

Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic

Although often mentioned in textbooks about the Carolingian and Byzantine empires, the Treaty of Aachen has not received much close attention. This volume attempts not just to fill the gap, but to view the episode through both micro- and macro-lenses. Introductory chapters review the state of relations between Byzantium and the Frankish realm in the eighth and early ninth centuries, crises facing Byzantine emperors much closer to home, and the relevance of the Bulgarian problem to affairs on the Adriatic. Dalmatia's coastal towns and the populations of the interior receive extensive attention, including the region's ecclesiastical history and cultural affiliations. So do the local politics of Dalmatia, Venice and the Carolingian marches, and their interaction with the Byzantino-Frankish confrontation. The dynamics of the Franks' relations with the Avars are analysed and, here too, the three-way play among the two empires and 'in-between' parties is a theme. Archaeological indications of the Franks' presence are collated with what the literary sources reveal about local elites' aspirations. The economic dimension to the Byzantino-Frankish competition for Venice is fully explored, a special feature of the volume being archaeological evidence for a resurgence of trade between the Upper Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean from the second half of the eighth century onwards.

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**Byzantium, the Carolingians
and the Treaty of Aachen (812)**

**Edited by Mladen Ančić,
Jonathan Shepard and Trpimir Vedriš**

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Preface

Although often featuring in textbooks about the Carolingian and Byzantine empires, the Treaty of Aachen has not received very much close attention from western medievalists, Byzantinists or Slavists. This is surprising, given that it marks the climax of a series of confrontations, armed conflicts and intensive negotiations involving the papacy and local elites in northern Italy and the Upper Adriatic, Dalmatia (a term deriving from the ancient Roman province, encompassing the coast and the hinterland of the north-eastern Adriatic) and the Middle Danube region, as well as the Frankish and the Byzantine leaderships. And although the treaty's text has not survived, and tensions between Byzantine and Frankish rulers were not eliminated, the treaty represents a milestone in the establishment of legitimate Carolingian hegemony in the west. This volume, the fruits of a conference held in Zadar in September 2012, makes an attempt not just to fill the gap in scholarship but to view the episode from all possible angles, political, diplomatic, military, economic and cultural. A mixture of veteran and younger scholars were enlisted for this task so as to draw upon several other disciplines besides general history and to present in the English language important work done by Central and Eastern European scholars.

Introductory chapters review the state of relations between Byzantium and the Frankish realm in the eighth and early ninth centuries, comparing them with international relations in modern times and setting them in the context of western *aemulatio imperii* and the problems facing Byzantine emperors much closer to home (see the chapters by Shepard, Ančić, Majnarić, Sophoulis). One theme of these and subsequent chapters is the relevance of the Bulgar problem to Byzantium's general interest in the Upper Adriatic (Nikolov, Ziemann). This is why the populations of the coastal towns of the old Roman province of Dalmatia along with those of the interior receive extensive attention, with coverage of the ecclesiastical history and of the cultural affiliations of the townsmen and the various inland elites (Skoblar, Cerno, Dzino, Betti, Komatina, Basić, Vedriš). Some chapters focus on the local politics or the local and long-range commerce of Dalmatia, Venice and the Carolingian marches and the interaction of these with the high politics of the Byzantino-Frankish confrontation (Gelichi, Štih, Budak): individuals and families could raise their status by aligning with one side or another, while established regimes might feel themselves threatened. The Franks' relations with the Avars are analysed in detail and, here too, the three-way play between the

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two empires and ‘in-between’ parties is a theme. Archaeological, sculptural and other material indications of the Franks’ presence in Dalmatia and the Middle Danube are reviewed (Szóke, Gračanin, Takács). The economic dimension to the Byzantino-Frankish contest for Venice is fully explored, a special feature being the archaeological evidence for a resurgence of trade between the Upper Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean from the second half of the eighth century onwards. Thus the diplomatic exchanges between Constantinople and Aachen and the intermittent bouts of armed conflict are set within the broader background of shifting local allegiances and an economic upswing.

The end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries was, then, a turning-point at several levels and, in an era of experiment, fragmentation and flux, the image of a spinning compass needle would perhaps be more apt. The careers and changing alignments of Slav warlords like Liudewit in Pannonia and churchmen like Fortunatus of Grado epitomise this, while the problems of attribution of ciboria in that town and of assessing the significance of swords and other Frankish weaponry and Byzantine coins found in Pannonian and Dalmatian soil offer material evidence of this. This volume aims to shed light on the periphery of two political systems, namely the otherwise neglected region between the eastern Adriatic and the Middle Danube. Setting out the problems, it illuminates the multiple processes underway when a variety of communities and cultures find themselves confronting one another, some entering the historical stage for the first time. Such a kaleidoscope does not lend itself to a ‘grand narrative’, let alone to an overarching synthesis. But it could be that markers have been laid down here for further interdisciplinary work on the Upper Adriatic and Middle Danube regions and even for a more nuanced history of early medieval Europe in general. And narratives of the main events and issues in the run-up to the making of the Treaty of Aachen are offered in such contributions as those by Mladen Ančić and Daniel Ziemann and in other chapters in the first two parts, while the limitations of our knowledge about key topics like the collapse of the Avar khaganate are shown by Miklós Takács’ chapter.

Such interdisciplinary work inevitably poses a veritable minefield of questions for the editors to answer. How should we style names? Should we quote in the original language or should we transliterate? And if so, how? Is it helpful to offer a translation of article or book titles when no such translation of the work itself is available? Answering such questions is never easy and invites accusations of inconsistency – or worse. We have tried to make this volume clear and accessible primarily to an English-speaking audience and to non-specialists in the history, art and archaeology of the early medieval southern Slavs, Franks and Byzantines. This has led us to some broad brushwork and possibly controversial decisions. First and foremost, the styling of the very treaty itself: as Mladen Ančić notes in his chapter (below, 34 n. 1), western medievalists have tended to fight shy of styling the ‘Treaty of Aachen’ as anything more concrete than a series of negotiations or possibly a *pactum*. We have bitten the bullet and call it a treaty. An agreement was, after all, set out in writing, ratified by two powers claiming fully legitimate authority over a disputed area and followed up by negotiations concerning some of its territorial details a few years later. Since the text does not survive, we have to infer its contents from the Frankish annals; Byzantine chronicles

are (characteristically) silent about this, as about most other events in the empire's relations with western potentates. This does not make the formal agreement any less of a treaty. Other issues of terminology include the use of Bulgars rather than Bulgarians up to their Christianization around 864; and Croats become Croatians from the early ninth century, with the formation of what eventually became the kingdom of Croatia. We have also styled as Abodrites the West Slavs who lived in northern Germany in what is today Mecklenburg and Holstein, and as Obodrites the tribe mentioned by the *Annales regni Francorum* in 822–824 (*Praedenecenti*) as living close to the Danube in Dacia. We have also tried to be consistent when styling the leaders of the Venetians (as doges), of the Franks (as dukes) and of local Slav groupings (as *duces*). Colleagues who specialize in any of the fields we range into and perhaps trample upon may, understandably, be uncomfortable with such an approach. For this, we can but plead that these fields are now a little more open to comparison and to exploration.

We have tried to ensure that frequently cited proper names and technical terms are consistent and comprehensible. Greek forms of proper names have generally been adopted – Porphyrogenetos instead of Porphyrogenitus, for example – after c. 500; place names have generally been left untouched unless a familiar English form exists – Athens not Athenai. Some names in the present-day Balkans and Asia Minor appear in their current form when the author is guiding the reader through reference to present-day locations. Because the places and territories under discussion are at the point of so many overlapping circles, they tend to have many names. We have provided a short list of Alternative Place Names at the back of the volume (316–18) to help orient the reader and to prevent overloading the text. Thus the reader will find 'Serdika' in the text; but reference to the table at the back will show the alternative forms and spellings encountered elsewhere, including Sardika, Serdica and Sofia.

With a few exceptions, we have transliterated quotations and book titles in Greek, Bulgarian and other Slavonic languages using a modified version of the Library of Congress system for Cyrillic. We have tried to avoid long quotations in the original language, preferring an English translation – unless the passage is the subject of detailed textual analysis. Translations are mostly by our authors unless otherwise specified in the endnote. Given the scarcity of sources for the early history of the Upper Adriatic, some are discussed by more than one of our authors, and so the reader will find different interpretations – and sometimes translations – in the book.

The reader will find a short Glossary at the end of the volume. This does not aim to be exhaustive, and when possible, we have tried to explain technical terms or foreign words in the text. The maps at the start of the book should help to orient the reader and locate some of the key places and areas mentioned by our authors. Absolute consistency is difficult to achieve, and readers may find modern place names alongside ancient ones. It also goes without saying that all boundaries depicted are approximate and, in some cases, highly speculative or controversial. Unless otherwise stated, tables are by the author of a given chapter.

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Preparation of an edited volume – and particularly one dealing with such a disparate range of disciplines, languages and regions – is inevitably long and sometimes tortuous. We would never have got things off the ground without editorial help from Zsuzsanna Reed at the CEU in Budapest and Nicola Sigsworth in Oxford. We would also like to thank David Cox for his superb maps. For permission to use images we owe a debt of gratitude to Roberto Arelli of Fondazione CISAM (Figs. 9.1–9.6); Dr Ante Milošević, Director of the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments, Split (Figs. 18.1, 18.3 and 18.7); Professor Joško Belamarić, Director of the Cvito Fisković Center, Institute of Art History, Split (Fig. 18.2); Dr Ante Piteša, Curator of the Medieval Department, Archaeological Museum, Split (Figs. 18.5 and 18.6); and Dr Jerica Zihnerl, Director of the Muzej-Museo Lapidarium, Novigrad-Cittanova d'Istria (Fig. 18.7).

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Finally, we would like to thank those colleagues who participated in the Zadar conference, but whose papers are published elsewhere, for the intellectual stimulus they provided; but above all, our thanks go to our authors for their enthusiastic participation in the project and for their patience and good humour in dealing with a raft of queries great and small.

Abbreviations and notes on bibliography

Each chapter is accompanied by a bibliography, broken down into primary sources (with short titles used in the endnotes) and secondary literature (using the name-date system in the endnotes). Where forenames of primary text authors are known, they are cited first: 'Niketas Choniates', not 'Choniates, Niketas'. Where a primary source appears frequently in only one chapter, this has been abbreviated within that chapter's bibliography (for example, 'AM' for 'Amalarius of Metz, *Opera liturgica*' is only found in Chapter 19). Primary sources – and a few secondary works – which are cited frequently by many of our authors appear in the endnotes in abbreviated form, but full details are given in the list of abbreviations that follows. This list also contains the titles of some journals and institutions. Well-known sources (such as the Bible and some Latin and Greek authors) are cited without full bibliographic referencing. Works published in two languages show both titles, divided by an oblique (for example: Goran Bilogrivić, 'Karolinški mačevi tipa K/Type K Carolingian Swords'). Where a summary – however brief – is known to be available in a western language, the title is shown in square brackets (for example: Béla Miklós Szöke, 'A 9. századi Nagyalföld lakosságáról [Die Bevölkerung der Großen Ungarischen Tiefebene im 9. Jahrhundert]').

AA	<i>Antichità altoadriatiche</i>
AD	Andrea Dandolo, <i>Chronica</i> , ed. Ester Pastorello, <i>Andreae Danduli Ducis Venetiarum, Chronica per extensum descripta aa. 46–1280 d.C.</i> , 9 fasc., <i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i> 12.1 (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1938–1958)
AH	<i>Acta Histriae</i>
ARF	<i>Annales regni Francorum</i> , ed. Friedrich Kurze, <i>Annales regni Francorum inde ab. a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , MGH SRG 6 (Hanover: Hahn, 1895)
ASM	Walter Pohl, <i>Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr.</i> (Munich: Beck, 1988)
AttiRovigno	<i>Atti del Centro di Ricerche Storiche Rovigno</i>
BaB	Panos Sophoulis, <i>Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831</i> (Leiden: Brill, 2012)

xx Abbreviations and notes on bibliography

<i>BB</i>	<i>Byzantinobulgarica</i>
<i>BCC</i>	<i>Bizantini, Croati, Carolingi. Alba e tramonto di regni e imperi</i> , ed. Carlo Bertelli, Gian Pietro Brogiolo et al. (Milan: Skira, 2001)
<i>BJ</i>	Ivo Goldstein, <i>Bizant na Jadranu od Justinijana I. do Bazilija I.</i> [Byzantium in the Adriatic from Justinian I to Basil I] (Zagreb: Latina et graeca – Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta, 1992)
<i>BR</i>	Warren Treadgold, <i>The Byzantine Revival, 780–842</i> (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988)
<i>BSBC</i>	Danijel Dzino, <i>Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity Transformations in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia</i> (Leiden: Brill, 2010)
<i>BSI</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>CarCh</i>	<i>Carolingian Chronicles</i> , trans. Bernhard W. Scholz and Barbara Rogers, <i>Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories</i> (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970)
<i>CCP</i>	<i>Croatica Christiana periodica</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series latina</i>
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae</i>
<i>CHBE</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492</i> , ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
<i>CISAM</i>	Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, Spoleto
<i>CodCar</i>	<i>Codex Carolinus</i> , ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, in <i>MGH EKA 1</i> (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), 469–657
<i>CTC</i>	<i>The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor</i> , trans. Cyril A. Mango, Roger Scott and Geoffrey Greatrex, <i>The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
<i>DAI</i>	Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, <i>De administrando imperio</i> , ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. Romilly J. H. Jenkins, 2nd ed., <i>CFHB 1</i> (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967)
<i>DRSV</i>	<i>Documenti relativi alla storia di Venezia anteriori al mille</i> , vol. 1: <i>Secoli V–IX</i> ; vol. 2: <i>Secoli IX–X</i> , ed. Roberto Cessi (Padua: Gregoriana, 1942; repr. Venice: Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, 1991)
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>FiF</i>	Harald Krahwinkler, <i>Friaul im Frühmittelalter: Geschichte einer Region vom Ende des fünften bis zum Ende des zehnten Jahrhunderts</i> (Vienna: Böhlau, 1992)
<i>GHI</i>	The Astronomer, <i>Life of Louis the Pious</i> , ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, in <i>MGH SS 2</i> (Hanover: Hahn, 1829),

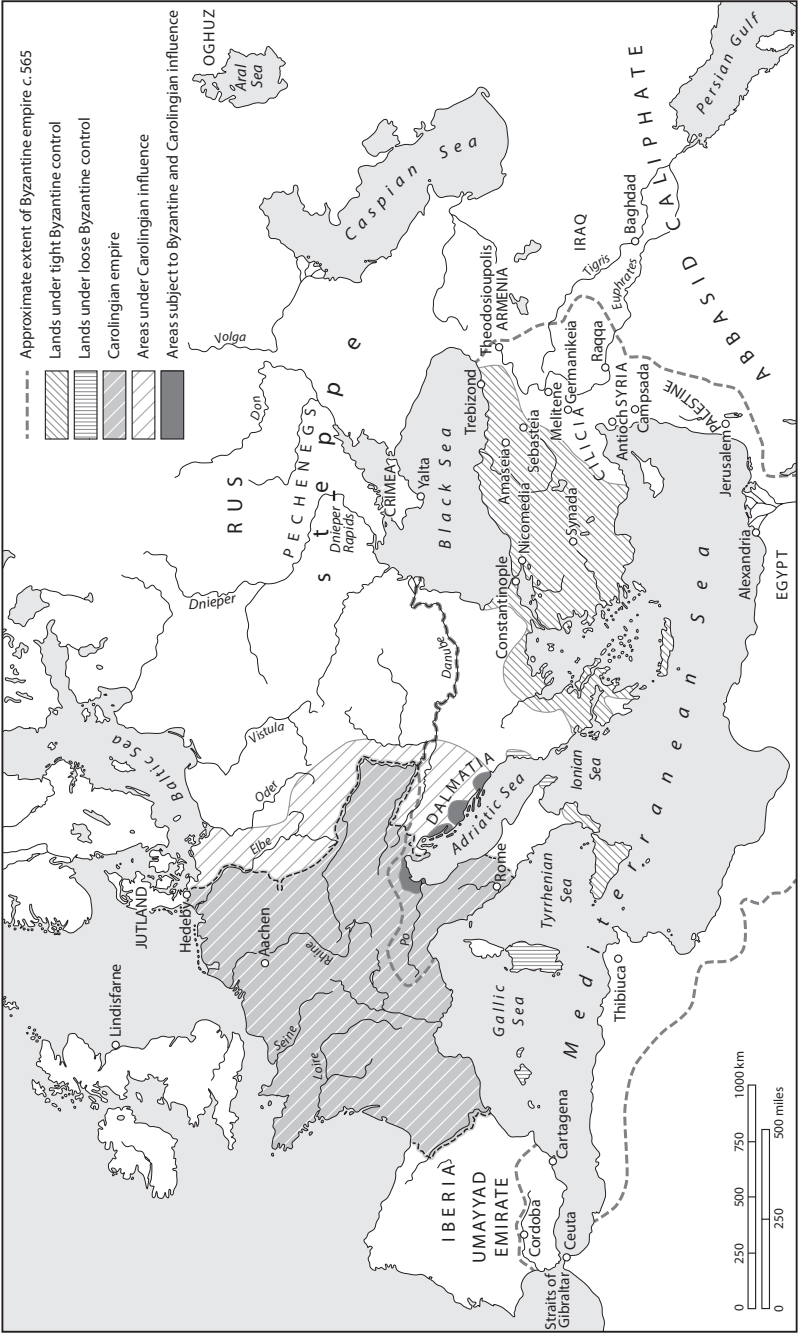
- 604–648; ed. and German trans. Ernst Tremp, in *Thegan, Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs (Gesta Hludowici imperatoris)*; *Astronomus, Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs (Vita Hludowici imperatoris)*, *MGH SRG* 64 (Hanover: Hahn, 1995), 279–555
- GZMS *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine u Sarajevu. Arheologija*
- HAM *Hortus Artium Medievalium*
- HAZU Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb
- HiK *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, vol. 1: *Rasprave i vrela*; vol. 2: *Katalog*, ed. Ante Milošević (Split: MHAS, 2000)
- JAZU Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb
- JD¹ John the Deacon, *Chronicon Venetum* [*Cronaca Veneziana*], ed. Giovanni Monticcolo, in *Cronache Veneziane antichissime, Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 9 (Rome: Istituto storico italiano, 1890), 57–171
- JD² John the Deacon, *Chronicon Venetum* [*Istoria Veneticorum*], ed. and Italian trans. Luigi A. Berto, *Giovanni Diacono, Istoria Veneticorum* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1999)
- Mansi *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Johannes D. Mansi, 31 vols (Florence: Antonio Zatta, 1759–1793; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960–1962)
- MEFRM *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen Âge*
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*; available online: <www.dmgh.de>
- MGH EKA *MGH Epistolae Karolini aevi*, 5 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892–1925)
- MGH PLAC *MGH Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, 4 vols to date (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881–)
- MGH SRG *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, 78 vols to date (Hanover: Hahn, 1871–)
- MGH SRG n.s. *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* n.s., 24 vols to date (Berlin–Weimar–Hanover: Weidmann–Hahn, 1922–)
- MGH SRLI *MGH Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* (Hanover: Hahn, 1878)
- MGH SS *MGH Scriptores*, 39 vols to date (Hanover: Hahn, 1826–)
- MHAS Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika u Splitu
- NCMH 2 *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2: c. 700–c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- ÖAW Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
- OEE Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communication and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

xxii *Abbreviations and notes on bibliography*

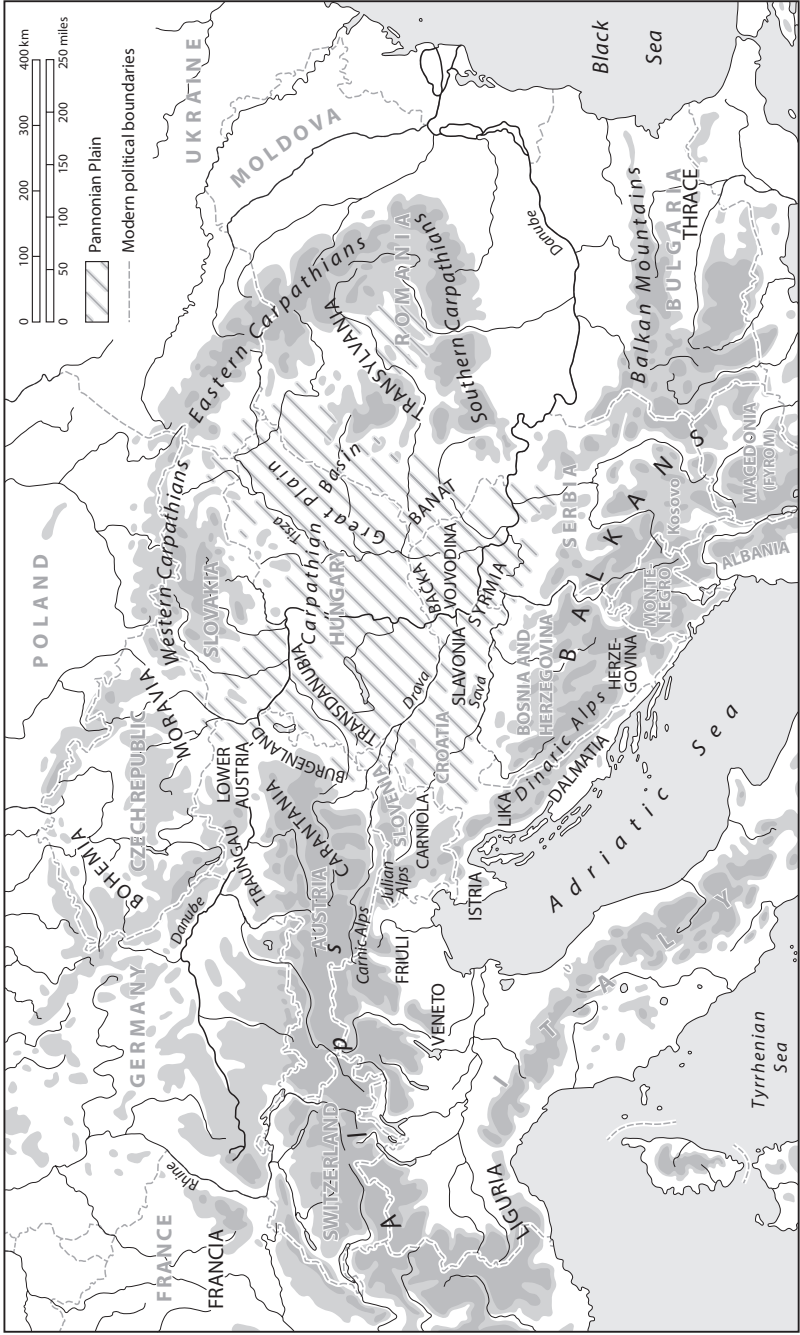
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols (Paris, 1857–1866)
PIAZ	<i>Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina</i> , ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1841–1864)
P-RT	<i>Post-Roman Towns: Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium</i> , ed. Joachim Henning, 2 vols (Berlin–New York: de Gruyter, 2007)
RadZhp	<i>Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest</i>
RÉB	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
RKK	<i>Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, 751–918</i> , ed. Johann F. Böhrmer, rev. Engelbert Mühlbacher, <i>Regesta imperii</i> 1 (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1908); available online: < www.regesta-imperii.de/regesten.html > [last accessed 8 May 2016]
SANU	Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti
SHP	<i>Starohrvatska prosvjeta</i>
SL	<i>Suidae lexicon</i> , ed. Ada Adler, 5 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1938; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967–1971); available online: < www.stoa.org/sol/ > [last accessed 16 May 2016]
SSCI	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo</i> , Spoleto
TFLAC	<i>The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians</i> , ed. Walter Pohl, Ian Wood and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2001)
Theoph.	Theophanes, <i>Chronicle</i> , vol. 1, ed. Carl de Boor, <i>Theophanis, Chronographia</i> , 2 vols (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1883–1885)
TS	Thomas of Split, <i>Historia Salonitana</i> , ed. and trans. Olga Perić, Damir Karbić, Mirjana Matijević Sokol and James Ross Sweeney, <i>Thomae Archidiaconi Spalatensis, Historia Salonitanorum atque Spalatinorum pontificum/Archdeacon Thomas of Split, History of the Bishops of Salona and Split</i> (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006)
VAHD	<i>Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku</i>
VAMZ	<i>Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu</i>
VAPD	<i>Vjesnik za arheologiju i povijest dalmatinsku</i>
VKM	Einhard, <i>Life of Charlemagne</i> , ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, <i>Vita Karoli magni</i> , MGH SRG 25 (Hanover: Hahn, 1911)
ZRVI	<i>Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta</i>

Maps

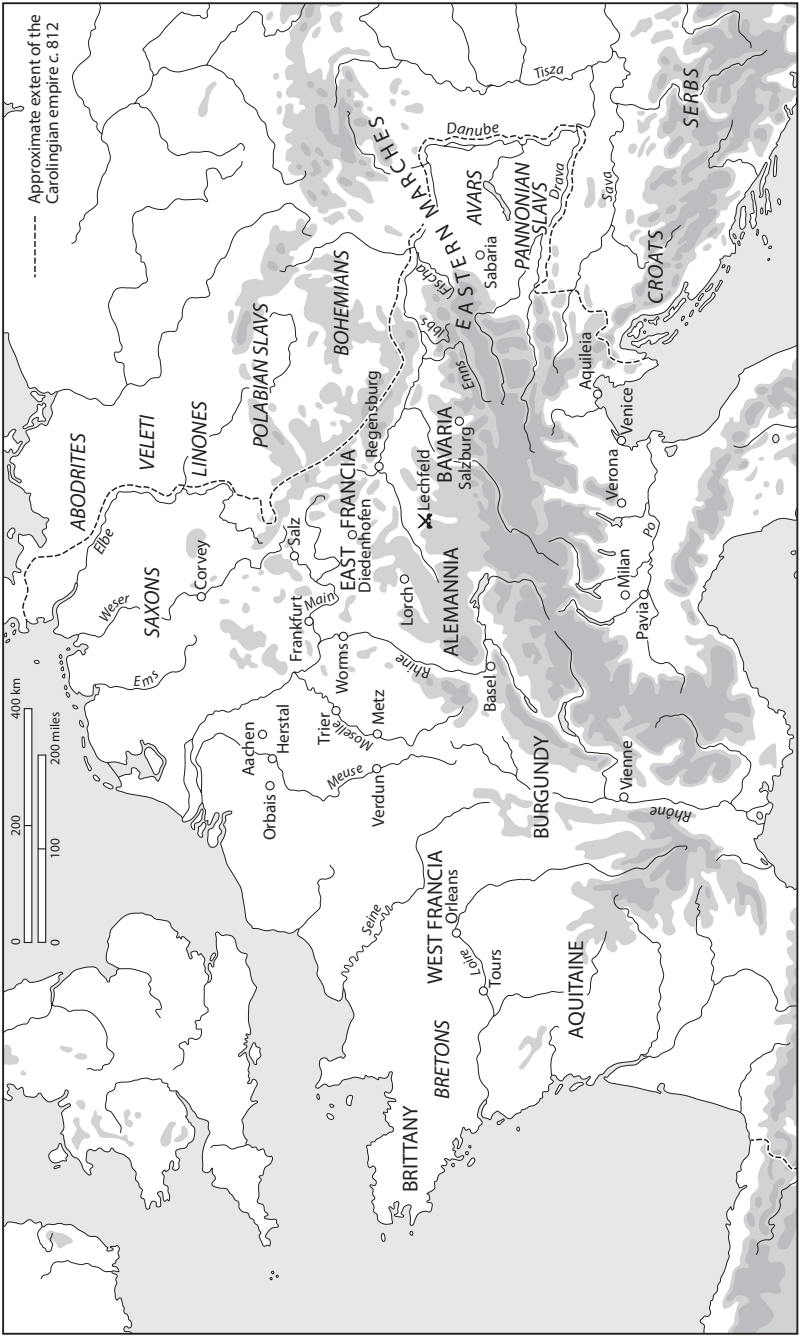
These maps are intended to help orient readers and to locate some of the key places and areas mentioned by our authors. Absolute consistency is difficult to achieve, and readers may find modern place names alongside ancient ones. It goes without saying that the historical boundaries depicted are approximate and, in some cases, highly speculative or controversial.



Map 1 The Carolingian and Byzantine worlds collide (c. 812)



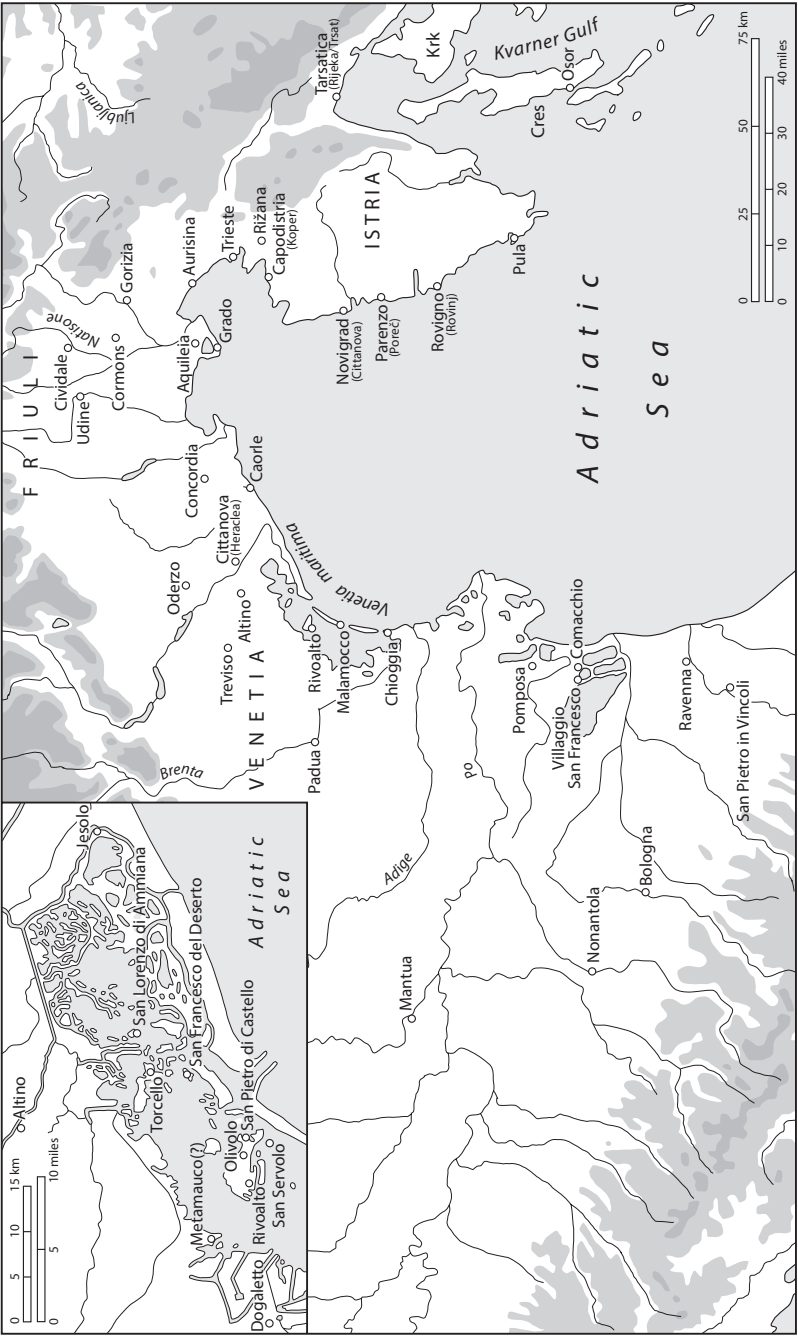
Map 2 Geography and regions, past and present



Map 3 The Frankish lands



Map 4 Pannonia, the Balkans and Byzantium, with insets showing the approximate boundaries of Roman, Late Antique and Carolingian Pannonia (although for a fuller discussion of the highly ambiguous term ‘Pannonia’, see 225–27 below)

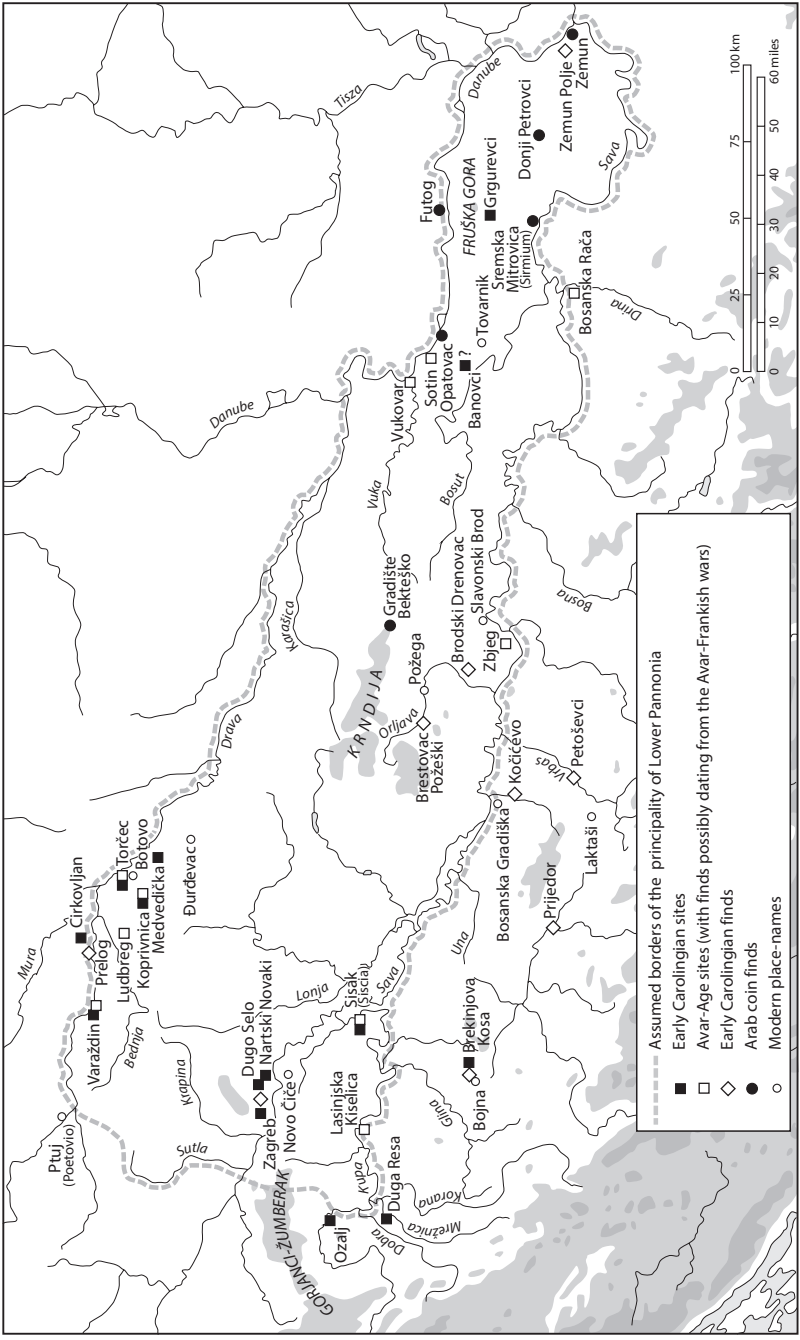


Map 5 The Upper (northern) Adriatic, with inset showing the Venetian lagoons

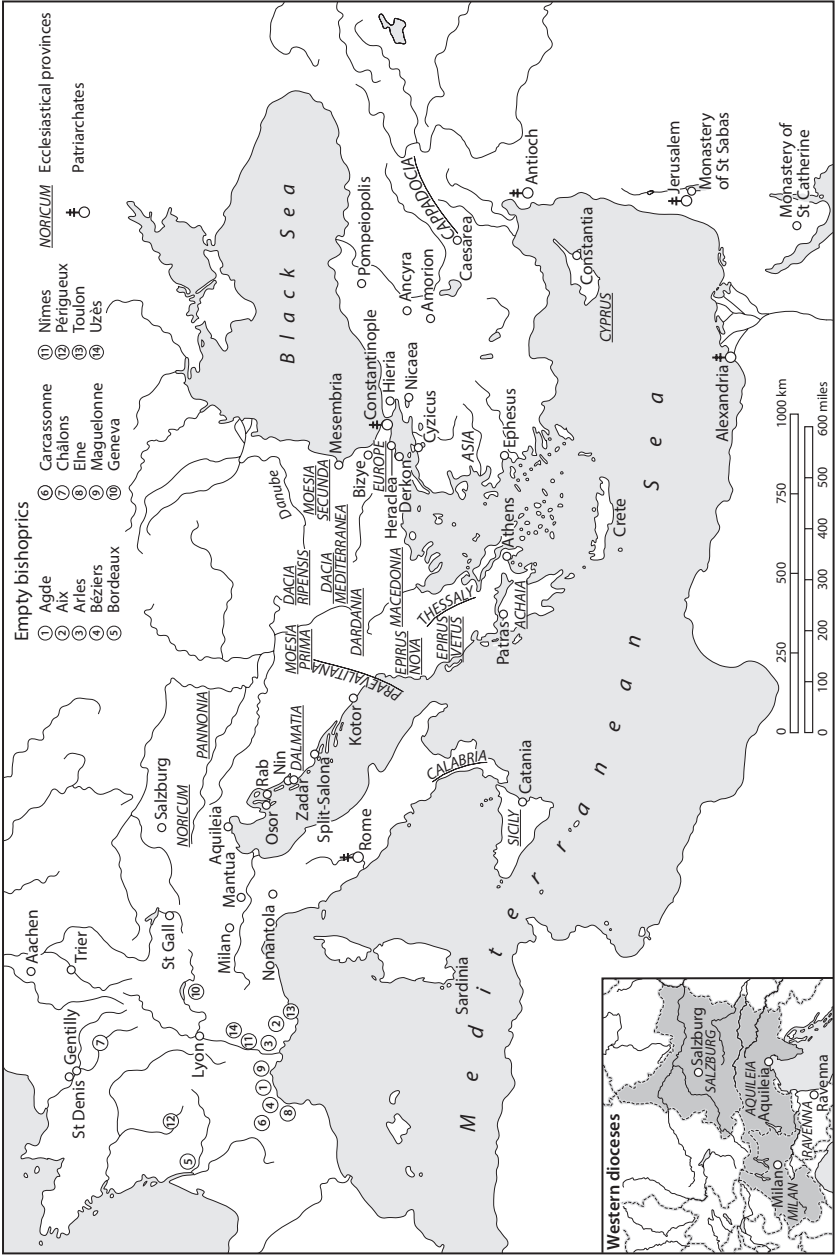


Map 6 Italy before the Franks and at the death of Charlemagne





Map 8 Find sites in Lower Pannonia, showing the assumed boundaries of the area (although for a fuller discussion of the highly ambiguous term 'Pannonia', see 225–27 below)



Map 9 Ecclesiastical provinces and places mentioned, with inset showing western dioceses

8 Aachen, Venice and archaeology

Sauro Gelichi

A coincidence?

There can be little doubt that there was at least one timely coincidence between the Treaty of Aachen and the birth of Venice. According to our written sources, it was exactly then – in the year 810 – that Agnellus Particiaco (or Partecipazio) became doge and the ducal seat was moved from Metamauco to Rivoalto.¹ This gave geographical stability and dignity to the constellation of small islands that would eventually become the city of Venice. However, this can scarcely be pure coincidence: the Franks' interest in the area had already made itself known, when Charlemagne unsuccessfully tried to conquer or directly control the lagoon.² In the period between the eighth and tenth centuries, the Venetian aristocratic elites fluctuated between pro-Byzantine loyalty and recognition of the rising Carolingian power. And it was in this period that the islands of the lagoon (and with them the *civitas rivoaltina*) almost unexpectedly revealed themselves to be an area of economic and commercial interest to the Carolingians.

However, the ways in which a geographical area hitherto virtually absent from historical records suddenly and forcefully emerged were extraordinary and may at first seem baffling.³ As Michael McCormick rightly points out, the period of Venetian growth probably started quite abruptly and was complete within a few decades.⁴ There is no reason to doubt that the evolution of the Venetian lagoon underwent a surprising acceleration in this period. However, it is also undeniable that these processes needed an accommodating environment – a context which afforded the chance to evolve in this way. This chapter offers an analysis, in order better to understand the impact of the Treaty of Aachen on these territories. The evidence employed for this purpose is a very promising set of archaeological sources that have been used in previous scholarship inadequately, if at all.

Although it may seem strange, it is precisely because of the scarcity of written documents that the beginnings of Venice appear nebulous and, consequently, almost mythical. Moreover, archaeological evidence has not been well used to study the history of pre-ducal and ducal Venice. I have endeavoured to explain the reasons for this situation elsewhere and so I will not address the question here.⁵ However, in order to explain the types of archaeology used in this field and to understand the historical discourse surrounding them, we must identify at least the main paradigms in which this particular strand of archaeological scholarship has evolved.

Paradigms and archaeological reality

The principal paradigms that have long been at the centre of Venetian archaeologists' attention are 'Romanitas' and 'Byzantineness'. As a matter of fact, these are two different versions of the same stereotypical interpretation. 'Romanitas' is associated with the myth of origins, involving the alleged transfer of the mainland (and therefore Roman) population to the islands at the time of the barbarian invasions. In contrast, 'Byzantineness' is seen as the continuation of a relationship with the Roman past over time, reinforced by both political and economic relations with the Byzantine empire. In recent years these paradigms have quite rightly been revised through various exegeses of our written sources. They have nonetheless decisively affected the interpretation of the archaeological data.⁶ Thus, on the one hand, archaeology has moved towards the search for the Roman origins of the settlement, as if the lagoon were already intensively and densely populated, and equipped with what Lech Leciejewicz has called a 'permanent settlement', in the early imperial period. On the other hand, Leciejewicz has also suggested that the lagoon either did not exist at all or was much reduced in that period.⁷ By the same token, he has dismissively labelled everything that followed in later periods as 'Byzantine'.

In addition to these two paradigms, there is a third, that of Venice's 'wild origins', which is partially accredited by local eleventh-century chronicle traditions.⁸ Alone and isolated, Venice therefore appears as a mix of the old (the Roman and the Byzantine) and the different (self-isolation). This has repercussions for the interpretation of our scarce archaeological artefacts, and this situation has affected our understanding of those artefacts. At the same time, it has resulted in our underestimating indicators – or rather types of contexts – which could help us understand what the Venetian lagoon actually was between the eighth and ninth centuries, and what role it played in the regional and international arenas. Side-stepping these three paradigms, this study analyses the archaeological data *per se* from two main perspectives: the local, including the lagoon and its neighbouring areas; and a wider one, comprising the whole arc of the Adriatic.

The archaeology and history of the lagoon: Periodization

There are three main stages in the history of the Venetian lagoon that offer scope for stimulating archaeological analyses. The first is the initial, developmental phase: the area which we continue to see as having been 'patronized' but not 'inhabited' in Roman times began to form a stable settlement, acquiring its first set of permanent habitations. The second period covers the evolution of this space, characterized by processes of selection, movement and centralization of the habitat.⁹ Written sources often describe this second period as being marked by a sort of frenzy, which resulted in the continuous relocation of the seat of ducal power. The third and final period is the one that coincides with the transfer of the ducal seat to Rivoalto, around the beginning of the ninth century.

There seems no doubt that much of the Venetian lagoon underwent active settlement between the late fourth and sixth centuries. In fact, the vast majority of the

archaeological artefacts at our disposal date from this period. The initial stages, where well documented, are always characterized by the implementation of remedial and containment structures, such as fills and waterfronts. Further, artefacts of easier archaeological readability are often associated with the internal structuring of the salt marshes and buildings with residential functions, as in the case of Torcello. While remaining a numerically indistinct settlement in the archaeological records, it is thus indisputable that there was a vested local interest in colonizing a territory that had not been intensively settled before.

The northern end of the lagoon shows more signs of fourth-century settlement, but as archaeological excavations have revealed, settlement may also have occurred in parts of the southern reaches, including the islets around Rivoalto. Although our written sources imply that security was an issue, it appears that colonization was associated with processes of a purely economic and itinerant nature. The first sign of this is the central role these spaces acquired in the lagoon's links with the northern Adriatic, after the imperial headquarters moved to Ravenna in Late Antiquity. This function, which is made explicit in a famous letter of Cassiodorus,¹⁰ is indirectly attested by various types of archaeological artefacts found in almost every area investigated in the lagoon.¹¹

Further confirmation of the lagoon's importance as a medium for communication is the decisive role of the town of Altino as a commercial centre which organized trade links between the Adriatic, the surrounding hinterland and the north. We should, at this point, reconsider the city's apparent decline, which is due more to a playing down of the archaeological data because of uncritical acceptance of our written sources, particularly the chronicles, than to any real absence of information on Altino in Late Antiquity.¹² It is true that the town underwent a significant transformation, but this was not enough to damage its role at least up to the seventh century. Thus, the growth of settlements in the northern lagoon in the fourth to sixth centuries should be read as an indication of vitality and related to the opportunities that Altino was able to offer: functions that could no longer be fulfilled by infrastructures nearer to the town were shifted to more suitable settlements in the lagoon.

Between the seventh and eighth centuries the situation evolved and moved towards a process of habitat selection, connected to the phenomenon of centralization. This selection resulted in the abandonment of some settlements (such as San Lorenzo di Ammiana and San Francesco del Deserto) and a boost to others, which eventually emerged as new centres with stable and more systematic structures. These centres also began to gain institutional form, and church leaders showed interest in creating new diocesan seats there. This holds true for Torcello during the seventh century, although the exact date remains uncertain, and for Olivolo, the easternmost island of the archipelago, in the years 774–775.¹³

Archaeology illustrates these developments precisely. Excavations outside the former episcopal church of San Pietro di Castello in Olivolo, for example, indicate that the site was already in use between the fifth and sixth centuries. The rectangular building with masonry foundations was, however, only built in the first half of the seventh century. Findings here include three Byzantine *bullae*, used to seal official documents in the sixth and seventh centuries, and a gold

tremissis of Heraclius. All the material evidence seems to indicate that this island had an important role in public administration long before it was established as an episcopal seat.¹⁴

If we continue to analyse these processes from the perspective of social and institutional order, it is interesting to note that the first ducal seats remained outside this area and were located on the outer reaches of the lagoon. This means that the separation from the mainland, which would later define the lagoon settlement, had not yet occurred, and the emerging Venetian elite still maintained a strong interest in the control and use of land ownership. Indirect confirmation is found in the *Pactum Lotharii* from 840, in the sections establishing the demarcation between the territories of the kingdom of Italy and Cittanova (also called Cittanova Eracliana or Heraclea): a sort of 'rural pact', as it was once described.¹⁵ Cittanova is the location of the first known ducal seat. Although traditionally dated to the fall of Oderzo to the Lombards in 639 and subsequent flight of its population, the settlement appears to have originated in a rural division dating back to Late Antiquity and which remained unchanged throughout the Middle Ages. In contrast, the channel settlements seem to have had a more commercial function.

Unfortunately, we know nothing about the ducal seat of Metamauco, which was established as early as 740–742 and whose precise location remains uncertain. Even though the island is certainly located in the south of the lagoon, as our sources attest, it cannot be identified with certainty as present-day Malamocco. A direct confirmation of ducal interest in these areas is, however, found in written sources about the estate of the Particiaci ducal family. These lands belonged to the same Agnellus Particiaco and his son Justinian, who donated a chapel and their property in the Dogaletto in the southern lagoon to the monks of San Servolo in 819. The chapel and goods would become home to a large monastery dedicated to Sts Benedict and Hilary, which later became the family's burial place.

The Venetian lagoon of the eighth century is thus a place of both historical and archaeological interest. However, its 'phases' of development seem to have the air of 'almost, but not quite'. In order to clarify these phases and to understand the when and the why, we shall now turn our attention to some other comparable areas.

Outside the lagoon

Written evidence suggests that the little-known settlement of Comacchio, just a few kilometres south from the mouth of the Po, emerged towards the beginning of the eighth century, following the Lombard-Byzantine peace treaty of 680. The text, the so-called 'Capitulary of Liutprand', is a covenant about trade along the Po and its tributaries between an unknown community represented by *homines comaclenses* and the Lombards.¹⁶ The *Comaclenses* were required to pay duties for transporting their goods at a series of stations along these rivers. What was shipped is known partially and indirectly by the type of goods they were required to pay duties for: primarily salt, but also pepper, oil, *garum* and, in some cases, coins.

Historiography has offered different interpretations for this moment in time in northern Italy. Following Ludo Hartmann's lead, several scholars see this period

of the Lombard kingdom as a preparatory phase for the economic boom of the Carolingian and post-Carolingian era.¹⁷ Others, not necessarily in contradiction, lean toward a more restrictive hypothesis: they see the undeniable vitality recorded in our few known written sources as strictly local.¹⁸ From our point of view, two main aspects are of note. The first concerns the size and role of maritime traffic (and, therefore, of trade) in this period; and the second is whether the *Comaclenses* were the only possible participants in this commercial 'fever'.

Archaeological research at the site of Comacchio and a review of artefacts from the Po valley have made it possible to ascribe a broader function to this settlement and to rethink the meaning and the role of the last period of Lombard economic history.¹⁹ From an archaeological angle, it represents a good point of comparison for analysing the history of the Venetian lagoon, since we know how, when and where Comacchio developed, and its size; we also have a good idea about the character of its material culture and economy.²⁰ Archaeology thus reveals key material indicators of a major 'competitor' to the Venetian lagoon in the Adriatic. But was the archaeological context of the Venetian lagoon so very different?

Although the types of archaeological data at our disposal differ for the two locations, there are certain similarities between them. These include the location itself, the ways in which the settlements developed, their structural characteristics and the types of goods that circulated (notably pottery and amphorae). In essence, archaeology does not seem to rule out the suggestion that the Venetian lagoon and Comacchio participated in an economic 'system', which pivoted on the Po valley between the late seventh and first half of the eighth centuries. The location of the ducal seat of Metamauco supports this supposition: although an island, it was not far from the mouths of the rivers Brenta and Adige, and thus connected to Padua and, indirectly, to the lands of the Lombard kingdom.

This idea of an economic system fits into the paradigm of 'fragmentation' prevalent in modern historiography, which, as in this case, envisages functional systems operating at a micro-economic level. I believe, however, that even within this paradigm the role of Mediterranean trade needs to be reconsidered. We have no direct information about such trading activity, yet our few available written sources speak of spices, *garum* (and possibly even oil), which could only have come from the east. We are now aware of these connections and can trace them using a marker which was thought to have been lost after the seventh century: the amphora. Here, too, Comacchio's situation can shed light on that of the Venetian lagoon, for which only uncertain and fragmentary data is currently available.

Material discovered by the excavations at Villaggio San Francesco and the island's episcopal seat of Comacchio indicates a remarkable amount of globular amphorae. Most importantly, these give us an insight into their varied origin, primarily from the eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea, while, to the best of our knowledge, products from southern Italy seem to have been entirely absent at that time.²¹ The presence of these findings is corroborated not merely by the evidence of commercial dealings related to *annona* (tax) in those parts of the Adriatic region still under Byzantine control, but also by hints of the existence of a more complex network and of economic relations functioning outside, or in

any case independently, of that system. Of prime importance in this period is the rise of a type of settlement hitherto unknown in the Adriatic: emporia. What were Venice and Comacchio in the beginning, if not emporia?

Aachen: A history of churches and money

At the beginning of the ninth century, the ducal seat was moved one last time. The choice fell upon a group of Venetian islands which, as we have seen, had already been inhabited as early as the fifth and sixth centuries. The most easterly of these, Olivolo, had by then even become an episcopal seat.

The reasons for the last phase of development and the shift towards Rivoalto are not easy to explain, but they may be more comprehensible when detached from possible 'contingencies' and retraced by means of the archaeological data. If we consider the entire lagoon complex as an organic structure – with various political and economic tensions and population dynamics – all these processes appear to be the consequence of a society and an elite that was gradually growing into a mercantile power. The fleet was by now the largest in the northern Adriatic and as a result could be more strategically positioned. This fleet was the real legacy of the Byzantines and necessitated a quantum leap that the *Comaclenses* were not able to make. Venice needed not simply to serve as a passive haven for maritime traffic, but rather to move freely around and control the Adriatic. The new location also lent itself to protecting the area from possible external interference, especially by the Franks, who, as we have seen, had already made an unsuccessful attempt at conquest. And as Albert Ammerman has demonstrated, the width of the channel was greater than today, thus guaranteeing a more versatile use of the fleet.²²

The question remains whether the transition of Venice from emporium to town and its emergence as the leading mercantile force in the Adriatic was a rapid process, and if this is perceptible in archaeological terms. I believe this is so, even if it requires reliance upon a different kind of archaeology from that previously in use. In recent years, an archaeologist and a historian have published some extremely interesting data on the origins of Venice and its churches.²³ Yet this information, which comes from a diverse range of written sources, especially chronicles, is both useful and dangerous. This is because the chronology of most accounts is never completely certain, and our archaeological sources can offer little help with this problem. For example, San Lorenzo di Castello, one of our few Venetian churches to be excavated, has no parts dated to before the late tenth century.²⁴ The excavations around San Pietro di Castello, the first episcopal seat, have not unearthed any information about the church either. So, how can this data be used?

In 2004 a mapping of the churches John the Deacon claims to date from the ninth century, as an indicator of the area then settled, suggested that this area corresponds only in part with the archaeological data for that period.²⁵ This could mean that John is unreliable, which is possible; or it could mean that the town in the ninth century was larger than has been hitherto assumed. Equally, it could mean that the generally accepted theory of centralized settlements may not apply to Venice in its early years. With all this uncertainty surrounding the question of

dating, I am no longer able to agree with the theory that many of these ecclesiastical foundations can be dated to the eighth century.²⁶ However, if we accept at face value the number of ninth-century Venetian ecclesiastical foundations, the fact remains that it was incredibly high, with no equivalent in any other comparable centres of the same period and of the same type, such as Comacchio. If this information is considered in light of the fact that from 814 onwards the Venetians (while formally declaring themselves 'Byzantine') issued currency in the name of Louis the Pious, it is clear who had become their chief trading partner – and what markets they intended to serve.²⁷

Did this flourishing have immediate repercussions for Venice's neighbouring competitors? I would say not. There is no archaeological evidence to prove the sudden and permanent disappearance of those centres and communities which had participated, alongside the Venetians, in the regional dynamics of the Po and the Adriatic in the eighth century. The sequence of events at ninth-century Comacchio and in late ninth- and tenth-century Villaggio San Francesco shows no trace of any traumatic episode. Nor is there any suggestion that Comacchio's importance as an episcopal seat declined, especially since the church's liturgical furnishings were renewed during the ninth century.²⁸ Further, there is no suggestion that commercial indicators, such as the presence of 'Otranto-type' amphorae characteristic of the previous century, are scarce or absent. In the ninth century, even Torcello could be defined as a large emporium; and it was opulently rebuilt by its bishop, the son of Doge Pietro II, in the eleventh century. Basically, these rival centres were either incorporated into Venice or allowed to continue trading at the local level, much as Torcello and Comacchio had been doing before their traumatic destruction around the beginning of the tenth century.

In the opening decades of the ninth century something was changing in the dynamics of the economy in the northern Adriatic. It had earlier been a system entirely under the power of the Lombards and the Byzantine empire, an interface between the Byzantine world of the Adriatic and Mediterranean and the Lombards' territories, with Comacchio and the Venetian lagoon as passive intermediaries. This then seems to have transformed into a larger system, primarily serving the interests of the Carolingians. It was at this time that the Venetian elites started to play a more active role, leading to their direct involvement in the Adriatic. As such, the Venetian lagoon was the winner in this hidden competition. Even though the Treaty of Aachen of 812 was not the single cause of this development, it certainly promoted the conditions in which the lagoon could evolve in this way.

Notes

1 JD² II.29, 114–15 and 233 nn. 70–71.

2 Hodges 2000, 59–64.

3 'Una storia senza fonti scritte', that of origins, has been effectively defined by Gasparri 1992.

4 McCormick 2007, 44.

5 Gelichi 2010a; Gelichi 2010b.

6 Gasparri 1997.

- 7 Leciejewicz 2002a; Leciejewicz 2002b.
- 8 Ortalli 2009, 26.
- 9 This situation is clearly traceable in the northern part of the lagoon: Gelichi and Moine 2012.
- 10 Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII.24.
- 11 In particular, on the variety and quantity of imported pottery, see Grandi 2007; on the amphorae, see Toniolo 2007.
- 12 Previous scholarship has tended to focus on Altino's development phases as a Roman city, although more recently, some researchers have attempted to discuss the later archaeological evidence; see Calàon 2006; Possenti 2011, 172–77; and Asolati 2011.
- 13 The date for the foundation of the church at Torcello varies according to different sources, ranging from the late sixth to the late seventh centuries. According to John the Deacon's *Chronicon Venetum* it was 579 (JD², I.28, 82); but the text of the well-known inscription in the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta gives the date as 639 and attributes this to the Byzantine exarch Isaac. On Olivolo, see Cuscito 2009.
- 14 Tuzzato 1991. See now Gelichi 2015, 72–78.
- 15 Gasparri 1992, 7.
- 16 For an edition of the capitulary, see Hartmann 1904, 123–24.
- 17 Violante 1952.
- 18 See, for example, Balzaretto 1996.
- 19 On Comacchio and its role in the Adriatic, see Gelichi 2008.
- 20 On the recent excavations in Comacchio and the related results, see Gelichi *et al.* 2012.
- 21 Negrelli 2012, 401–09.
- 22 Ammerman 2003.
- 23 *OEE*, 523–31; Ammerman 2003.
- 24 De Min 1990.
- 25 Gelichi 2006.
- 26 Gelichi 2006, 173, fig. 29; Baudo 2006.
- 27 *OEE*, 758.
- 28 Gelichi *et al.* 2011.

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