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NEW DIRECTIONS
IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN
ARCHAEOLOGY: SPAIN AND ITALY
COMPARED
ESSAYS FOR RICCARDO FRANCOVICH

edited by
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BREPOLS

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Sauro GELICHI

SOCIETIES AT THE EDGE: NEW CITIES IN THE ADRIATIC SEA DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES (8th-9th CENTURIES)

Land of cities?

During the Roman time, Italy was a land of cities. The cities had administrative functions, but also economic and commercial. The existence of the cities (and also of an urban society) was ensured by an agricultural surplus; and the urban connections were based on a terrestrial communication system, large and efficient.

This system of cities, or based primarily on the city, went into decline fairly quickly. This did not mean the abandonment of the cities, only a their transformation. Already in Late Antiquity many cities were deeply changed, not only in their institutional characteristics, but also in the material and structural aspects.

Archaeologists have investigated this transition (or these transitions), and they wondered what had become of the old cities, what is their social, economic and institutional role¹. The answer is not easy, partly because the different archaeology into each single urban centre. Thus, our overall impression you can see in a map, where is photographed a situation that has never been true, at least synchronically (it is a map drawn by Ward Perkins several years ago and which reproduces the north of Italy) (Fig. 1)².

Observing this map we can see, however, three main urban macro-processes: in some parts of the northern Italy the ancient cities generally survived; in other parts, they disappeared almost entirely; in others they were replaced by new foundations. All three of these macro-processes are interesting to study, because

1 About the urbanism in Early Medieval Italy and the archaeological approach see: G. P. Brogiolo, S. Gelichi, *La città nell'alto medioevo italiano. Archeologia e storia*, Rome-Bari, 1998; A. Augenti (ed.), *Le città italiane tra la tarda Antichità e l'alto Medioevo. Atti del convegno* (Ravenna, 26-28 febbraio 2004), Florence, 2006; N. Christie, A. Augenti (eds.), *Urbes extinctae. Archaeologies of Abandonend Classical Towns*, Farnham and Burlington, 2012; G. P. Brogiolo, *Le origini della città medievale*, Mantova, 2011.

2 B. Ward Perkins, *The towns of northern Italy: rebirth or renewal?*, in R. Hodges, B. Hobley (eds.), *The rebirth of towns in the West AD 700-1050*, London, 1988, p. 16-27 and Fig. 6.

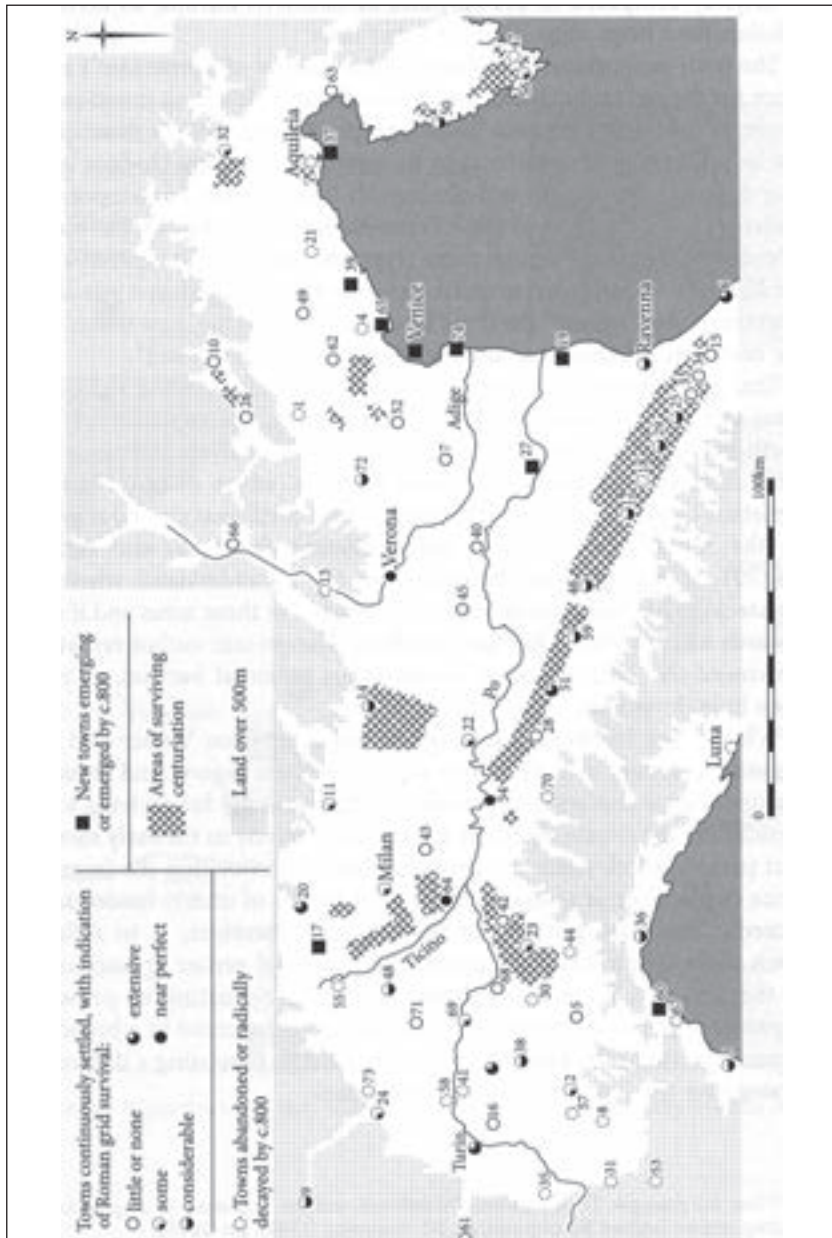


Figure 1. Roman towns and new towns in northern Italy, c 300-800 (by B. Ward Perkins, *The towns*, fig. 6).

they assume a profound change in the arrangement of settlements. However, on this occasion, I focused my attention on the new phenomenon, because it seems the most promising: the new emerging settlements as expression of a new process of urbanization of the northern Italian peninsula.

When and what. The northern Adriatic arc between eighth and ninth centuries: a new settlement organisation

We have seen that during the Early Middle Ages the entire span of the north Adriatic seems to be affected by a different historical processes of settlement compared to the north of the peninsula. In this area new settlements of urban type were founded, especially along the coast (in the lagoons or in the estuaries of large rivers like the Po, for example). Now, I wish to discuss in detail two of these emerging areas with new types of settlement: the Venetian lagoon and the lagoon of Comacchio (Fig. 2).

This process took place between the eighth and ninth centuries and had as its final result the birth of Venice. There have been various traditional explanations for this phenomenon. The most common is that the people would be migrated to the islands of the lagoon for fear of the barbarians. In this way, each settlement in the lagoon would be more or less direct heir of a city in decline and then abandoned in mainland. But this is a simplistic and mechanical explanation, which refers to a traditional historical topics³.

Also, this explanation trivializes the functions of the places where these settlements were (qualifying them as passive spaces) and does not explain the real reasons that led to these new situations, the rise of this new settlement.

The analysis of the ecosystem of the lagoon of Venice, ie the environmental conditions, seems to indicate a change between the fifth and sixth century A.D.⁴. At that time, a worsening climate would have resulted in strong marine ingression. This may have contributed to a more intensive exploitation of salt. However, these environmental changes may have been more significant in an indirect form.

3 C. La Rocca, "Castrum vel potius civitas". *Modelli di declino urbano in Italia settentrionale durante l'alto medioevo*, in R. Francovich, G. Noyé (eds.), *La storia dell'Alto Medioevo Italiano alla luce dell'archeologia*, Florence, 1994, p. 545-554.

4 A. J. Ammerman, C. E. McClennen (eds.), *Venice before San Marco. Recent Studies on the Origins of the City*, Hamilton N. Y., 2001. See also S. Gelichi, *Venezia tra archeologia e storia: la costruzione di un'identità urbana*, in A. Augenti (ed.), *Le città italiane*, cited n. 1, p. 164-169.

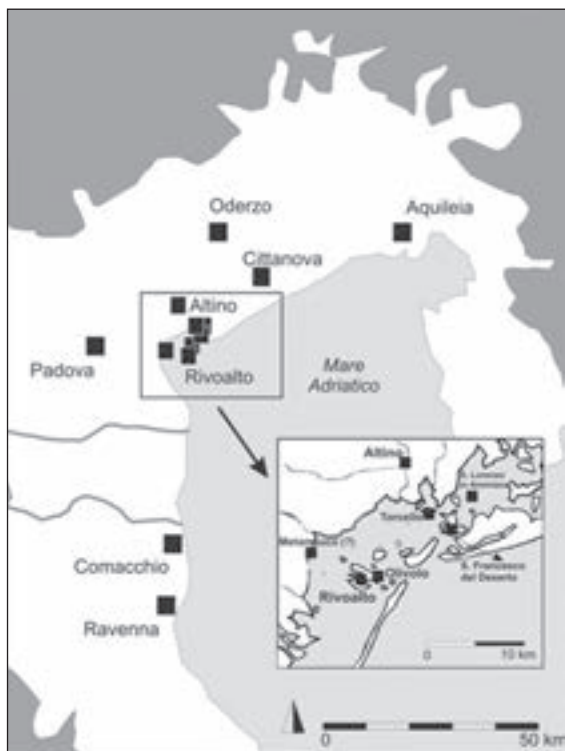


Figure 2. The northern Adriatic arc and the main places mentioned in the text.

We see the situation in detail. The most important ancient city near the lagoon, ie Altino, was not abandoned in a sudden⁵. However, landslides have brought about the burying of its channels and have weakened the use of its port facilities, so that its maritime functions were moved to the lagoon. These processes had to trigger a mechanism of proliferation of small settlements, which recognize a specific commercial function and also an itineraria function, which are the most visible evidence in the northern lagoon during this period⁶.

⁵ For further details about Altino (and, in particular, its urban configuration) see: A. Ninfo, A. Fontana, P. Mozzi, F. Ferrarese, *The Map of Altinum, the Ancestor of Venice*, in *Science*, 325, 2009, p. 577; M. Tirelli (ed.), *Altino antica: dai Veneti a Venezia*, Venice, 2011; and G. Cresci Marrone, M. Tirelli (eds.), *Altino dal cielo: la città rivelata. Lineamenti di Forma urbis, Conference Proceedings Venice 2009*, Rome, 2011.

⁶ S. Gelichi, C. Moine (eds.), *Isole fortunate? La storia della laguna nord di Venezia attraverso lo scavo di San Lorenzo di Ammiana*, in *Archeologia Medievale*, XXXIX, 2012, p. 9-56

On the archaeological point of view, these processes are associated with two types of significant data. The first is the presence of a stable form of settlement, documented by residential buildings in wood with base in stone and broken bricks and by wooden waterfronts. The second is represented by the presence of appreciable quantities of imported pottery and Mediterranean amphorae, numerically out of scale with the likely size of the lagoon population during this period and its ambiguous social configuration (vd. *infra*). This type of objects, instead, could be explained by a new functional specificity of these places at this time. A letter of Cassiodorus, written in 537-538 to the *Tribuni Maritimorum* of *Venetiae*, would be a confirmation⁷. This letter required that Ravenna, the new capital of the Western part of Roman Empire, had to be supplied with grain, wine and oil of the Istria. This document presents interesting motifs of ambiguity. On the one hand, in fact, describes a lagoon environment devoid of permanent settlements and / or centralized, inhabited by people dedicated to fishing and cultivation of salt, living in a sort of Eden and in an almost pan-egalitarian way. In addition, it confirms the important role that the endo-lagoon road had taken over the terrestrial road (not only for safety but also for greater speed and comfort in the links). If really the harbor of Altino gradually enters into crisis at this time, then you understand how the movement of settlements and infrastructure into the lagoon can be explained as the result of a delegation of tasks to most favorable areas.

The next step in the northern lagoon seems marked by a process of selection and concentration. Some of these small settlements are abandoned and others evolve. This seems to occur between the sixth and seventh centuries, a time when Altino loses almost all its urban prerogatives and, at the same time, other settlements such as Torcello and Olivolo consolidate their role (they become seats of ecclesiastical power)⁸. And this is also the time when the written tradition tells us about the creation of the first ducal power in Cittanova during the eight century.

7 Cass., *Variae* XII, 24. About this famous document see R. Cessi (ed.), *Documenti relativi alla storia di Venezia anteriori al Mille. I. Secoli V-IX - II. Secoli IX-X*, Padua 1942, doc. n. 2, p. 2-4. In general, about this text of Cassiodorus and its interpretation see A. Carile, G. Fedalto, *Le origini di Venezia*, Bologna, 1978, p. 179, and L. Cracco Ruggini, *Acque e lagune da periferia del mondo a fulcro di una nuova "civitas"*, in L. Cracco Ruggini, M. Pavan, G. Cracco, G. Ortalli (eds.), *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima. I. L'età ducale*, Rome, 1992, p. 72.

8 The bishopric of Torcello was established around the first quarter of the 7th century; on the contrary, the bishopric of Olivolo between 774 and 776. See G. Cuscito, *L'Alto Adriatico Paleocristiano*, in G. Caputo, G. Gentili (eds.), *Torcello. Alle origini di Venezia tra Occidente e Oriente*, Venice, 2009, p. 32-49.

Also what is happening in a lagoon far south, that of Comacchio, it is very instructive. The archaeology has specifically shown, in this case, that the developments of the settlement were very rapid⁹. The first traces of occupation are of the late sixth century, but by the second half of the seventh one has the perception of a stable settlement, already strongly oriented from the economic point of view – and a related community sufficiently structured so to establish itself as a partner of Lombard king, as evidenced by the famous ‘Capitulary of Liutprandus’¹⁰. In this document, to represent the community there is not a bishop, but a priest and some aristocratic members (presumably local); a community that self-represents itself with specific skills and attitudes (the maritime skills) and that appears sufficiently sophisticated (at least to consider some objects from excavations)¹¹. A society located in a kind of gray space that is neither totally outside, but not directly dependent, as we would expect, from the public power or from the control of the high aristocracy (in this case represented by the exarch and the Archbishop of Ravenna).

A little what, with other times and in the different modes, seems to be the case also for the emerging aristocracy of the Venetian lagoon between the seventh and eighth centuries. Through the analysis of what happens in the lagoon of Venice, it is understandable that these are places of natural resources (fishing, salt), but also as places suitable for the construction of new opportunities. The isolation and marginalization, among other things, may have played an active role in encouraging the development of new economic initiatives and new attitudes in the maritime sense.

9 S. Gelichi (ed.), *L'isola del vescovo. Gli scavi intorno alla Cattedrale di Comacchio*, Florence, 2009; *Id.*, *Venice, Comacchio and the Adriatic Emporia between the Lombard and Carolingian ages*, in A. Willemsen, H. Kik (eds.), *Dorestad in an International Framework. New Research on Centres of Trade and Coinage in Carolingian Times*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 149-157; S. Gelichi, D. Calao, E. Grandi, C. Negrelli, *The history of a forgotten town: Comacchio and its archaeology*, in S. Gelichi, R. Hodges (eds.), *From one sea to another. Trading places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages, Proceedings of the International Conference (Comacchio 27th-29th March 2009)*, Turnhout, 2012, p. 169-205.

10 About the Capitulary: L. M. Hartmann, *Zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte Italiens im frühen Mittelalters Analekten*, Gotha, 1904; M. Montanari, *Il capitulare di Liutprando: note di storia dell'economia e dell'alimentazione*, in *La civiltà comacchiese e pomposiana dalle origini preistoriche al tardo medioevo, Comacchio 1984*, Bologna, 1986, p. 461-475

11 On the ecclesiastical situation in Comacchio during the 7th-8th century see: S. Gelichi, Lupicinus presbiter. *Una breve nota sulle istituzioni ecclesiastiche comacchiesi delle origini*, in G. Barone, A. Eposito, C. Frova (eds.), *Ricerca come incontro. Archeologi, paleografi e storici per Paolo Delogu*, Rome, 2013, p. 41-60.

Why? New settlements, new societies and new economies?

We tried briefly to illustrate the changes between the fifth and eighth centuries in two lagoons of the arc in the northern Adriatic and we have tried to identify how these processes have occurred. Now we must ask why this happened and, more importantly, whether the emergence of these new settlements means that there is a different kind of economy, creating a different urban network and, at the same time, a different kind of society.

Let's start with the last question. A very interesting document, from this point of view, is the so-called *Pactum Lothari*, a text by 840, which describe a previous situation (eighth century) about boundaries between the first ducal seat (Cittanova) and the surrounding areas. Contrary to traditional explanation, it is a text which some scholars define convincingly as purely 'rural'¹². The interest of the parties, that is, is always essentially addressed to the ownership and management of the land.

A comparison with this document could be recognized in the archaeological record for the first ducal center known in the lagoon (or rather, in the peri-lagoon): namely Cittanova¹³. Survey and small shovel test (or small trenches) have demonstrated the existence of a scattered settlement located along a canal, but still divided on regular land plots. Cittanova, therefore, seems to best represent a place in social change and economic: the expression of an aristocracy linked to the land but also facing an exchange economy based on trade (demonstrated by the existence of the docks located just along the canal and by various kind of exotic merchandise).

A similar process could be seen in Comacchio, specially if we consider the environmental reconstruction recently proposed¹⁴.

12 S. Gasparri, *Venezia fra i secoli VIII e IX. Una riflessione sulle fonti*, in *Studi veneti offerti a Gaetano Cozzi*, Venice, 1992, p. 3-18

13 S. Salvatori (ed.), *Ricerche archeologiche a Cittanova – Heraclia. Campagne 1987-1989*, in *Quaderni di Archeologia del Veneto*, V, 1989, p. 67-112; D. Calaon, *Cittanova (VE): analisi GIS*, in R. Francovich, M. Valenti (eds.), *IV Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, Florence, 2006, p. 216-224. For a more recent interpretation of the settlement processes in the Cittanova area during the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages see S. Cadamuro, A. Cianciosi and C. Negrelli, *Nuove comunità lagunari tra l'età di transizione e l'altomedioevo: i casi di Jesolo e Cittanova*, in S. Gelichi (ed.), *Costruire territori/Costruire Identità. Lagune archeologiche a confronto nell'Alto Medioevo*, Venice, 2014, *Reti Medievali*, 2015, forthcoming.

14 See A. A. Rucco, *L'ambiente e l'uomo nell'entroterra comacchiese tra VII e X secolo d.C.*, in S. Gelichi, E. Grandi, C. Negrelli (eds.), *Un emporio e la sua cattedrale. Gli scavi di piazza XX Settembre a Comacchio*, forthcoming; *Id.*, *Dalle "carte" alla terra. Il paesaggio comacchiese nell'alto medioevo*, in S. Gelichi (ed.), *Costruire* cited n. 13. See also S. Gasparri, *Un placito carolingio e la storia di Comacchio*, in *Fare lien. Aristocratie, réseaux et échanges compétitifs. Mélange en l'honneur de Régine Le Jan*, Paris, 2015, p. 179-190.

These data, however, should not in my opinion tarnish other traits that seem peculiar to these communities and their new economies, namely the establishment of maritime skills. They describe them in the course of the eighth century, as in a moment of transition. Not surprisingly, even recently, I try to compare these phenomena with the phenomenon of emporia in northern Europe, with which it has many features in common¹⁵. So we will see later, if and original features such as these settlements produce the same in terms of material structure.

But in what economic system do these new centers?

An exceptional document, already mentioned and which refers of Comacchio (the so-called 'Capitulary of Liutprand'), helps us in this regard. This document, dated to the first quarter of the eighth century concerns a covenant with the inhabitants of Comacchio (mentioned here for the first time) and the Lombards, for the opportunity to trade along the river Po and some of its tributaries. The *Comacleses* are required to pay certain duties in a range of ports or *stationes* along these rivers. Through this document, therefore, we know that people of Comacchio came up the main river Po to Pavia (the capital of the Kingdom) and they paid duties in salt, money, oil and spices. The traceability of these products is not always easy: the salt is probably carrying by bales (or directly loaded on the boat and then covered), the spices are not as well documented archaeologically. Further details can be had from the coins and, above all, from the amphoras they could carry oil and wine. And, in fact, a better and sophisticated archaeology began to highlight some of these indicators.

Recent research into both Comacchio that in the Venice lagoon are showing more and more evidence the spread of these amphorae still in the eighth and ninth century. Amphorae whose traceability is also found inland¹⁶ (Fig. 3).

15 S. Gelichi, *The eels of Venice. The long eighth century of the emporia of the northern region along the Adriatic coast*, in S. Gasparri (ed.), 774. *Ipotesi su una transizione*, Turnhout, 2008, p. 81-117; *Id.*, *The future of Venice's past and the Archaeology of the North-Eastern Adriatic Emporia during the Early Middle Ages*, in J. G. Schryver (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of the Medieval Mediterranean*, Leiden, 2010, p. 175-210. Very important on this subject is C. Negrelli, *Anfore medievali in Dalmazia: una prospettiva mediterranea*, in S. Gelichi, C. Negrelli (eds.), *Adriatico altomedievale (VI-XI secolo) Atti del Convegno*, Venice 2015, Florence, forthcoming.

16 S. Gelichi, C. Negrelli, *Anfore e commerci nell'alto Adriatico tra VIII e IX secolo*, in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge*, 13/2, 2008, p. 307-326; *Id.*, *Ceramiche e circolazione delle merci nell'Adriatico tra VII e X secolo*, in *Actas del VIII Congreso Internacional de Cerámica Medieval, Ciudad Real – Almagro 2006*, Ciudad Real, 2009, p. 49-62.

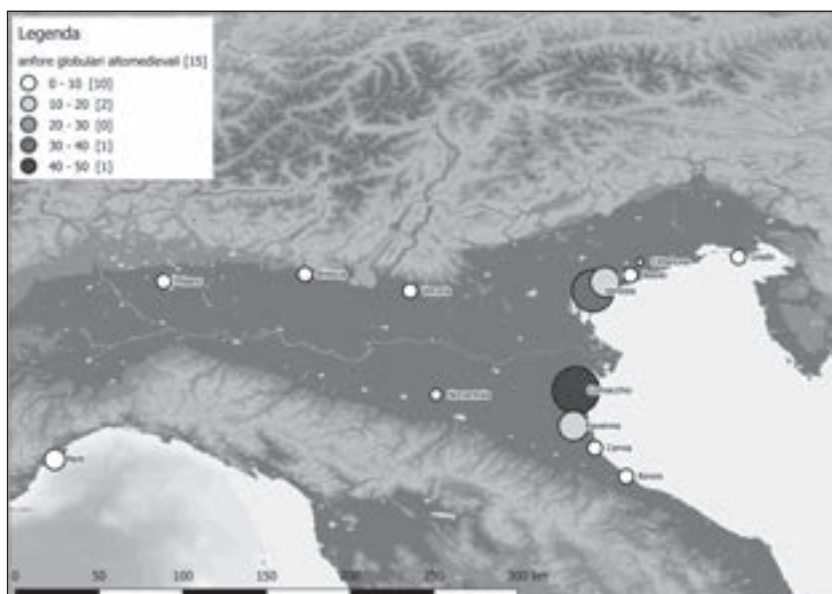


Figure 3. Distribution map of the globular amphorae in the northern Italy (by Claudio Negrelli).

These amphorae can introduce us in a different way to interpret the economic and commercial situation in the Po valley. But, where do these amphorae come from? What were they carrying? And who were the consumers of these commodities?

First, such containers, that follow extremely uniform shapes (but with very different ceramic fabrics), could have come from the eastern Mediterranean, in particular from Syria-Palestine and the Aegean (although possible imports from Pontus cannot be excluded) (Fig. 4). Such containers, by virtue of their uniformity, may have been sent directly from a single centre, which would presumably be the capital of the Byzantine Empire, backed up by comparisons with some archaeological contexts coming from Saraçhane in Istanbul studied by Hayes¹⁷.

The analysis of their contents revealed wine until now; but we can also suppose oil and *garum*.

Another interesting category of pottery comes from Comacchio. It is pottery with fine fabric: generally jugs with two handles (similar to a small amphora) and flat base. The minero-petrographic analysis does not exclude a local production (Fig. 5). We can assume that these small bi-handled jugs serve

17 J. W. Hayes, *Excavations in Saraçhane in Istanbul, Vol. II*, Princeton, 1992, p. 61-79.

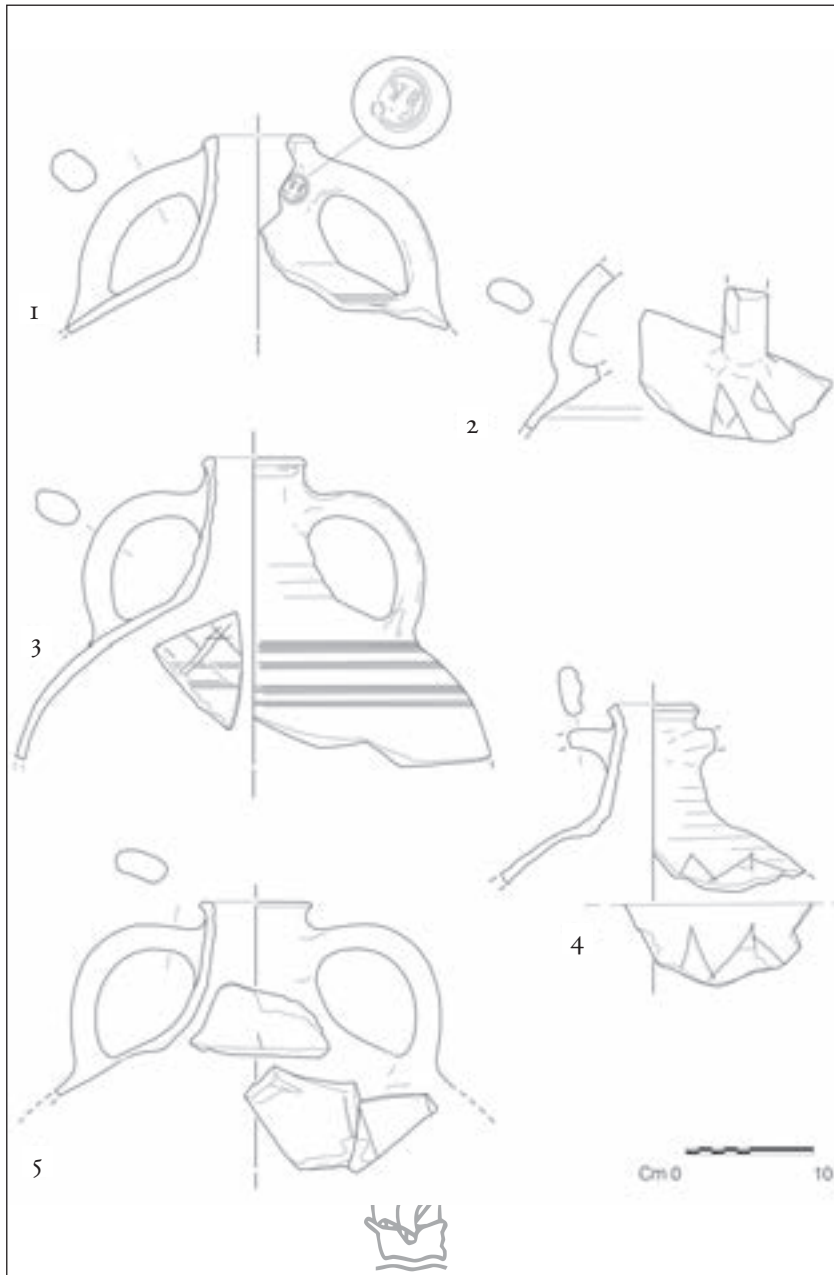


Figure 4. Globular amphorae from excavations in Comacchio.

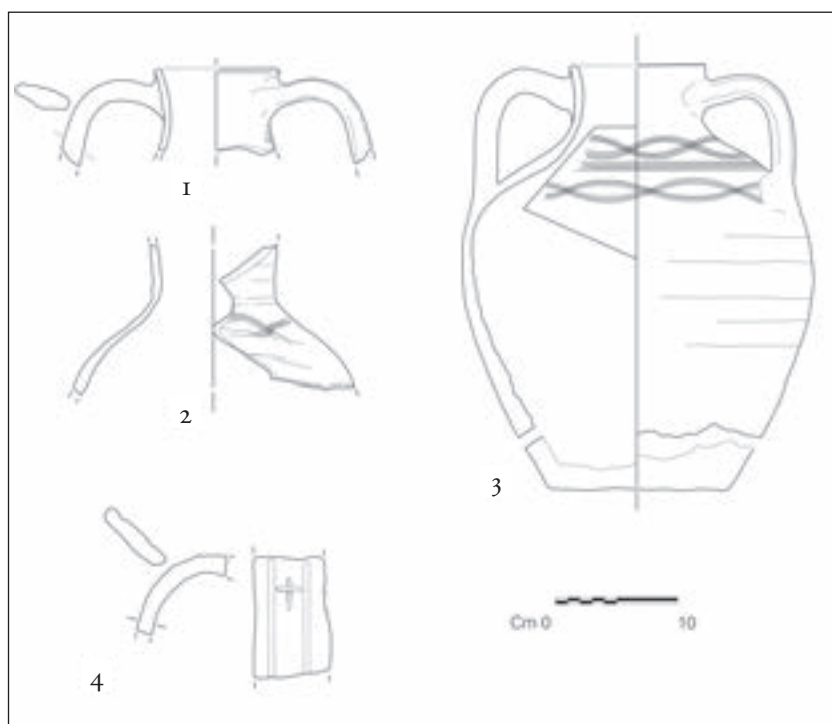


Figure 5. Local (?) jugs with two handles (or amphorae) from Comacchio.

to transport goods along the river routes. So, we can assume that goods coming from outside (the Adriatic and Mediterranean) in globular amphorae were then partially transferred into smaller containers (Fig. 6). This fact also explains the large number of globular amphorae found in Comacchio; and, meantime, would also explain the presence of these small containers in the inland territories (Fig. 7).

Finally, let us try to answer the last question about the beneficiaries of these amphorae. Does the amphorae evidence correspond with the suggested trading of luxury goods for a limited *élite*? Contrary to what was expected, the quantity of archaeological evidence which was found especially in Comacchio is of a magnitude that we would not have imagined until recently. It reveals that there were still, during the 8th century, active trading relations with the Byzantines: a process that seems neither sporadic nor accidental. Indeed, the economic picture must have changed drastically and the creation and development of these emporia is, in my opinion, a very precise material testimony to this. The number of round amphorae of Mediterranean origin, but above all the very existence of

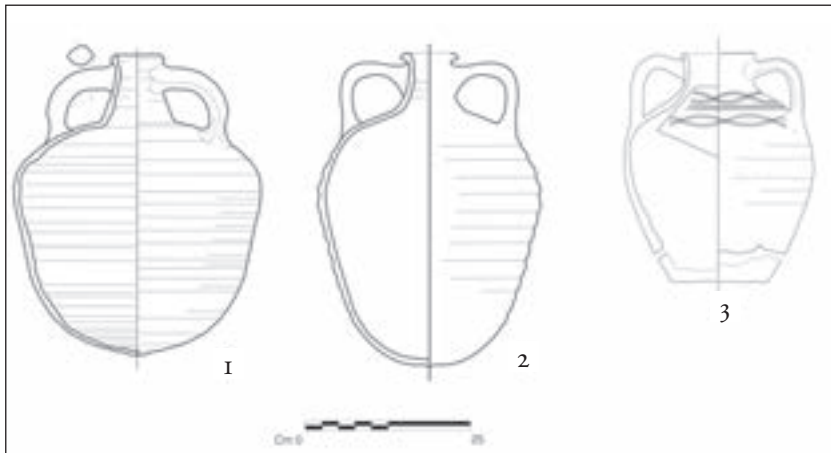


Figure 6. A comparison between the imported globular amphorae (1-2) and the hypothetical local production (Comacchio) (3).

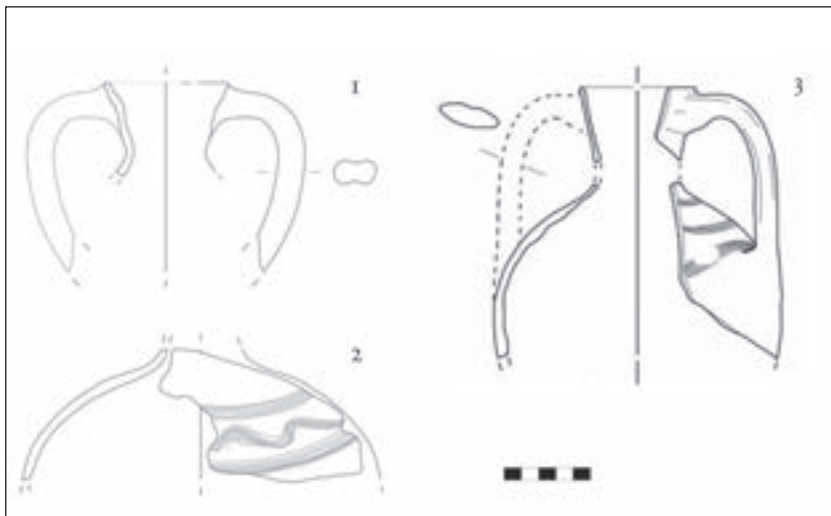


Figure 7. Imported jugs with two handles (or amphorae) of North Italian production (Comacchio?) found in the monastery of Nonantola (MO) (by Lara Sabbionesi).

sites like Comacchio, their uniqueness, the extent and complexity of their infrastructures, is by no means justifiable for the circulation of a few luxury goods limited to a restricted *élite*.

Unfortunately we have no archaeological information on the boats that came to Venice and Comacchio nor of those boats which, from these places, went up the rivers. However, it may be interesting to note the dramatic increase of boats made from tree trunks found in these areas (in Italian 'monossili')¹⁸. Generally attributed to the prehistory or Roman times, subjected to analysis were found to be generally of early Middle Ages.

Living at the edge: histories at the end (a happy end?)

Let us summarize. Three main phenomena are found in this portion of the northern Adriatic between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

The first important phenomenon concerns changes in the mode of communication; ie more and more endo-lagoon (therefore coastal) communications, on one side, and those on the rivers on the other, than terrestrial communications.

This phenomenon produces the establishment and the rise of new settlements in lands previously uninhabited or sparsely populated; in places, however, where no settlement of urban character existed. These new settlements, such as those of the lagoon of Venice and Comacchio, were very similar in topographical characters, in the material structures and in the 'material culture'; in few words they produce new identities and an accentuated specialization in maritime sense. The definition of these settlements as emporia, at least in an initial phase, is therefore not incorrect.

Who created these settlements? About Venice, recently Michael McCormick argued that: Venice was certainly not founded by a king¹⁹. I agree with this position and, I might add, even Comacchio was certainly not founded by a king (or by an Emperor). Indeed, the emergence of these new settlements seems to be favored by being in a 'gray zone', far enough away from the centers of power strong (such as Ravenna, for example, concerning Comacchio); or they have

¹⁸ On this type of boats in general: M. Bonino, *Le imbarcazioni monossili in Italia*, in *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova*, 72, 1983, p. 51-77; S. Medas, *Le imbarcazioni monossili ritrovate nei laghi e nei fiumi italiani*, in M. A. Leva Binaghi (eds.), *Le palafitte del lago di Monate. Ricerche archeologiche e ambientali nell'insediamento preistorico di Sabbione*, Gavarate, 2003, p. 30-38.

¹⁹ M. McCormick, *Where do trading towns come from? Early Medieval Venice and the northern emporia*, in J. Henning (eds.), *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Vol. 1. The Heirs of the Roman West*, Berlin-New York, 2007, p. 44.

arisen in times of temporary difficulty of these centers (or of the powers that be). Would seem to prove it the fact that, for example, in Comacchio is established a seat of diocese after the 'Capitulary of Liutprand'²⁰; then after that the community of Comacchio existed and had established stable and lasting relationships with the Lombards for the commercial use of the rivers.

Location, therefore, as a space for new opportunities. This does not mean, automatically, that these communities were moving completely outside of a power system or were not the product of the local aristocracy linked with public power. And, at the same time, it does not mean that this process has been immediate, that is, that away from wealth based on land ownership to a wealth asset-based on the sea, is solved in a short time.

Can you compare these new centers with the cities? The question of ambiguous, because it is necessary to establish precisely what it was a city in this period; or categorizing when a settlement is perceived as a city in the Italy of the eighth and tenth centuries²¹. It is easier to determine whether these places had the aspiration to become anything resembling a city. Comacchio declined definitely in the early ninth century and had no way, no time, to create a chronicle tradition-narrative that would tell the story and would revealed its aspiration. In contrast to what happened in Venice. Towards the end of the tenth century the deacon John wrote the first major history of Venice and helped to develop the first functional repertoire of topical places for the reconstruction of an identity, an identity that is urban²².

These new Adriatic settlements were the protagonists of a reorganization in economic structures in northern Italy, first of all during Byzantine-Lombard time, then during the Franco-Carolingian period. It is in this context that their trajectories must be read and interpreted.

There are three possible models that archeology has been able to outline.

The first model is that of centers functional in the international trade, in the long distance trade. Their existence, and therefore their boom, would then be independent (or at least not necessarily dependent on) from the economies of the surrounding areas²³.

20 See S. Gelichi, Lupicinus, cited n. 11.

21 S. Gelichi, *La città in Italia tra VI e VIII secolo: riflessioni dopo un trentennio di dibattito archeologico*, in A. García, R. Izquierdo, L. Olmo, D. Persi (eds.), *Espacios urbanos en el Occidente Mediterráneo (s. VI-VIII)*, Toledo, 2010, p. 65-85.

22 S. Gelichi, *L'archeologia nella laguna veneziana e la nascita di una nuova città*, in *Reti Medievali*, XI, 2010/2, p. 1-31.

23 This model has been conjectured by Frans Theuws: F. Theuws, *River-based trade centres in early medieval northwestern Europe. Some 'reactionary' thoughts*, in S. Gelichi, R. Hodges (eds.), *From one sea*, cited n. 9, p. 25-45.

The second model is that of functional centers mainly to the local economy (regional or inter-regional), an economy which ends almost exclusively in the area of the kingdom, first of all Lombard and then Carolingian. This model involves instead a simultaneous growth of the agrarian economy, the production of a surplus and the creation of a group of settlements directly connected with this system.

The third and last model, finally, is a mixed model. These centers are primarily functional to a local economy but, at the same time, they tend to also develop relations with the Mediterranean trade. In this model, it is very likely that emporia such as Venice or Comacchio were pivot points in which goods coming from outside (conveyed by merchants, therefore, not local); and from which, however, the same goods departed for the interior, conveyed this time from local merchants²⁴.

The story seems to tell us that there has been an evolution over time and it is a story of competitions at various scale. This third model, mixed, seems typical of the eighth century and early ninth. Since the beginning of the ninth, and especially after the Peace of Aachen, the policies of the Carolingian rulers seem to bring about change.

At the beginning of the ninth century, Venice is the place chosen by the ducal family of Partecipazi as the permanent; in the same place where still is Venice; not by chance that it is period when Venetians coined a denarus in the name of Louis the Pious.

What caused this final choice? Location McCormick writes²⁵. In effect, the location was certainly more functional to the economic interests that had moved from the capital of the kingdom (Pavia) to the capital of the empire (ie Aachen). But you could add the fact that the lagoon of Venice was chosen as the seat of the Byzantine power, to which was linked the presence of a very important fleet (at least according to what they tell us the written sources). A fleet that was necessary for the subsequent and decisive step, which is to transform this place under another economic sense: a place from which the ships moved to the Adriatic and then Mediterranean Sea. And here begins the true story of a unique and extraordinary city, ie Venice.

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²⁴ For an intriguing theoretical model of such type see: P. Horden, N. Purcell (eds.), *The Corrupting Sea. A study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, 2000; R. Hodges, *Adriatic Sea trade in an European perspective*, in S. Gelichi, R. Hodges (eds.), *From one sea*, cited n. 9, p. 230-254.

²⁵ M. McCormick, *Where*, cited n. 19.

