

# Venice and Its Neighbors from the 8th to 11th Century

*Through Renovation and Continuity*

*Edited by*

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## The Waterfront of Istria: Sea and Identity in the post-Roman Adriatic

*Francesco Borri\**

According to the *Translatio s. Marci*, two tribunes of the province of Venetia, Bonus and Rusticus, sat in the harbor of Umag hesitating to enter the lagoons out of fear of Duke Justinian's wrath.<sup>1</sup> It was the year 827 and the two men had sailed to Alexandria against their master's ban, where they had stolen the body of the evangelist Mark. After adventurously escaping the Sultan's men and surviving a perilous sail, they finally came to Istria with their precious loot.<sup>2</sup> There they waited for the inevitable happy ending to come.

The episode is well known and has been told dozens of times; two things must be considered here. First, the story may have never happened, at least in the form told by the anonymous author of the narrative. The two main characters' names, Bonus and Rusticus, the good and the simple, are rather revealing of their roles and are seldom attested.<sup>3</sup> They could have been *agnomina* given to real characters, or even allegories for their function in the narrative.<sup>4</sup> Second, even if the story was only a fictional account, it is very revealing of the environment of its composition. The two protagonists, whereas story bound, are aristocrats of a certain standing, whose title (*tribunus*) went back to the commander of a legion in the army of Diocletian and Constantine. Though the honor had lost its traditional meaning in the ninth century, it maintained a prestige able to evoke the ancient awe of Rome. In the author's mind, Bonus and Rusticus may have been armed landowners, as many European aristocrats were at the time, but they were also seamen, a much more remarkable position. Indeed, their stop in Umag made sense not only because of the duke's

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- 1 *Translatio s. Marci* 16, i, ed. Emanuela Colombi, *Storie di cronache e reliquie nella Venetia altomedievale*, Antichità Altoadriatiche: Monografie 6 (Trieste, 2012), pp. 16–63, at p. 61.
- 2 Patrick Geary, *Furtasacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 88–94.
- 3 Luigi A. Berto, *In Search of the First Venetians: Prosopography of Early Medieval Venice*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 41 (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 62, 211.
- 4 I am indebted to Cinzia Grifoni, who greatly helped me with this.

policy, but also in terms of the Adriatic sea-lanes, Istria being the gateway to Venice for the travelers sailing from the east.

The Adriatic Sea was generally navigated counterclockwise. The rocky and jagged eastern coast granted shelter from the strong winds from the northwest, while the skyline of the Dinaric Alps offered the fundamental orientation points in pre-modern navigation. The difference to the other shore could not be more striking, where it was much harder to find good harbors, with the exception of Mount Gargano, Conero, and the lagoons between Ravenna and Istria, known in antiquity as the seven seas, the *septem maria*.<sup>5</sup> The flat sandy coastline of the western Adriatic was busy as well, as archaeological finds may prove, but it was the eastern coast that constituted the main route of communication for the sailors aiming to reach the wealthy towns of the Po Valley. Istria, therefore, became an important stopover in the Adriatic exchange.

Information on early medieval Istria is scant, being confined to scraps of chronicles, a few letters, and inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> However, the lengthy Plea of Rižana provides ample details.<sup>7</sup> From the charter, we learn that in 804 in an unknown place not far from the river Rižana, somewhere in today's Slovenia, the Istrian aristocrats, called *capitanei* in the text, gathered in front of duke John and the Frankish authorities lamenting the worsening of their social and economic condition in the aftermath of Charlemagne's takeover of their homeland. In the document, we find rich evidence on the base of social power and on the habits and identity of the Istrian aristocrats. We read that the Istrian highborn could make their living off the land, possessing vast estates and collecting the products of forests and meadows. Moreover, like the aristocrats of imperial Italy, they exploited public authority.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the *capitanei* extracted the resources from the sea, undertaking long maritime journeys on the Adriatic and the broader Mediterranean. While lamenting their present condition, the Istrians offered an invaluable comparison between the Roman past and the Frankish present, which have been studied on many occasions, particularly in

5 Michel Sivignon, "Le cadre naturel," in *Histoire de l'Adriatique*, ed. P. Cabanes (Paris, 2001), pp. 13–22; Alfred Philippson, *Das Mittelmeergebiet: seine geographische und kulturelle Eigenart* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 40–41.

6 On early medieval Istria, see: Jadran Ferluga, "L'Istria tra Giustiniano e Carlo Magno," *Arheološki Vestnik* 43 (1992), pp. 175–187; Antonio Carile, "L'Istria tra Bisanzio e Venezia," in *Istria e Dalmazia: Un viaggio nella memoria*, ed. Giovanni De Vergottini (Bologna, 1996), pp. 37–52.

7 *Plea of Rižana*, ed. Harald Krahwinkler, ... *in loco qui dicitur Riziano ... Zbor v Rižani pri Kopru leta 804/Die Versammlung in Rižana/Risano bei Koper/Capodistria im Jahre 804*, Knjižnica Annales 40 (Koper, 2004).

8 Thomas S. Brown, *Officers and Gentlemen: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy A.D. 554–800* (Rome, 1984), p. 205.

insightful contributions published by Harald Krahwinkler, Stefan Esders, and Matthew Innes.<sup>9</sup>

Even in this new Frankish world, the Istrian aristocrats cared to present themselves according to the fashion of the old Roman army. As we saw, Bonus and Rusticus also used ancient Roman titles, and the same may have been similar among the imperial aristocrats of Dalmatia.<sup>10</sup> This early medieval Romanness of Italy and the Adriatic was rather different from the one linked to intellectual *otium*, spent in the lavish villas, which had disappeared decades earlier.<sup>11</sup> Concurrently it was an identity contiguous to it, rooted in the same tradition: the actors embracing this medieval Roman identity were eager to stress continuity with the ancient and glorious past, as seems to have been the case in the city of Rome.<sup>12</sup> Different outcomes were possible, as Gaul or Africa may show. There, individuals claiming a Roman heritage negotiated different strategies in order to survive.<sup>13</sup> In Istria, Roman identity was mostly linked to the army, with its values of masculinity, service, and, most importantly, hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> It seems to have implied a comprehensive set of attitudes, values, and outlooks echoing an ideal model of the imperial gentleman. Therefore, men of

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- 9 Krahwinkler's work is mentioned in note 7; Stefan Esders, "Regionale Selbstbehauptung zwischen Byzanz und dem Frankenreich: Die Inquisitio der Rechtsgewohnheiten Istriens durch die Sendeboten Karls des Großen und Pippins von Italien," in *Eid und Wahrheitssuche: Studien zu rechtlichen Befragungspraktiken in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. idem and Thomas Scharff, Gesellschaft, Kultur und Schrift: Mediävistische Beiträge 7 (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), pp. 49–112; Matthew Innes, "Framing the Carolingian Economy," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9 (2009), pp. 42–58.
- 10 Brown, *Officers and Gentlemen*, pp. 130–143; Giorgio Ravegnani, "Dignità bizantine dei dogi di Venezia," in *Studi veneti offerti a Gaetano Cozzi*, ed. Gino Benzoni, Mario Berengo, and Gherardo Ortalli (Venice, 1992), pp. 19–29.
- 11 Simon Esmonde Cleary, *The Roman West, AD 200–500: An Archaeological Study* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 395–454.
- 12 Paolo Delogu, "Il passaggio dall'Antichità al Medioevo," in *Roma medievale*, ed. André Vauchez (Rome and Bari, 2001), pp. 3–20, at p. 23.
- 13 Jonathan Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700* (Cambridge, 2012); Ralph W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin, 1993). See also the monographic issue of *Early Medieval Europe* 22/4 (2014), pp. 387–502, dedicated to *Being Roman after Rome*.
- 14 Edward James, "The Militarization of Roman Society, 400–700," in *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in European Perspective, AD 1–1300*, ed. Anne Nørgård Jørgensen and Birthe L. Clausen (Copenhagen, 1997), pp. 19–24; Dick Harrison, "The Development of Élites: From Roman Bureaucrats to Medieval Warlords," in *Integration und Herrschaft: Ethnische Identitäten und Soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Walter Pohl and Maximilian Disenberger, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 3 (Vienna, 2002), pp. 289–300.

a certain standing affirmed their local identity and authority with names and symbols stemming from the Roman past: Jonathan Conant recently remarked “empires can survive as an identity long after they disappear as polities.”<sup>15</sup>

Looking to the *capitane*'s sources of power and identity, two considerations become necessary. On the one hand, the exploitation of land and the allegiance with public authority were features of many early medieval aristocracies.<sup>16</sup> On the other, the intense relationship with the seascape was much less usual.<sup>17</sup> Gaining insight in this aspect is problematic, because the great majority of literary sources often neglect the maritime element. Authors seldom recorded sea journeys, together with routes, the identity of the travellers, and the nature of the things that were transported.<sup>18</sup> More revealing is the absence of the sea in narratives where we would have expected the maritime element to be present for the protagonists. Also in the *Istoria Veneticorum* written in the aftermath of Peter II Orseolo's victorious expedition in Dalmatia, and in the same years that allegedly saw the beginning of the traditional marriage of the sea, the Adriatic is openly mentioned only two times. A suggestive comparison comes from the Northern hagiography, such as in Ireland or Friesland where the waves in all their breath-taking beauty and violence are omnipresent.<sup>19</sup> This discrepancy is suggestive. In contexts dramatically different from ours, Carl Schmitt read this difference in literature as the reflection of factual, diverse approaches to the maritime element, which were grounded in cultural, if not ethnic, differences between the Northern and Southern peoples.<sup>20</sup> This odd reading was symptomatic of the spreading discourse, which saw the Northerners as sharing

15 Conant, *Staying Roman*, p. 1.

16 On this Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), p. 154; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 506–507.

17 On the subject see now the monographic issue of *World Archaeology* 35/3 (2002), pp. 323–495, dedicated to *Seascapes*. Moreover on the identity of the seamen see now Danijel Dzino, “Aspects of Identity-Construction and Cultural Mimicry among the Dalmatian Sailors in the Roman Navy,” *Antichthon* 44 (2010), pp. 96–110; and, although concerned with a much later time, Neill Atkinson, *Crew Culture: New Zealand Seafarers under Sail and Steam* (Wellington, 2001).

18 Michael McCormick, *The Origins of European Economy: Communication and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 12–15. See, however, the rich collection of evidence in Dietrich Claude, *Der Handel im westlichen Mittelmeer während des Frühmittelalters*, Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa 2 (Göttingen, 1985).

19 Thomas O'Loughlin, “Living in the Ocean,” in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. Cormac Bourke (Dublin, 1997), pp. 11–23.

20 Carl Schmitt, *Land und Meer: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (Leipzig, 1942), pp. 24–25.

a preferential relationship with the maritime element. This impression would be misleading, and the difference in literature, although difficult to explain, remains just that. Perhaps it was a legacy of the ambiguous Roman perceptions of seas and oceans, but I believe that, for the moment, any explanation must remain a matter of opinion.<sup>21</sup>

While the Roman past formed a depository of meaning and signifiers that could be displayed and performed in order to make a difference, maritime connection forged community and exclusiveness among the people facing the Adriatic.<sup>22</sup> Landward aristocrats looked with suspicion to the coast and its inhabitants. They were strange men inhabiting unbounded, untamed, and unholy places.<sup>23</sup> Some authors commented on this intense relationship between the Adriatic aristocracies and the sea: Godescalc depicted the Venetians as “intra mare degentes homines Latini,” while the Dalmatians seem to have shared a similar destiny.<sup>24</sup> Even more direct is a famous passage of the *Honorantiae civitatis Papiæ*, where the Venetians figure as elusive and outlandish characters, strangers to the more common human activities, such as farming.<sup>25</sup> In the medieval imagination, the shores, far from being the pleasant recreational location they are now, were the place of liminality where the water met the land.<sup>26</sup> There, women and men could gaze at the mysteries of life and death.<sup>27</sup> Not far

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- 21 John Mack, *The Sea: A Cultural History* (London, 2011), pp. 91–95; Salvatore Cosentino, “Mentality, Technology and Commerce: Shipping amongst the Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity and Beyond,” in *The Insular System of the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Archaeology and History*, ed. Demetrios Michaelides, Philippe Pergola, and Enrico Zanini, BAR IS 2523 (Oxford, 2013), pp. 65–76.
- 22 See the reflections of Jonathan Shepard, “Bunkers, Open Cities and Boats in Byzantine Diplomacy,” in *Byzantium, its Neighbours and its Cultures*, ed. Danijel Dzino and Ken Parry, Byzantina Australiensia 20 (Brisbane, 2014), pp. 11–44.
- 23 Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2000), pp. 57–58. See also Dries Tys, “Maritime Environment and Social Identities in Medieval Coastal Flanders,” in *Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World*, ed. James H. Barrett and Sarah J. Gibbon, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs 37 (Leeds, 2015), pp. 122–137.
- 24 Godescalc of Orbais, *De praedestinatione* IX, 6. ed. Cyrille Lambot, *Œuvres théologiques et grammaticales de Godescalc d’Orbais*, Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense: Études et documents 20 (Louvain, 1945), pp. 180–258, at p. 208.
- 25 *Honorantie civitatis Papiæ* 57–58, ed. Carl-Richard Brühl and Cinzio Violante, *Die “Honorantie civitatis Papiæ;” Transkription, Edition, Kommentar* (Cologne and Vienna, 1983), p. 18: *et illa gens, non arat, non seminat, non vindemiat.*
- 26 On changing attitude toward seashores, see Alain Corbin, *Le territoire du vide: L’occident et le désir du rivage 1750–1840* (Paris, 1990).
- 27 John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore* (Chicago and London, 2012), p. 62.

from the shore, below the waves, lay people and objects cast away from society that were not meant to return.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the waters hid monstrous creatures like the Leviathan, waiting in the dark depths.<sup>29</sup> Stories featuring horrific sea creatures, such as that of Saint Brendan or Within Piscator, may have circulated also in the Adriatic.<sup>30</sup>

Facing the sea, the Istrians shared similarities with the inhabitants of further Adriatic enclaves of Roman tradition.<sup>31</sup> Although part of a face-to-face based society, the aristocrats of eighth-century Istria presented themselves as part of an encompassing Adriatic community.<sup>32</sup> Peculiar anthroponomy, dignities, habits, and rituals clustered around the major knots of Adriatic communication in the Venetiae, the Romania (the coast of Ravenna), and the Dalmatian harbor towns. They were a symptomatic expression of an allegiance and an affective relationship to the empire as well as a will to belong. This Adriatic community was constructed around a network of routes, harbors, and ships: it was the movement of men by water, with its subsequent share of ideas and wares that cemented this identity.<sup>33</sup>

If we overlook the role of seafaring, sometimes dismissed as a secondary or even pedestrian aspect of history, we would fail to understand the unitary character of this vaster Adriatic horizon. Seafaring as a way of crossing space enabling the transportation of people, materials, and artifacts was also the reason for the sharing of knowledge and ideas in communication nodes many nautical miles away from each other. A decade ago, Helen Farr pointed out that the similarities in material culture of the Neolithic Adriatic, particularly

28 Astrid Lindenlauf, "The Sea as a Place of No Return in Ancient Greece," in *Seascapes* (= *World Archaeology* 35 [2003]), pp. 416–433.

29 *Job*. 41, xxiii. On the dangers of the sea: Paolo Squatriti, "I pericoli dell'acqua nell'alto Medioevo italiano," in *L'acqua nei secoli altomedievali*, Sett. 55 (Spoleto, 2007), pp. 583–618; George T. Dennis, "Perils of the Deep," in *Novum Millenium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture dedicated to Paul Speck*, ed. Claudia Sode and Sarolta Takàs (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 81–88.

30 Lethaldus of Micy, *Within Piscator*, ed. Ferruccio Bertini (Florence, 1995); *Navigatio s. Brendani*, ed. Giovanni Orlandi and Rossana E. Guglielmetti, *Navigatio sancti Brendani: Alla scoperta dei segreti meravigliosi del mondo*, Per Verba 30 (Florence, 2014).

31 See also the reflection, based on the Channel's evidence: Chris Loveluck and Dries Tys, "Coastal Societies, Exchange and Identity along the Channel and southern North Sea Shores of Europe," *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 1 (2006), pp. 140–169, at p. 162.

32 Francesco Borri, "Gli Istriani e i loro parenti: Φράγγοι, Romani e Slavi nella periferia di Bisanzio," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 60 (2010), pp. 1–26.

33 On maritime networks: Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011).



the distribution of obsidian objects along the shores of the Strait of Otranto, denote social allegiances and human exchange.<sup>34</sup>

Although early medieval authors recorded sails rarely and poorly, we have to keep in mind that any kind of transaction described in the literary sources and all the archaeological finds from the broader Mediterranean implied sea travel.<sup>35</sup> The Plea of Rižana recorded men coming to Istria from Constantinople in order to collect taxes, Istrians travelling for dignities all the way to Constantinople, together with an overabundance of shorter moves, which seem to have implied *cabotage*.<sup>36</sup> Venetian charters confirm this picture of buzzing seashores with people on boats and ships moving on the water. More importantly, in every single move, men had to work on the sails and mast, sharing water, food, and the everyday hardships of dangerous journeys. Furthermore, they could not do it alone. They needed a network of relationships to meet the need for fresh water, food, and shelter. All of this offered the opportunity for intense social activities, which must have cemented allegiance. These invisible men were the backbone of Adriatic connectivity.

Watched from the hull of a boat sailing the Adriatic, the surrounding shores became a different space when confronted with an inland perspective. The fringes of the inland polities of Italy and South-Eastern Europe became the extreme edges of a kingdom made of water. A world delimited by river mouths, streams, dangerous straits and safe channels, cliffs on which to repair boats from storms and the savage winds of the north-east, and creeks organized according to revealing lines of sight. They became fundamental orientation points to guide the traveller in this boundless place.<sup>37</sup> If, as Fernand Braudel frequently remarked, Mediterranean navigation was made up of journeys where land was in sight, this is particularly true for the long and narrow Adriatic, dominated by the mountains on its eastern side. This must have generated mental maps meant to create order in this unruly space. Men seem to have Christianized landscape features in order to make sense of and catalogue the environment

34 Helen Farr, "Seafaring as Social Action," *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 1 (2006), pp. 85–99.

35 Literature is now very extensive. See: *La circolazione delle ceramiche nell'Adriatico tra tarda Antichità e Altomedioevo*, ed. Sauro Gelichi and Claudio Negrèlli, *Documenti di Archeologia* 43 (Modena, 2007); and *From one Sea to Another: Trading Places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages*, ed. Sauro Gelichi and Richard Hodges, *SAAME* 3 (Turnhout, 2012).

36 Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 137–143.

37 On line of sight see Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, pp. 124–132.

surrounding them. It was part of the broader process of anthropization of the coasts.<sup>38</sup> This world of routes and orientation markers survives only in tiny fragments. John the Deacon's *Istoria Veneticorum* shows the *mons Scavorum*, the mountain of the *Scavi* or the Slavs, as it seems they were called in eleventh-century Venetiae.<sup>39</sup> John's readers would have probably recognized this place as part of a wider topography. Lighthouses from antiquity may have still been functional. The unexpected darkness surrounding the *pharus* of Populonia inspired the melancholic Rutilius Namatianus to write his most famous verses.<sup>40</sup> Ancient structures were sometimes repaired: in the *Royal Frankish Annals* we read that Charlemagne ordered the lighthouse of Boulogne to be restored, so that the flames on its top could brighten the night.<sup>41</sup> From Agnellus' narrative, we know that a place not far from the walls of Ravenna was called *Ad Farum*. There, King Theodoric was buried. The toponym was apparently still in use in the ninth century, as a possible clue for a continuity in the lantern's usage.<sup>42</sup> It may have been a memorable view: Pliny the Elder recorded the great lighthouse of Ravenna, which bore resemblance to the one in Alexandria in Egypt.<sup>43</sup>

Men going by sea may have developed a set of knowledge distinctive of sailing people.<sup>44</sup> They may have known the habits, language, and lore of distant countries and cultures. They certainly shared knowledge of the tides and soils, the changes brought by the seasons, and the ability to make forecasts of the weather. Men living on the coast must have observed the night-sky for navigating in darkness: in the Greek East, we see an effort to Christianize the stars.<sup>45</sup> As

38 Robert Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies: A Maritime Biography, 10,000 BC–AD 1500* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 98–124.

39 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* 111, 33, ed. Luigi A. Bertò, *Fonti per la storia dell'Italia medievale* 2 (Bologna, 1999), p. 146.

40 *De redito suo* vv. 403–405.

41 *Annales regni Francorum* 811, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH, SS rer. Germ. [6] (Hanover, 1895), p. 135: *ipse autem interea propter classem, quam anno superiore fieri imperavit, videndam ad Bononiam civitatem maritimam, ubi eadem naves congregatae erant, accessit farumque ibi ad navigantium cursus dirigendos antiquitus constitutam restauravit et in summitate eius nocturnum ignem accendit.*

42 Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 39, ed. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, CCLM CM 199 (Turnhout, 2006), p. 197: *quod usque hodie vocamus Ad Farum.*

43 *Hist. Nat.* xxxvi, 18. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 28.

44 Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, p. 93.

45 Gilbert Dagron and Jean Rougé, "Trois horoscopes de voyage en mer," *Revue d'études byzantine* 40 (1982), pp. 117–133.

perhaps well known, Mary was known as *stella maris*.<sup>46</sup> Even common memories may have created a vision of the past specific to the sea-dwellers. Abnormal tides and other threats from the sea may have marked their remembrance. John the Deacon recalled the days when the Adriatic covered the islands.<sup>47</sup> Years later, a violent storm destroyed Ragusa and the threatening news must have spread along the harbors of the Adriatic.<sup>48</sup> Harsh winters could also become quite visible on the water's surface. In the *Annales Fuldenses* we read that in 860 the temperature dropped to an unusual low, so that the Adriatic froze and the merchants travelled with chariots instead of boats.<sup>49</sup>

Due to the seasonality of seafaring, the Adriatic could have dominated the life of an entire coastal community. We know that early medieval navigation followed the pattern of ancient seafaring, even if it is possible that medieval sailors showed a keener bravado than their ancient colleagues.<sup>50</sup> Although celestial navigation was practiced, as just mentioned, sailing was mostly a day activity with the crew spending the nights in the coastal towns or camping on the shores, as shown by the description of Peter II Orseolus' cruise to Dalmatia.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, winter break brought the men together, who apparently may have spent long months at home, all watching the same winter sea.<sup>52</sup>

It seems that aristocratic households on the Adriatic used to own ships. This is rarely mentioned. An exception could be the *prior* Andreas of Zadar, who, in 918, explicitly recorded the possession of (at least) one vessel.<sup>53</sup> Although

46 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* IV, 69, ed. Berto, p. 140: *statim futurum sanctę Marię auxilium, que stella maris interpretatur*; Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesię Ravenatis* 55, ed. Deliyannis, p. 224: *Maria interpretatur "domina," siue "stella maris," siue "illuminatrix."*

47 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* II, 19, ed. Berto, p. 104: *temporibus quorum apud Veneciam adeo excrevit mare, ut omnes insulas ultra modum cooperiret.*

48 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* II, 53, ed. Berto, p. 126: *fertur quoque tunc Ragusiensem civitatem maris et venti impetu maxima ex parte cecidisse.*

49 *Annales Fuldenses* 860, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH, SS rer. Germ. [7] (Hanover, 1891), p. 54: *mare etiam Ionium glaciali rigore ita constrictum est, ut mercatores, qui nunquam antea nisi vecti navigio, tunc in equis quoque et carpentis mercimonia ferentes Venetiam frequentarent.* Also recorded by John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* II, 56, ed. Berto, p. 128.

50 McCormick, *Origins*, p. 468. See, however, John Beresford, *The Ancient Sailing Season* (Leiden, 2012), p. 5.

51 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* IV, 45–55, ed. Berto, pp. 186–194.

52 On the winter break, see now the reassessment of Beresford, *The Ancient Sailing Season*.

53 *Testament of Andreas*, ed. Marko Kostrenčić, *Diplomatici Zbornik kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije* 1 (Zagreb, 1967) n. 21, pp. 25–28, at p. 27: *et nave venundetur et datur pro anima mea.* On the text, which survives only in a seventeenth-century transcript:

Andreas was perhaps the highest-ranking officer in his town, men of lower standing must have had boats too. The *capitanei* complained how the bishops' men cut their fishing nets, causing them great financial damage.<sup>54</sup> The mention of *retia* is a very rare glimpse of the structure of everyday life.<sup>55</sup> We may imagine that the Istrians shared and jealously guarded tools and skills that helped them in various activities. Sources hardly mentioned them, but they must have been important markers of identity and cohesion. Leaving these aspects aside for the moment, the mention of fishing nets immediately recalls the presence of watercrafts. It seems that the Venetian *tribuni* also owned boats. A certain Andreas stole the body of Duke Peter Tradonicus from *Mucles*, perhaps today Makarska in Croatia, to ship it to Grado.<sup>56</sup> We know that in distant societies such as Kent, many women and men owned vessels.<sup>57</sup> In this given milieu, the significance of ships exceeded their functional role, acquiring cultural and religious meanings.<sup>58</sup> Literature on the topic is immense, suggesting that boats could have become a sign of distinction. Moreover, they may have represented identity too. I will return to this topic below.

The *capitanei* mourned being forced to cruise for Duke John and his family to Ravenna, Dalmatia, and Constantinople, and along the river ways.<sup>59</sup> The obligation must have been heavy, and Duke John, talking the Istrians into an agreement, relieved them of their cruising duties.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the *capitanei* recalled how, before the Frankish takeover of the region, they used to sail to Constantinople in order to obtain dignities.<sup>61</sup> Similar voyages are indirectly attested also for Dalmatia and the Venetiae.<sup>62</sup> They resembled old "prestige good economy," with the young aristocrats travelling to boost their role in

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Radoslav Katičić, *Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte des kroatischen Frühmittelalters*, ÖAW: Schriften der Balkan-Kommission, philologische Abteilung 40 (Vienna, 1999), pp. 317–320, 386–392; Jadran Ferluga, *L'amministrazione bizantina in Dalmazia*, *Miscellanea di studi e memorie* 17 (Venice, 1978), pp. 188–189.

54 *Plea of Rižana*, ed. Krahwinkler, p. 72: *et retia nostra concidunt*.

55 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme I: Les structures du quotidien xv<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1979).

56 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* III, 34, ed. Berto, p. 146.

57 Robin Fleming, "Elites, Boats and Foreigners," in *Città e campagna prima del Mille*, Sett. 56 (Spoleto, 2009), pp. 393–425.

58 Chris Ballard, Richard Bradley, Lise Nordenborg Myhre, and Meredith Wilson, "The Ship as Symbol in the Prehistory of Scandinavia and Southeast Asia," in *Seascapes* (= *World Archaeology* 35 [2003]), pp. 385–403; Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, pp. 152–160.

59 *Plea of Rižana*, ed. Krahwinkler, pp. 76–78.

60 *Plea of Rižana*, ed. Krahwinkler, p. 79: *de opera vel navigatione seu pluribus angariis si vobis durum videtur, non amplius fiat*.

61 *Plea of Rižana*, ed. Krahwinkler, pp. 75–76.

62 Borri, "Gli Istriani," pp. 23–24.

local societies. From distant milieus, we know that young leaders of maritime communities would have acquired foreign knowledge and prestigious objects through dangerous journeys by sea.<sup>63</sup> The dignities that the *capitanei* recalled having once collected may have played a similar role. Further narratives confirm this impression and we know that prestigious goods also reached the harbors of the Adriatic thanks to the ships of courageous navigators.

A further focal point, almost invisible in the sources, is that aristocrats were able to raise crews. Their makeup is largely unknown because of our limited knowledge of the early Adriatic ships.<sup>64</sup> John the Deacon narrated that around 850 the Dukes Peter and John Tradonicus equipped two vessels called *chelandiae*.<sup>65</sup> This brief entry gave origin to fanciful forgeries being debated at length.<sup>66</sup> The *chelandiae* were rather well-known warships.<sup>67</sup> From the eleventh-century witness of Thietmar of Merseburg we know that they were large vessels able to carry one hundred and fifty men.<sup>68</sup> In this context, John let his audience understand that those kinds of big ships did not exist before, and Jonathan Shepard linked the new technology to the presence of the imperial patrician Theodosius.<sup>69</sup> This may have been the case, but warships are attested almost continuously in the early medieval Adriatic. Nevertheless, they seem to have been used in particular moments only. The crews that granted the Adriatic connectivity must have been much smaller. In one occasion, John wrote that a small ship was operated by fourteen men.<sup>70</sup> When the Slavs attacked the boat Duke Peter was sailing, they killed him along with seven other men.<sup>71</sup> Further evidence seems to confirm these suggestions.<sup>72</sup>

63 Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, p. 191.

64 On the tonnage of early medieval ships: John H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 26–28.

65 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* II, 55, ed. Berto, p. 126.

66 Reinhold Müller, “Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders before the Millennium: Jal’s *chelandia* or the Fortunes of a Fake,” in *Le technicien dans la cité en Europe occidentale, 1250–1650*, ed. Mathieu Arnoux and Pierre Monnet, Collection de l’École Française de Rome 325 (Rome, 2004), pp. 61–76.

67 John H. Pryor and Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204*, *The Medieval Mediterranean* 62 (Leiden and Boston, 2006), pp. 188–189.

68 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* III 23, ed. Robert Holtzmann, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, MGH, SS rer. Ger. N.S. 9 (Berlin, 1935), p. 126: *Haec est, ut prefatus sum, navis mirae longitudinis et alacritatis et utroque latere duos tenens remorum ordines ac centum quinquaginta nautas.*

69 Jonathan Shepard, “The Rhos Guests of Louis the Pious: Whence and wherefore?” *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995), pp. 41–60, at p. 57.

70 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* III, 7, ed. Berto, p. 132.

71 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* III, 33, ed. Berto, p. 146: *ibidem interfectus est cum aliis septem.*

72 McCormick, *Origins*, p. 417.

Crews seem to have been formed by a handful of men, linked by family and neighborhood and perhaps locally enlisted. We know that when the Venetian lagoons were ravaged by internal conflict at the beginning of the ninth century, fleets and armies were recruited in the settlements of Malamocco and Cittanova respectively. On the other hand, it is possible that some of the ships sailing the early medieval Adriatic had the well-known cosmopolitan character of the larger ships of later centuries. In the middle of the ninth century, the inhabitants of Cremona recalled that in the past they had begun to sail with the people of Comacchio, in order to trade in salt and spices, and, we may suppose, to learn the job.<sup>73</sup> Navigators having expertise in challenging coastal straits, such as the Strait of Otranto or the Bosphorus may have shortly served on different ships.<sup>74</sup> Out of speculation, it is clear that powerful men must have had a retinue that sailed with them for trade or prestige. They must have also been able to compensate them properly in order to maintain support.

The experience of seafaring itself must have been an important factor of cohesion. We know less about early medieval sailing than for more recent periods, but it seems that early medieval men perceived going by sea a hard, extenuating, and risky business. Once at sea, sailors lived in a self-contained floating world. In the middle ages, stops on land were frequent, but when crossing blue waters, seamen had to remain in the vessel for days. Amalarius of Metz in his (rather obscure) *Versus Marini*, expresses the hardships of a sea cruise.<sup>75</sup> It was commonly agreed that every sail could become a life-threatening experience. The fear of storms seems to have been ubiquitous.<sup>76</sup> The author of the *Translatio s. Heliani* depicted a massive storm not far from the shores of Apulia

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73 We know this from a plea from 856 in Pavia, edited in *I placiti del regnum Italiae 1*, ed. Cesare Manaresi, FSI 92 (Rome, 1955), n. 56, pp. 196–197: *memoro. xii. annos, ante quam dominus Karolus in Italiam ingressus fuisset, numquam sibi istos homines nec suos parentes suas habere naves ad negotium peragendum, nisi cum Comaclenses communiter sale aut alias speties adducebant in istum portum, et de communiter ipsum ripaticum et palificaturam dabant iuxta istud pactum.*

74 J. Mack, *The Sea*, p. 29.

75 Amalarius of Metz, *Versus marini*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH, Poetae 2 (Berlin, 1881), pp. 426–428. On this: Reinhard Düchting, “Amalar, Versus marini,” in *Lateinische Kultur im VIII. Jahrhundert: Traube-Gedenkschrift*, ed. Albert Lehner and Walter Berschin (St. Ottilien, 1989), pp. 47–58.

76 McCormick, *Origins*, pp. 403–404.

threatening the life of an entire crew.<sup>77</sup> In the *Translatio s. Marci* we read of the ship rapidly sailing in the night while a storm was approaching.<sup>78</sup> The almost certain tragic outcome of a night squall became the perfect setting for a miracle story. Therefore, setting out to sea became a highly ritualized practice. John the Deacon recorded the numerous religious functions that Peter II and his army attended during the sail to Dalmatia of the year 1000.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, living before the mast must have meant living in a largely masculine world. Members of the crews may have been different ages and experience levels, but must have been mostly male. We do not know too much about the lifestyle of the sailors, whether their drinking habits and bad tempers were notorious as in the following centuries, but in one of the very few portraits of life on the seventh-century docks we learn of the brutality and perhaps macabre humour of the seamen, who are dismissed as *lupaces*.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, sharing a long and dangerous journey together in life on the sea, the common adventure and mutual dependency must have created or enforced communal bonds of solidarity, perhaps friendship and respect.

If these aspects are somehow elusive due to the nature of the evidence, Istria may have represented a partial exception. Rich information stems from the *Cosmography of Aethicus Ister*. It is a very obscure narrative, which has become well known in the last years thanks to a new edition and English translation by Michal Herren.<sup>81</sup> The title of the text suggests it to be a description of the world, but the narrative is more an account of the adventurous and marvellous travels of the Hellenistic philosopher Aethicus. The text that we possess is allegedly a Latin epitome compiled by a certain Jerome (which the reader is supposed to identify as the fourth-century Church father) of the

77 *Translatio s. Heliani*, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Lang. (Hanover, 1878), pp. 581–582, at p. 581.

78 *Translatio s. Marci* 15, i, ed. Colombi, p. 60.

79 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* IV, 46–48, ed. Berto, pp. 188–190. For inspiring perspective see Christer Westerdahl, “Seal on Land, Elk at Sea: Notes on and Applications of the Ritual Landscape at the Seaboard,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 34 (2005), pp. 2–23.

80 Anastasius the Librarian, *De furore hereticorum in Martinum Papam*, PL 129, ed. Jaques P. Migne (Paris, 1879), cc. 591–604, at c. 592: *accedebant enim varii homines, quos propter ferales mores lupaces dixerim, et subrogati, ut conjicio, talia contra sanctum papam agebant, qualia Christianis dici non oportet*. McCormick, *Origins*, p. 425, described *lupaces* as *pimps and male prostitutes*.

81 *Cosmography of Aethicus*, ed. Michael Herren, *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin 8 (Turnhout, 2011).

lost Greek original. However, we know this to be a brilliant piece of literary fiction and the text was composed by an anonymous author in the eighth century, perhaps during the second quarter of it. The epithet *Ister*, which could immediately evoke the Danube, seems to have referred to an alleged Istrian origin of the Aethicus instead. The ego narrator Jerome showed some relationship and knowledge of the Northern Adriatic. With more certainty, the story's protagonist Aethicus had strong bonds with the same waterscape. The two characters' proximity to the Adriatic must have been a reflection of the author's origin. Ian Wood, maintaining that the text could inform the modern historian of the perceived nature of the Other, suggests that the fixed point against which this was constantly assessed was the Adriatic peninsula of Istria.<sup>82</sup> I would like to add that some of the Cosmographer's comments point to genuine knowledge of the eighth-century Adriatic, as I will show below. Nevertheless, the text is convoluted, in some sections to the point of unintelligibility. It must have been comprehensible in given literary circles, but not to us. This hopelessly compromises what could have been a greatly important witness.

Some things can still be said. A maritime perspective, like the one that the *capitanei* may have shared, dominates the entire *Cosmography*, which describes a world of shores and communication nodes watched by the sea. The *Cosmography of Aethicus* is by no means isolated in this literary achievement, but it is almost unique in the Mediterranean early middle ages. The author attached great importance to the islands both of the North and the South, which he inhabited with different amusing, sometimes humorous barbarians. Moreover, he shows a deep knowledge of the winds, the stars, the seasons of navigation, and, most importantly, of the classical terminology of seafaring and shipbuilding, on one occasion even praising the shipwrights.<sup>83</sup>

Notwithstanding its peculiar aspects, even the *Cosmography of Aethicus* is not an island, to quote an important lesson of critical theory.<sup>84</sup> Narrative elements hidden in different sections of the work reach out to a broader textual community, perhaps gathered around the early medieval Adriatic. In one passage the Cosmographer described a fascinating cycle of the sea. In his interpretation, the waters penetrated the cracks of the sea bottom in order to

82 Ian N. Wood, "Aethicus Ister: An Exercise in Difference," in *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 1 (Vienna, 2000), pp. 197–208.

83 On the winds, *Cosmography of Aethicus* 112, ed. Herren, p. 214; stars and season, *ibid.* 36c, ed. Herren pp. 38–40; on shipwrights, *ibid.* 36b, ed. Herren, p. 38.

84 I.e. Roberta Frank, "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 88–106, at p. 101.



travel to the mountains' springs and flow down to the seas and oceans, only to start the cycle once again.<sup>85</sup> This scientific explanation was widespread: writing in the seventh century, Isidore described the vast obscurity of the *Abyssus*, which bears clear resemblances to the Cosmographer's picture.<sup>86</sup> More interesting is that Paul the Deacon, an author who may have had some affection for the Adriatic Sea, narrated a lengthy account of a sailor captured in the great maelstrom raging north of the Lofoten Islands. Concluding the story, Paul recalled that the Adriatic also has similar although less imposing tides, which originated from the discharge of the maritime waters.<sup>87</sup>

A further, revealing redundancy concerns the ships and their representation. In the central section of his narrative, the Cosmographer adds a long and obscure catalogue of ships.<sup>88</sup> At first sight the section is mostly a curiosity: the nature of some vessels is clearly imaginative and magical. One ship is called *Lamia*, like the child-devouring daughter of the god Poseidon in Greek mythology (Λάμια), which was able to tear the enemies' vessels into pieces thanks to complex machinery.<sup>89</sup> Yet, beyond the author's taste for a good story, ships appear to characterize given populations. Most are active in certain regions only, being operated just by given groups of humans (or monsters). Therefore, in the social logic of the text and in the discourse alive in the Cosmographer's literary circle, people were recognizable by the ships they were sailing. This may have well been an Adriatic perspective. One of the most famous warships of the ancient Mediterranean was the *Liburna*, probably named after a people, perhaps the Adriatic Liburnians, although some authors suggested that the name might have originated from the Libyans as recorded by Isidore and later reported by the Cosmographer as well.<sup>90</sup>

85 *Cosmography of Aethicus* 112, ed. Herren, p. 214. Paolo Squatriti, *Water and Culture in the Early Middle Ages: AD 400–1000* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 160–161.

86 Isidore of Seville, *Eymologiae* XIII, 20, i, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911): *Abyssus profunditas est aquarum inpenetrabilis, sive speluncae aquarum latentium, e quibus fontes et flumina procedunt; vel quae occulte subter eunt, unde et abyssus dictus.*

87 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 1, 6, ed. Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Lang. (Hanover, 1878), pp. 12–187, at pp. 50–51. In the same passage Paul calls the sea *Nostrum quoque, id est Adriaticum, mare*, *ibid.* p. 51. On this: Walter Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus between Sacci und Marsupia," in *Ego Trouble: Authors and their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini, Matthew B. Gillis, Rosamond McKitterick, and Irene van Renswoude, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 17 (Vienna, 2010), pp. 112–123, at p. 116.

88 *Cosmography of Aethicus* 44–57, ed. Herren, pp. 104–112.

89 *Cosmography of Aethicus* 50, ed. Herren, p. 108.

90 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* XIX, 1, xii, ed. Lindsay; *Cosmography of Aethicus* 47, ed. Herren, p. 106. On the relationship between the *Liburna* and the *Liburnians*: Silvio Paniciera,

Here I will limit myself to adding that the Cosmographer describes hide boats as typical of the Northern peoples such as Scythians, Hircanians, and Saxons as well as other fantastic *gentes*.<sup>91</sup> Ian Wood and George Indruszewski recently noted that: “hide boat technology belongs to the northern side of the known world.”<sup>92</sup> Contemporary witnesses also mention the existence of hide boats in the northern seas. In the *Vita Columbae*, Adamnán of Iona mentioned that Cormac travelled north, *ultra humani excursus*, in a boat made of hide.<sup>93</sup> Brendan sailed in a similar vessel too, and, in the report of his journeys, we can find one of the most famous descriptions of shipbuilding.<sup>94</sup> As argued by Robert Van de Noort, the mention of these frail vessels may have served the purpose of highlighting the abandonment of the holy men in God’s hands.<sup>95</sup> It is also probable that, in the context of the *Cosmography*, these watercrafts may have represented a further element of barbarity in the already rich plethora of monstrosities that the great Aethicus met in the North. Even Caesar and Pliny described hide boats as characteristic of the barbarians living in the British islands.<sup>96</sup> The case is not isolated: in ancient ethnography, the *monoxila* or logboats, vessels carved from a hollowed-out tree trunk, served a similar purpose being also considered characteristic of the barbarians.<sup>97</sup>

John the Deacon gave some importance to the ships. We already saw the two *chelantiae* and, on the occasion of Otto III’s night visit to Venetiae, he lingered

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“Liburna,” *Epigraphica* 18 (1956), pp. 130–156; Lionel Casson, *Sea and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 141–142.

- 91 On hide-boats: Ole Crumlin-Petersen, *Archaeology and the Sea in Scandinavia and Britain*, Maritime Culture of the North 3 (Roskilde, 2010), p. 47; Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, pp. 149–152.
- 92 Ian N. Wood and George Indruszewski, “An 8th-Century Written Source on Ships and Navigation: The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister,” in *Wulfstan’s Voyage: the Baltic Sea region in the Early Viking Age as seen from Shipboard*, ed. Anton Englert and Athena Trakadas, Maritime Culture of the North 2 (Roskilde, 2008), pp. 220–234, at p. 231.
- 93 Adomnán of Iona, *Vita Columbae* II, 42, ed. Alan O. Anderson and Marjorie O. Anderson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1991), p. 168: *pellicium tectum nauis*. Mark Stansbury, “The Composition of Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae*,” *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–4), pp. 154–182.
- 94 *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* 4, ed. Orlandi and Guglielmetti, p. 12.
- 95 Van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, p. 152.
- 96 *Bell. Civ.* I, 54; *Nat. Hist.* IV, 104. Barry Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its People* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 66–67.
- 97 Crumlin-Petersen, *Archaeology and the Sea*, pp. 48–49. Moreover, Pietro Janni, *Il mare degli antichi* (Bari, 1996), pp. 304–307.

on describing the beauty of the Venetian vessels.<sup>98</sup> Reporting on the scourge of the Hungarians in Italy, around 900, he narrated their attack on the Venetian lagoons. The Hungarians, described as the quintessential barbarians, took to sea on their ships, which John described as *pelliciis navibus*, the same hide boats of the Cosmographer's northern barbarians.<sup>99</sup> This could have been a fragment of a broader discourse on alterity alive in the harbors of the Adriatic, where ships became meaningful signifiers to distinguish civilization and barbarity.

In conclusion, we saw that the aristocracies controlling some of the major harbors of the Adriatic prided themselves on a Roman heritage while sharing a maritime identity and culture. It may be helpful to point out that in the famous *Pact of Comacchio*, the men sailing and trading the river ways of Northern Italy were evocatively called *milites*, a label perhaps including the inhabitants of further Adriatic harbors, which triggered an association with the Roman past.<sup>100</sup> In the Italian charters from the eighth, ninth, and tenth century, we find the occurrence of the expression *naves militorum*, which, I believe, acquires a deeper meaning in this enriched context. The concept of the “ships of the soldiers,” in fact, wonderfully conflates the Roman heritage and the maritime vocation of its actors.<sup>101</sup>

Therefore, in order to understand the habits and culture that the Istrians shared with their distant Adriatic neighbors, we have to put the sea at the center of our investigation and cross it with shipping lines and crowded boats moving along them. Observed from one of these watercrafts, the shores of Istria were the northernmost fringes of a vaster maritime horizon extending to the Venetian lagoons and the Dalmatian archipelago. This Adriatic seascape, where Istria played a pivotal role, was, to quote the powerful words of Artemis Leontis: “a world not of boundaries that separate but of routes that connected. As its centre is not a sovereign power that subordinates pockets of differences, but dark, fluid waters, the medium of dangerous yet fruitful passages.”<sup>102</sup>

98 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* IV, 43, ed. Berto, p. 186.

99 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum* III, 37, ed. Berto, p. 148.

100 *Pact of Comacchio*, ed. Ludo M. Hartmann, *Zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte Italiens im frühen Mittelalter* (Gotha, 1904), pp. 123–124. On the *milites* in Venice: Stefano Gasparri, “Venezia fra l’Italia bizantina e il regno italico: la civitas e l’assemblea,” in *Venezia: Itinerari per la storia della città*, ed. idem, Giovanni Levi, and Pierandrea Moro (Bologna, 1997), pp. 61–82, at pp. 67–70; in Dalmatia: Francesco Borri, “La Dalmazia altomedievale tra discontinuità e racconto storico (VII–VIII sec.),” *Studi Veneziani* 58 (2009), pp. 15–51, at pp. 44–45.

101 The “ships of the soldiers” are mentioned in *Codice diplomatico longobardo III*, ed. Carl-Richard Brühl, FSI 64 (Roma, 1973), pp. 84, 87; *Inventari altomedievali di terre, coloni e redditi*, ed. Andrea Castagnetti, Michele Luzzati, Gianfranco Pasquali, and Augusto Vasina, FSI 104 (Rome, 1979), p. 84.

102 Artemis Leontis, “Mediterranean Topographies before Balkanization: On Greek Diaspora, Emporion, and Revolution,” *Diaspora* 6 (1997), pp. 179–194, at p. 189.