage and artisanal capacities pale by comparison with an equivalent Anglo-Saxon, Danish or Frankish centre. This paradoxical contrast between the documented status of the papal community and its archaeological measurements makes the extensive excavated evidence from the Benedictine monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturmo all the more interesting.

San Vincenzo al Volturmo, thanks to a 12th-century chronicle – the *Chronicon Vulturense* – is one of a few well-documented major monasteries in Italy that for a short time enjoyed Carolingian patronage⁵⁹. A large part of this well-preserved site has now been excavated, enabling us to chart 4 stages in the transformation of a particular regional urban centre between

⁵³ M. McCormick, «Where do trading towns come from?».

⁵⁴ P. Delogu, «Rome in the ninth century».

⁵⁵ R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, *San Vincenzo Maggiore and its Workshops*, London, 2011.

⁵⁶ A. Rovelli, «Coins and trade in early medieval Italy», *Early Medieval Europe*, 17.1 (2009), p. 45-76.

⁵⁷ Cf. R. Santangeli-Valenzani, «Abitare a Roma nell'alto medioevo», in *Roma dall'antichità al medioevo II: contesti tardoantichi e altomedievali*, eds. L. Paroli, L. Venditelli, Milan, 2004, p. 41-59.

⁵⁸ N. Christie, C. Daniels, «Santa Cornelia: the Excavation of an Early Medieval Papal Estate and a Medieval Monastery», in *Three South Etrurian Churches: Santa Cornelia, Santa Rufina and San Liberato*, London, ed. N. Christie, 1991.

⁵⁹ R. Hodges, *Light in the Dark Ages. The Rise and Fall of San Vincenzo al Volturmo*, London, 1997.

ca. 790 and ca. 850⁶⁰. During this time the ‘monastic city’ evolved from being a centre of consumption to a centre giving status to production. In the course of these sixty years an underdeveloped system of some importance in Italy eventually attained the productive capacity of a comparable Frankish or Anglo-Saxon or Danish institution by ca. 850.

The four stages are as follows:

1. Phase 3c, the 780s: the small proprietary monastery expanded to encompass 5/6 hectares.
2. Phase 4a, 792-808: a newly designed proprietary monastery focussed upon a huge new basilica, San Vincenzo Maggiore, constructed under the patronage of Grimoald III, fusing Beneventan and Carolingian palatial models. The new plan focussed upon its two axial corridors and upon administered consumption. One corridor provided access to San Vincenzo Maggiore from the palace; the other provided access to San Vincenzo Maggiore from its *claustrum*. During this time, up until about c.819, the monastery acquired many estates, most of which were in Campania though significantly some were along the Adriatic coast, mostly in northern Apulia.
3. Phase 5a, ca. 833-39: probably supported by Sicardus, Prince of Benevento, with the construction of a ring crypt in San Vincenzo Maggiore to promote a cult of relics, the monastery created facilities for welcoming minor donors for the first time. So now there were two secular entrances to the great basilica: the extant connection from the palace to San Vincenzo Maggiore, and a second, new, grandiloquent entrance for other minor visitors. At this time the monastery also built a collective workshop for producing prestige goods. Cattle now became a major component of the monastic diet. We must presume, too, that only now was the monastery accessible to pilgrims travelling from Rome to San Michele in Apulia down the Via Numidia. In short, new productive and institutional elements were incorporated in a significantly revised plan of the monastery.
4. Phase 5a2, ca. 842-48: enhanced status was given to minor donors. First, a new, more welcoming entrance was made for minor donors. Second, the

⁶⁰ See R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, *San Vincenzo Maggiore*; also R. Hodges (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturno 1: the 1980-86. Excavations part 1*, London, 1993; R. Hodges (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturno 2: the 1980-86. Excavations part 2*, London, 1995; J. Mitchell, I.L. Hansen (eds), *San Vincenzo al Volturno 3: the Finds from the 1980-86 Excavations*. Spoleto, 2001; K. Bowes, K. Francis, R. Hodges (eds), *From Text to Territory. Excavations and Surveys in the Monastic Terra (San Vincenzo al Volturno 4)*, London, 2006.

workshop was now re-designed to be managed by an official, in all likelihood a chamberlain. The chamberlain himself had his own staircase entry into the great basilica, San Vincenzo Maggiore, such was his institutional importance. With these changes, the monastery was placing greater emphasis upon the cult of relics to win support for itself as its principal royal donors who evidently played an increasingly marginal role in sustaining the monastery. Output from the workshops was apparently considered more important. These included enamels, fine metalwork and bonework. We propose that these products were counter-gifts, creating gift-giving cycles with minor donors drawn to support this monastery by its cult of relics. At this time more Campanian pottery occurs at San Vincenzo al Volturno, though like the Adriatic Sea hilltop site of Santa Maria in Civita, at least 50% of the pottery is red-painted ware⁶¹. Meanwhile, in the monastic *terra* new churches were built, laying the framework for future *incastellamento*⁶². In sum, the monastery had shifted in the arc of sixty years from an emphasis entirely upon consumption to one in which production was increasingly becoming a key instrument in its survival.

The importance of this sequence perhaps should not be overstated until similar estate centres have been excavated in Italy. But, just like the monetary history described by Rovelli⁶³, the sequence provides a series of benchmarks, not so different from the well-known Tuscan hilltop settlement sequence devised by Riccardo Francovich and Marco Valenti⁶⁴ that attests to the growing adaptation to previously north European concepts during the course of the first half of the 9th century.

One last thought, comparing San Vincenzo and the central-place at Tissø, Denmark may seem like chalk and cheese⁶⁵. Tissø is an aristocratic site with an unusually high density of buildings and evidence for extensive resource consumption in the form of many metal finds. Its evolution from the 6th to the 11th

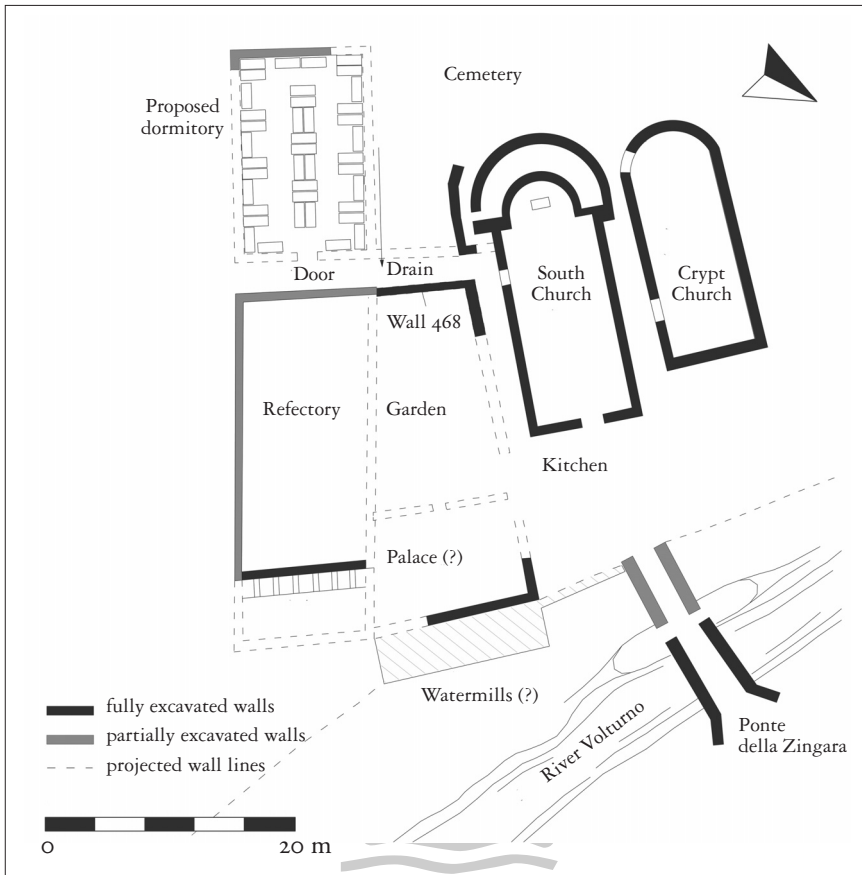
⁶¹ R. Hodges, G. Barker, K. Wade, «Excavations at D85 (Santa Maria in Civita): an early medieval hilltop settlement in Molise», *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 48 (1980), p. 70-124.

⁶² K. Bowes, K. Francis, R. Hodges (eds), *From Text to Territory*, p. 44-45.

⁶³ A. Rovelli, «Coins and trade».

⁶⁴ R. Francovich, R. Hodges, *Villa to Village*, London, 2003; M. Valenti, *L'Insemediamento Altomedievale nelle Campagne Toscane. Paesaggi. Popolamento e Villaggi tra VI e X secoli*, Florence, 2004; M. Valenti, *Miranduolo in alta val di Merse*.

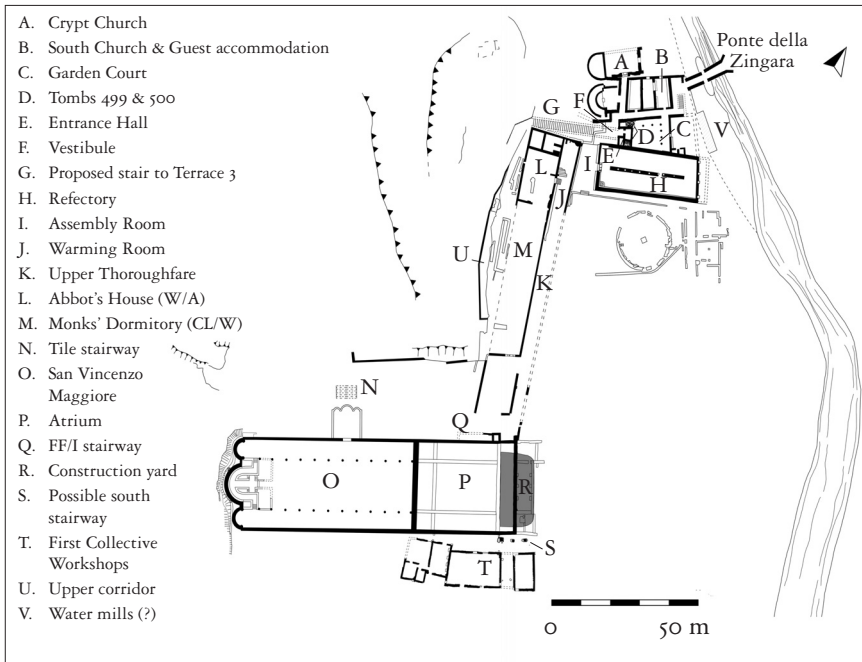
⁶⁵ L. Jørgensen, «Manor and market at Lake Tissø in the sixth to eleventh centuries: the Danish 'productive' sites», in *Markets in Early Medieval Europe. Trading and 'Productive' sites, 650-850*, eds. T. Pestell, K. Ulmschneider, Bollington, 2003, p. 175-207.



2. Map of San Vincenzo al Volturno, phase 3c.

centuries is often seen as an index of the accumulation of increasing political authority in western Scandinavia. Furthermore, its excavator draws a convincing parallel between its architectural form and its activities in the 9th century and a Carolingian *Pfalz* such as the imperial palace at Aachen⁶⁶. By contrast, San Vincenzo's 9th-century topographic history reveals a process of successive investment intended to reverse a regional collapse that began in this region in the mid 6th century. Underpinning the purposes of this succession of plans is a larger European political context, interpreted by the Abbot of San Vincenzo

⁶⁶ L. Jørgensen, «Manor and market at Lake Tissø», p. 204-7; cf. J. Staecker, «The concepts of *imitatio* and *translatio*: perceptions of a Viking-Age past», *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 38 (2005), p. 3-28.



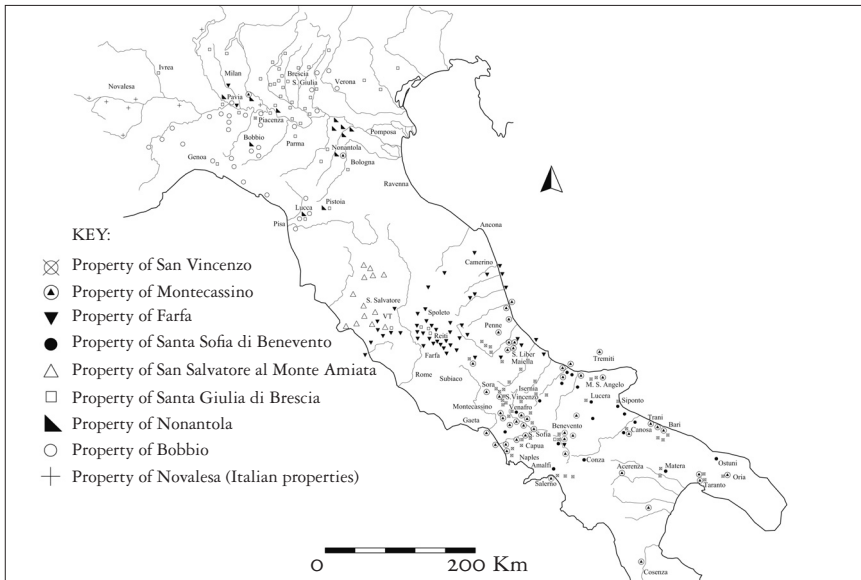
3. Map of San Vincenzo al Volturno, phase 4.

through the prism of his Beneventan background just as the aristocrat at Tissø instructed his Danish architects in his *imitatio* of a Frankish *Pfalz*.

As the Danes of Jutland were adapting to a changing relationship with the Carolingians⁶⁷, so from ca. 790-806 the Beneventans were resisting continual Byzantine incursions into southern Italy while remaining vigilant towards any Carolingian intervention in their affairs⁶⁸. Then a quarter-century of stasis occurred. From ca. 830 onwards, if not before, as the Danish relations with the Carolingians deteriorated, far to the south the Beneventans were engulfed in civil war, a key issue being control of increased commerce and revenues located in Campania. San Vincenzo's building history and concomitant evolving economic strategy, in other words, were not divorced from the geo-politics of the central Mediterranean. Its craftsmen were probably Beneventans, possibly with Byzantine training. But by the 830s it was acquiring small

⁶⁷ Cf. A. S. Dobat, «Danevirke revisited: an investigation into military and socio-political organisation in South Scandinavia (c.AD 700 to 1000)», *Medieval Archaeology*, 52 (2008), p. 27-67; cf. J. Staecker, «The concepts of *imitatio* and *translatio*».

⁶⁸ S. Gasparri, «Il ducato e il principato di Benevento», in *Storia del Mezzogiorno Vol.II*, eds. G. Galasso, R. Romeo, Naples, 1988, p. 83-146.



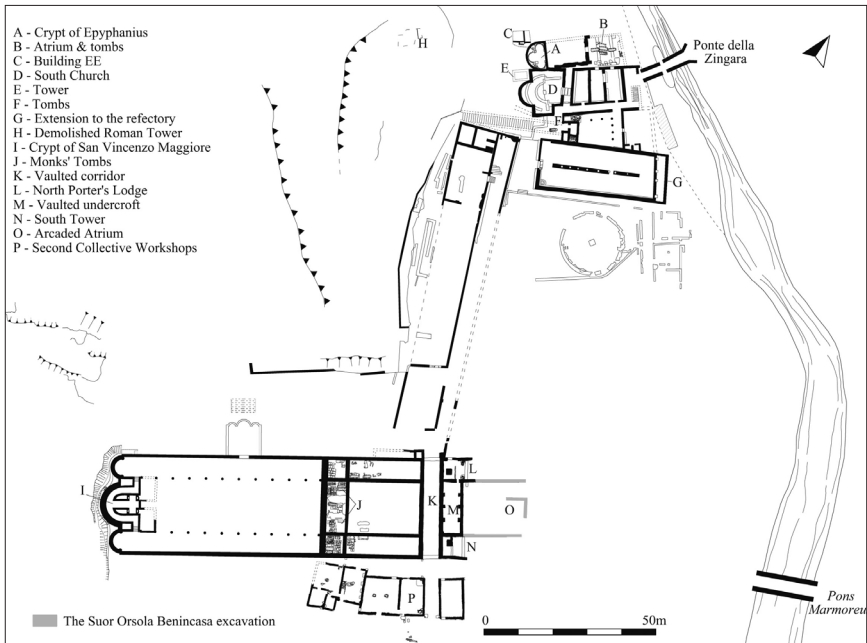
4. Map showing monastic estates in Italy c. 840 (after F. Marazzi, «San Vincenzo al Volturno tra VIII e IX secolo: il percorso della grande crescita», in F. Marazzi (ed.) *San Vincenzo al Volturno. Cultura, istituzioni, economia*, 1996, 41-92 (Monteroduni: Abbazia di Monte Cassino), Tav. 3).

amounts of Valchiavenna (Central Alpine) soapstone, presumably traded down the Po and thence southwards along the Adriatic coast by way of Comacchio⁶⁹. By this route, possibly, it obtained its sea-salt and even perhaps the two Abbasid polychrome glazed dishes found in the excavations. Globular amphorae, nonetheless, are extremely rare. Even so its political history invites us to look to the revival of Adriatic trade.

The Adriatic Sea viewed from Butrint

According to David Abulafia, "... the Adriatic Sea is a miniature Mediterranean; the Adriatic has, since the early Middle Ages, brought the inhab-

⁶⁹ H. Patterson, «The Pottery», in *San Vincenzo al Volturno 3: The Finds from the 1980-86 Excavations*, eds. J. Mitchell, I.L. Hansen, Spoleto, 2001, p. 135-72; P. Santi, F. Antonelli, A. Renzulli, «Provenance of Medieval *pietra ollare* artefacts found in archaeological sites of central-eastern Italy», *Archaeometry*, 47 (2005), p. 253-64; P. Santi, A. Renzulli, F. Antonelli, A. Alberti, «Classification and provenance of soapstones and garnet chlorite schist artifacts from Medieval sites of Tuscany (Central Italy)», *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 36 (2009), p. 2493-2501.



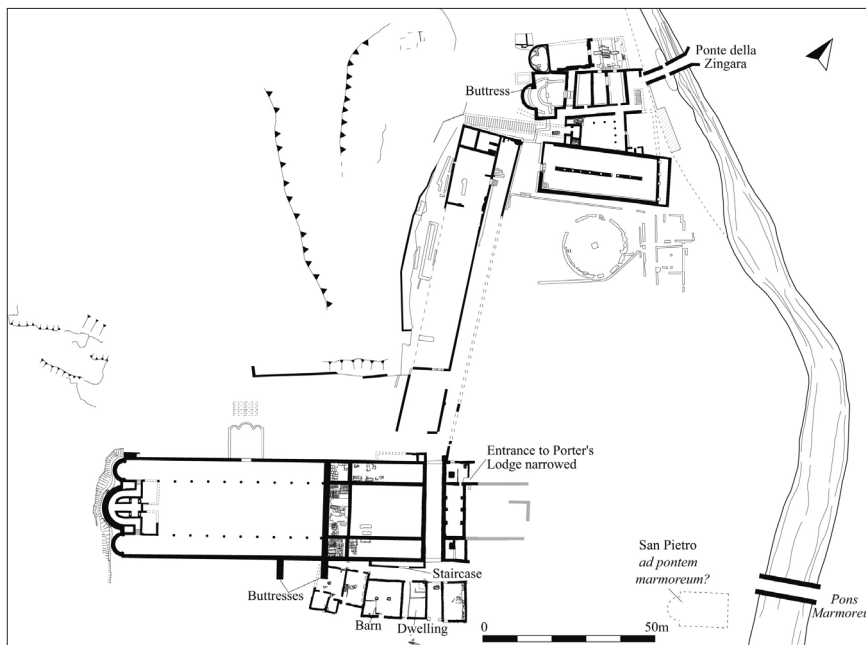
5. Map of San Vincenzo al Volturno, phase 5a1.

itants of Italy face-to-face with Slavs, Albanians, and other Balkan peoples... The Adriatic was a special theatre of operations for Venice...⁷⁰. Situated on the Straits of Corfu, at the junction to seaways leading westwards to Sicily, and northwards to Venice, the history of Butrint, ancient *Butbrotum*, serves as an index of commercial vicissitudes of the southern Adriatic region and, of course, the reach of Venice. Indeed, in the early modern period, Butrint was a Venetian bulwark in Ottoman territory on the coast of Epirus⁷¹. Like most ancient cities in the 7th century Butrint was reduced to little more than a castle. But instead of occupying the acropolis with its prominent late antique basilica, the nucleus of the first Mid Byzantine community appears to have been located in two towers in the lower city's seaward defences⁷². Vivid remains of the ground and upper floors of both towers were found, thanks to a cataclysmic fire – perhaps a sack of some kind,

⁷⁰ D. Abulafia, «Mediterraneans», in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. W.V. Harris, Oxford, 2005, p. 67.

⁷¹ A. Crowson, *Venetian Butrint*, London, Butrint Foundation, 2007; R. Hodges, *Eternal Butrint. A Unesco World Heritage Site in Albania*, London, 2006.

⁷² R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*, London, 2008.

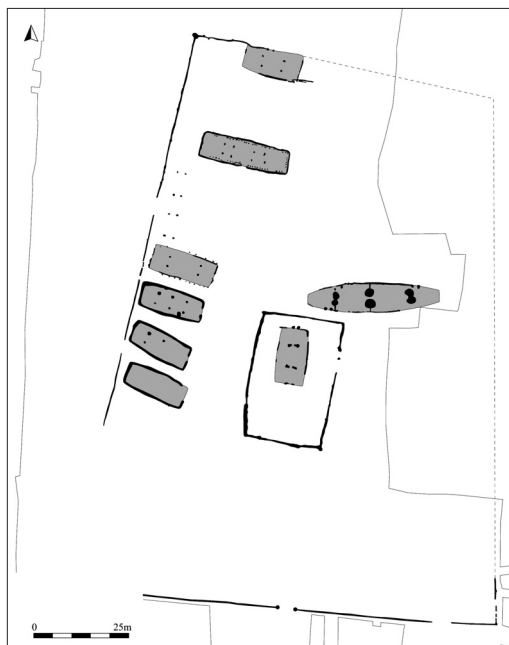


6. Map of San Vincenzo al Volturno, phase 5a2.

which engulfed them at the same time, in around AD 800. In each case, the upper floors collapsed downwards, crushing the stored contents just inside the ground-floor door. In the first tower these included a crate of glass comprising of about a 100 vessels including 69 goblets and cullet – a consignment destined for a glass-maker somewhere⁷³. The glass consignment comprised 6th- and 7th-century Venetian types; many locally made 8th-century goblets; and fragments of window glass. Next to this was a line of smashed transport amphorae from Otranto and other parts of Apulia, as well as the Aegean, perhaps Crete, and the Crimea. There were two White Ware tablewares from Constantinople and the strangest local pots, so-called Avaro-Slavic types, as well as two locally made chafing dishes and portable ovens⁷⁴.

⁷³ Cf. D. Whitehouse, «Things that travelled. The surprising case of raw glass», *Early Medieval Europe*, 12 (2003), p. 301-5.

⁷⁴ Cf. R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*; R. Hodges, J. Vroom, «Late antique and early medieval ceramics from Butrint», in *La circolazione delle ceramiche nell'Adriatico*, eds. S. Gelichi, C. Negrelli, Mantua, 2006, p. 375-88; J. Vroom, «The Medieval and Post-Medieval fine wares and cooking wares from the triconch palace and the baptistery», in *Byzantine Butrint: Excavations and Survey 1994-99*, eds. R. Hodges, W. Bowden, K. Lako, Oxford, 2004, p. 278-92.



7. Tisø in phase three, after Jorgensen 2003, fig. 15.16.

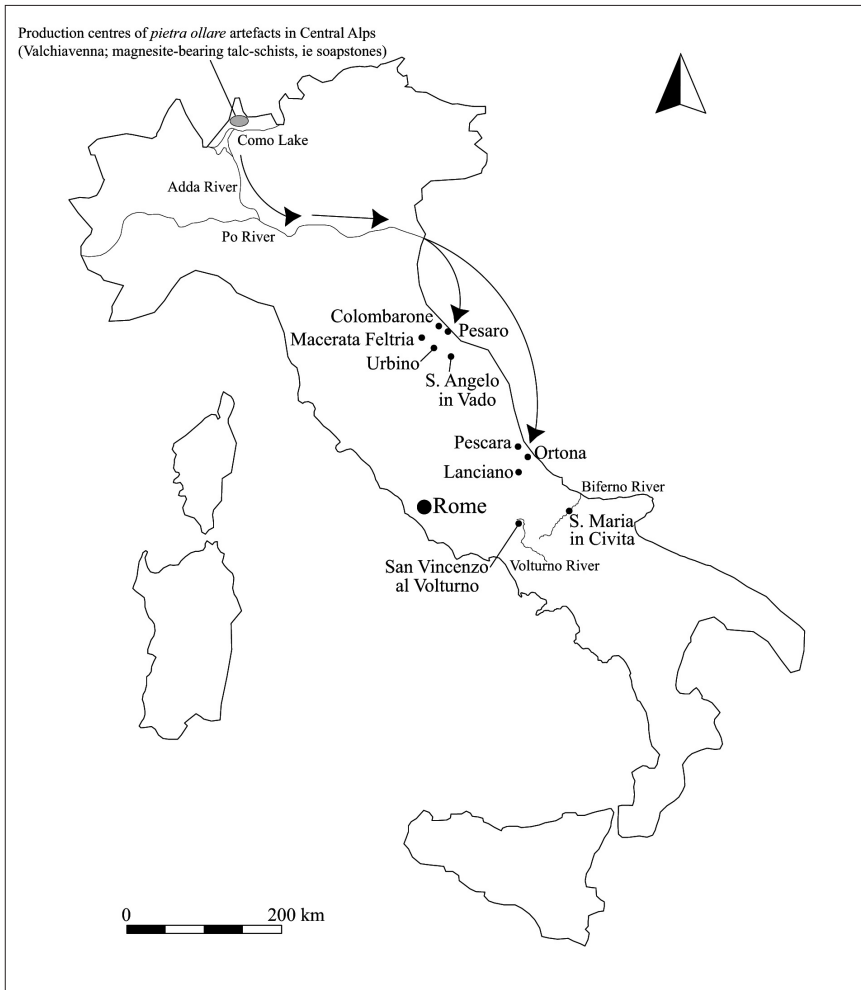
This rich assemblage emphasizes a chapter in Butrint's history when it could once more seek traded goods from as far afield as the Crimea as well as Italy. Two elements of the material culture need to be emphasized: coins are conspicuously lacking and the ceramic diversity is striking. With so many different ceramic types, it is very different from, say, an assemblage from San Vincenzo al Volturno⁷⁵. The ceramic assemblage is also very different from that discovered from its successor settlement on the Vrina Plain outside Butrint⁷⁶, or indeed, from anything as yet known from places like Corinth in Greece⁷⁷. Being in the lower city rather than on the acropolis, we can only assume the individual, perhaps Butrint's commander at the time, who occupied the tower(s) wished to have direct control over traffic plying the straits as Frankish pilgrims and travellers such as Amalarius who in 813 apparently sailed past Butrint⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, *San Vincenzo Maggiore*.

⁷⁶ See R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*.

⁷⁷ G.D.R. Sanders, «Recent developments in the chronology of Byzantine Corinth», in *Corinth: The centenary 1896-1996*, eds. C.K. Williams II, N. Bookidis, Princeton, 2003, p. 385-400.

⁷⁸ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 138-43.

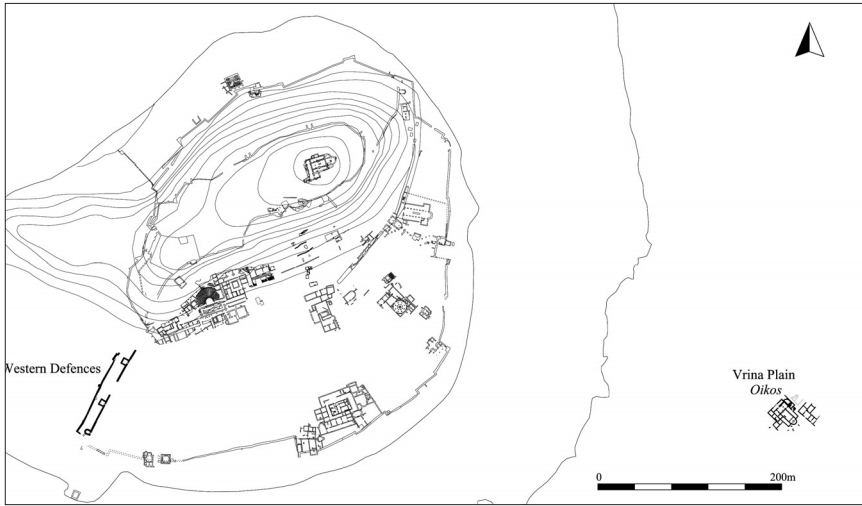


8. Soapstone distribution map.

The successor to the tower-house in Butrint has been found outside the old Late Roman fortified nucleus in the ruins of the Roman suburb on the Vrina Plain⁷⁹. Here, within an abandoned 5th-century ecclesiastical complex that in turn occupied the remains of the Roman colonial settlement⁸⁰, the

⁷⁹ R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*; S. Greenslade, R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, «Preliminary report on the Early Christian basilica on the Vrina Plain, Albania», *Archeologia Medievale*, 33 (2006), p. 397-408.

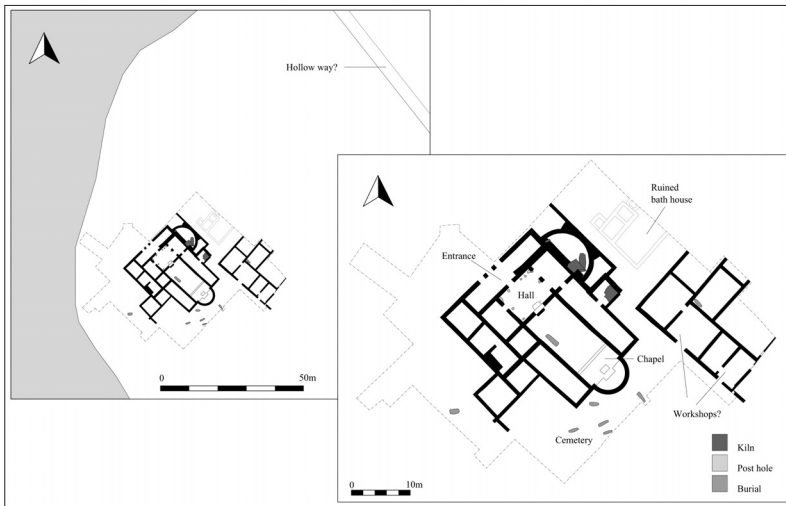
⁸⁰ Cf. I.L. Hansen, R. Hodges, *Roman Butrint. An Assessment*, Oxford, 2007.



9. Map of Butrint showing the location of the Western Defences and the Vrina Plain aristocratic *oikos*.

probable manor-house or aristocratic *oikos* was discovered⁸¹. Post-holes found within the paved narthex of the 5th-century basilica show that its upper floor was reinforced to take a new residence. Fire-blasted through the paving stones, the primitive architecture of the house cannot be understated. No less fascinating are the contemporary conditions. Its ground floor, like the areas around the church were covered in a thick deposit of black earth in which 1 silver *milaresion*, 48 bronze *folles* spanning ca. 840-950 were found as well as 5 Byzantine lead seals belonging to the same period. The black earth deposit also extended into the south aisle of the earlier church, while the north aisle, judging from hearths discovered here, was deployed as a workshop. The nave of the 5th-century basilica was made into a cemetery from the mid 9th century, graves rudely puncturing the earlier mosaic pavement. A grave with a fine copper-alloy openwork ornamental buckle accompanied one adult, perhaps the aristocrat himself. A secondary cemetery lay beyond the apse of the church included a disturbed adult associated with whom was a silver-plated horse bit. One adult appeared to have been interred with a Byzantine *folles* in his pocket. The ceramics, like the prolific coins, distinguish the culture of this household from that found in the tower at Butrint. Amphorae of a distinctive Otranto type make up

⁸¹ Cf. P. Magdalino, «The Byzantine aristocratic *oikos*», in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XII centuries*, ed. M. Angold, Oxford, 1984, p. 112-37.



10. Plan of the Vrina Plain aristocratic *oikos*, ca. 840-950.

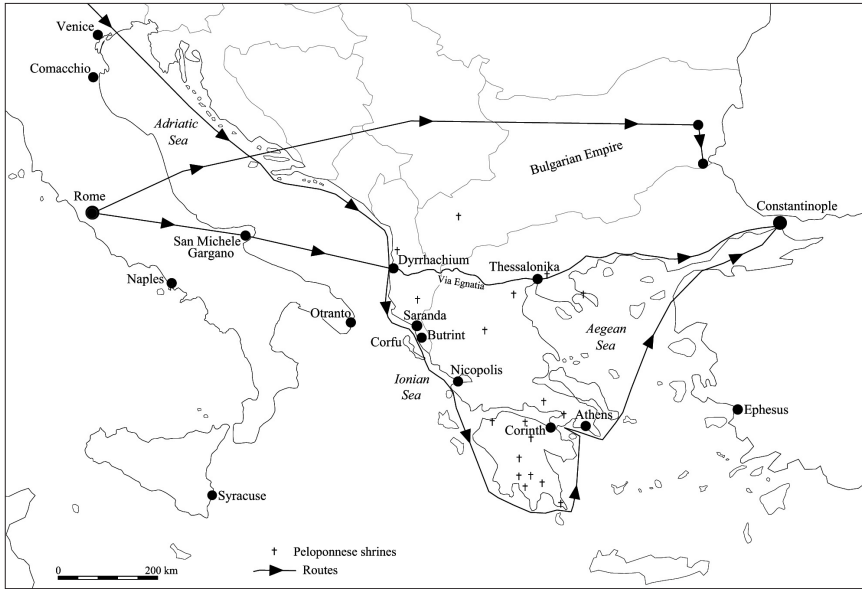
about 50 per cent of the pottery, while, local kitchen wares amount to most of the rest. The ceramics, in other words, resemble San Vincenzo's assemblage in some respects around ca. 840.

The first-floor dwelling with the associated high-status burials, occupying the monastic church, dates to the mid 9th to mid-10th centuries. The material culture shows a steady revival of trade with the heel of Italy while the ornamental metal fittings and jewellery points to far-flung Balkan connections. The coins and seals confirm the Byzantine administrative role of this household. Certainly, the material culture and art distinguishes the household from anything yet found in the large excavations in Butrint, including the towers described earlier. Was this, then, the residence of the *archon* of Vagenetia, the region opposite Corfu, whose seal has been discovered in excavations in Silistra, Bulgaria⁸²? Indeed, was this the household at Butrint (*polis epineios*) in which, according to the *Vita Eliae iunioris*, St. Elias the Younger and his companion, Daniel, were held prisoner at Butrint in 881-2, on suspicion of being Arab spies, on returning from visiting shrines in the Peloponnese⁸³?

Little more is known about Butrint as a town at this time. Arsenios of Corfu (876-953), who apparently visited Epirus to plead with Slav pirates

⁸² Cf. R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*.

⁸³ G. Rossi-Taibbi (ed. and trans.), *Vita di Sant'Elia il Giovane*, Palermo, 1962, XVI, 116 (c73), 182; cf. M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*: p. 957, no. 686.



II. Crossing the Adriatic Sea: pilgrimage routes in the 9th century.

to desist their raids, recorded that Butrint was rich in fish and oysters, with a fertile hinterland⁸⁴. Were these simple local products, like the salt Comacchio distributed throughout the Po valley, the bases of Butrint's revival as an Adriatic seaport?

In summary, then,

1. ca. AD 800 the port comprised an area concentrated upon the western defences, with a mixture of East Mediterranean and Apulian imports besides local wares and locally made glassware. This was a centre of consumption with limited evidence of production or involvement in bulk commerce.
2. ca. AD 840-950 an *oikos* was located in an unfortified open area of the old Roman suburb. Its ceramic assemblage comprised approximately 50% Otranto wares and 50% locally made wares. The coins, seals and imported globular amphorae show a marked switch of emphasis towards managed production and commerce.

⁸⁴ P. Soustal, «The historical sources for Butrint in the Middle Ages», in *Byzantine Butrint. Excavations and Survey 1994-1999*, eds. R. Hodges, W. Bowden, K. Lako, Oxford, 2004, p. 22.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this new Epirote evidence:

First, the political history of the period around AD 800 was evidently turbulent in the southern Adriatic as Byzantine authority was re-established between Patras, Cephalonia and the coast extending up to the north Adriatic, including Venice⁸⁵. Let us recall that this coincided with the Beneventan duke Grimoald III resisting Byzantine incursions in Basilicata as he provided support for the proprietary monasteries of San Vincenzo al Volturno and Montecassino to stabilize northern territories that Pope Leo I sought to annex⁸⁶.

Second, half a century later Butrint was plainly an untroubled open community with a lead seal and plentiful low-value coins initially issued at Syracuse in Sicily⁸⁷. Whether 9th-century Butrint was a response to the rise of Sicilian commerce or simply a part of a larger central Mediterranean economic revival remains to be established. Nevertheless, these indices of Byzantine economic revival intriguingly first occur at Butrint just as three Byzantine seals belonging to ambassador Theodosius, head of the Byzantine armoury and military recruiting office, appear in Danish territory at Haithabu, Ribe and Tissø (in ca. AD 840-1)⁸⁸. Might these seals in Denmark, Shepherd cautiously speculates, reflect a somewhat greater interest of the Byzantine government in new markets and new lands⁸⁹? Is not the same question true for the Vrina Plain aristocratic *oikos* at Butrint? This Epirote manorial settlement belongs to the moment the cult of saints became singularly significant at San Vincenzo al Volturno – as pilgrimage passing from Apulia southwards increased markedly – while concurrently the Beneventan monastery placed more emphasis upon being a production centre. Many of those pilgrims will have departed the Italian coast and sailed southwards through the Straits of Corfu heading for shrines in the Peloponnese and the Holy Land⁹⁰. The archaeology of these two centres at Butrint – the earlier one inside the old town, the later one in its suburb –

⁸⁵ F. Curta, «Barbarians in Dark-Age Greece: Slavs or Avars», in *Civitas Divino-Humana. In Honorem Annorem LX Georgii Bakalov*, eds. T. Stepanov, V. Vachkova, Sofia, 2004, p. 513-50; F. Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500-1250*, Cambridge, 2006.

⁸⁶ Cf. R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, *San Vincenzo Maggiore*.

⁸⁷ Cf. C. Morriçon, «La Sicile byzantine: une lueur dans les siècles obscures», *Quaderni ticinesi di numismatica e antichità classiche*, 27 (1998), p. 307-34.

⁸⁸ J. Shepherd, «The Rhos guests of Louis the Pious», *Early Medieval Europe*, 4 (1995), p. 41-60; L. Jørgensen, «Manor and market at Lake Tissø», p. 203.

⁸⁹ J. Shepherd, «The Rhos guests of Louis the Pious», p. 55.

⁹⁰ Cf. M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 197-210.

separated by half a century could not be more different, just as the archaeology of the first and fourth stages of the San Vincenzo al Volturno sequence, described above, differ significantly during exactly this same era.

The importance of Comacchio

The discovery of well-dated stratigraphic levels at Comacchio begs many questions that reach into the heart of Frankish Europe, as well as across the long breadth of the Adriatic Sea. The emporium at Comacchio appears to belong to precisely the same timeframe as the emporia around the North Sea. But if this is the case, why are we not identifying the intensification and transformation of its rural hinterland? Or is that rural context simply limited to the Po valley at the heart of the Lombard kingdom?

Or could there be another issue here? Following Karl Polanyi, the emporia may be divided into two different functional forms:

1. Those where buyers are absent but sellers are resident.
2. Those where buyers are resident, but which sellers visit for varying lengths of time⁹¹.

As Sauro Gelichi has pointed out, Comacchio (like Venice) resembles Dorestad and Quentovic, not Hamwic and Ribe⁹². It is, in other words, a place where buyers are probably absent and where sellers are resident. Quite conceivably, given these parallels, it had some type of autonomy or concession to operate on behalf of the Lombards. If so, its traders were middlemen handling traded goods. Its ceramics, in other words, reflect bulk traded goods as well as those utensils employed by the people of Comacchio. Unlike Hamwic or Lundenwic, then, these were not pots brought by foreign traders who used these while they remained in the port⁹³.

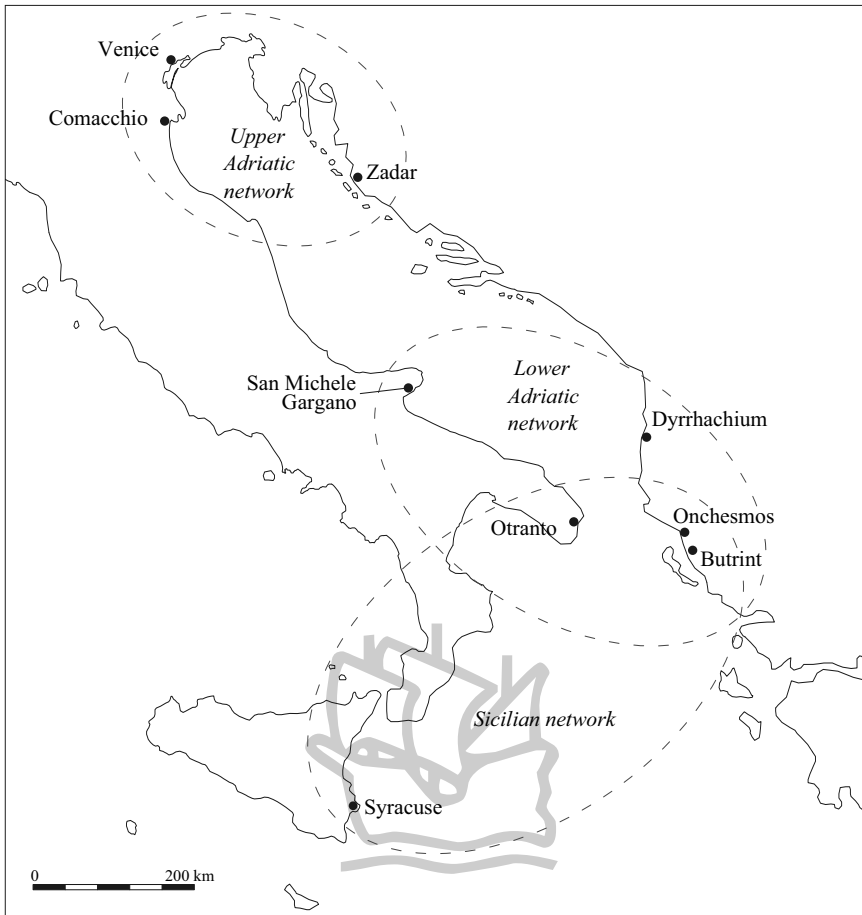
So from this premise, given the archaeology of San Vincenzo al Volturno and Butrint, what exactly can we infer from the archaeology of Comacchio?

1. Byzantine trade from the east Mediterranean was highly focussed in the Adriatic at emporia such as Comacchio. The Crimean and other Mediterranean wares at Butrint show contact but an apparent absence of bulk goods. In other words, this was administered or directed with ships trav-

⁹¹ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, p. 24; J. Lie, «Embedding Polanyi's Market Society», *Sociological Perspectives*, 34 (1991), p. 219-35.

⁹² S. Gelichi, «Flourishing places in north-eastern Italy».

⁹³ Cf. R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, p. 91-93; L. Blackmore, «The origins and growth of *Lundenwic*».



12. Adriatic Sea trade networks.

elling from point A in Byzantium to Comacchio, perhaps collecting cargoes as *cabotage* en route as had been the tradition since the Bronze Age Uluburan ship⁹⁴, and is certainly manifested in the cargoes of the Yassi Ada (ca. AD 625)⁹⁵ and later Serçe Limani (ca. AD 1025)⁹⁶ wrecks.

2. Adriatic Sea trade before AD 840 appears to be limited to centres of consumption. Otranto wares, for example, are few in north Italy. Alpine

⁹⁴ C. Pulak, «The Uluburan shipwreck: an overview», *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 27 (1998), p. 188-224.

⁹⁵ G.F. Bass, F.H. van Doorninck, *Yassi Ada*, College Station, 1982.

⁹⁶ G. Bass, *et al.*, *Serçe Limani: an eleventh-century shipwreck*, College Station, 2004.

soapstone does not occur in Otranto until the 10th century. Compared to the voluminous Norwegian trafficking of soapstones and whetstones traded via Kaupang⁹⁷, the distribution of 9th-century Alpine soapstone down the Adriatic sea coast⁹⁸ appears to be directed to elite centres such as Santa Maria in Civita and San Vincenzo (in Beneventum) on a tiny scale.

3. The archaeology of Butrint suggests two very different stages in Adriatic Sea commerce: first, directed or administered trade to the *kastron* located in the Western Defences in the late 8th century; second, after ca. 840 in the *oikos* on the Vrina Plain, the receipt of bulk quantities of Otranto-type wares, including transport amphorae, probably associated with an administered but periodic trade of fish here. In other words, the southern Adriatic Sea was establishing an active commercial network that appears to have encompassed Syracuse in the west – a Byzantine Sicilian network including Malta⁹⁹ that was in some ways a forerunner of the more substantive south Adriatic network that ultimately lead to the re-establishment of Butrint as a town around 1025¹⁰⁰.

Now, this chronology is intriguing. It suggests that Comacchio was involved in an administered trade to specific points, functioning perhaps as a centre for middlemen who traded around the northern extent of the Adriatic Sea as well as perhaps up the river network criss-crossing north Italy. But, equally, the economic limitations of this strategy are evident when the *kastron* at Butrint is compared, for example, with a contemporary Danish estate centre such as Tissø. In short, much of the central Mediterranean was hugely underdeveloped and under-populated by comparison with, for example, Francia, Anglo-Saxon England, or western Scandinavia. Comacchio was, therefore, more important as an emporium than its material presence suggests because it represented an administered connection between largely closed Mediterranean worlds. The change, of course, came when the vigilant Charlemagne struck a deal with the Venetians in 812. This was surely a well-conceived plan, following the defeat of the Avars and the ground-breaking Council of Frankfurt in the previous decade, to find a more effective way of reaching out to the eastern Mediterranean. Surely the treaty with the Venetians was conceived as an alternative that might be better controlled than the established, if small-scale, Ab-

⁹⁷ S.M. Sindbæk, «Stone-trade», in *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe, Vol. 1*, eds. J. Graham-Campbell with M. Valor, Aarhus, 2007, p. 310-11.

⁹⁸ P. Santi, F. Antonelli, A. Renzulli, «Provenance of Medieval *pietra ollare* artefacts».

⁹⁹ C. Morrisson, «La Sicile Byzantine»; B. Bruno, *Roman and Byzantine Malta. Trade and Economy*, Sta Venera, Malta, 2009, p.189-92

¹⁰⁰ R. Hodges, *The Rise and Fall of Byzantine Butrint*, p. 79-91.

basid-Scandinavian route through western Russia that had existed since the 780s. By 812, we might speculate, the Franks were well aware that too many Scandinavian stakeholders were now drawing down upon the imported resources that were needed to sustain the high level of consumption of the palace and monastic cultures of Francia from ca. 780. Certainly, by altering the balance of power, and as McCormick has shown¹⁰¹, with an eye on potential oriental traffic, the status quo of all the communities around the Adriatic Sea changed forever. Its implications, though, were far-reaching. So, the Frankish monastic model of 780s implemented in central Italy at San Vincenzo al Volturno around 800 was soon an anachronism. A major donor simply could not or would not sustain such a place. A new economic strategy was required.

Increasingly, then, it was the adoption of new strategies in the age of Louis the Pious, when the Byzantine, Theodosius, visited Mainz as an ambassador, and then Denmark¹⁰², that marks a shift in the economic investment in the Adriatic Sea region. The Franks and Byzantines, it appears, were exploring new forms of cooperation that actively involved the Venetians in 840, who were trying to destroy the Arabs who had seized Taranto.

Comacchio, then, belongs to a critical phase in the transition period that separates Late Antiquity from the high Carolingian age. In this highly controlled, consumption economy, Comacchio was of exceptional importance. In some ways it was a weathervane. Its rise marks the need for prestige goods in Lombard courts and monasteries. Its extinction marks the moment when the Carolingians introduced their new economic thinking and Lombard communities adapted themselves to a Frankish dominated Europe.

So, reflecting upon the three models for European economic development – those of McCormick, Wickham and Callmer – it appears to me that there is much to commend a thesis that takes account of all three. The trade model has perhaps been overstated and there is much still to be understood about the relationship between agrarian and craft production. Clearly, too, traders and craftsmen were critical agents in the shift from a highly personalized consumption economy administered by the elite, towards a society with embedded production at all levels. But innovation is risky. Individuals will only take risks where there is a chance of improving their status. Hence, a compelling case exists for a top-down development of risk, first in the later 7th century, then in the 790s, then again in the 840s, as leaders removed any

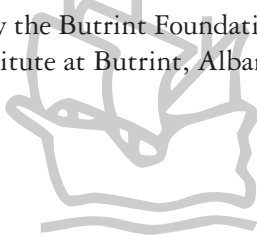
¹⁰¹ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*; M. McCormick, «Where do trading towns come from?»; note, though, F. Curta, «East central Europe», *Early Medieval Europe*, 12 (2003), p. 283-91.

¹⁰² J. Shepherd, «The Rhos guests of Louis the Pious».

negative stigma attached to differences and innovation. In this way, across a comparatively small and under-populated landmass, by Asian standards, the political elite took risks and made a lasting impact¹⁰³. Thus, notwithstanding the boldness of the Comacchian traders, it was their counterparts active in the North Sea zone that had been the epicentre of commerce, rural investment and, since the 780s, substantive trade with the caliph and beyond. And, it was this spirit of entrepreneurship which ultimately gave stimulus to the end of Comacchio and the rise of Venice.

Acknowledgements

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¹⁰³ J.A. Goldstone, «Cultural orthodoxy, risk and innovation: the divergence of East and West in the Early Modern World», *Sociological Theory*, 5 (1987), p. 133.