From one sea to another
Trading places in the European
and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages

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The numismatic evidence from the southern Adriatic (5th-11th centuries):
some preliminary observations and thoughts

Instead of investigating evolutions and phenomena that took place from ‘one sea to another’, as the title of this publication suggests, this paper focuses on one sea, the Adriatic, and its two coasts, the Illyrian to the east and the Italian to the west, and then only on their southern parts. This geographic limitation and chronological frame is dictated by historical reasons, since only southern Italian territories were more or less continuously under Byzantine control between the 5th and 11th centuries. Thus, they offer a potential field of comparison with the southern Albanian territories lying across the Adriatic. Since the circulation of Byzantine coins in Italy has been the subject of several contributions in the recent past, I will focus on the less well-known coin circulation in present-day Albania¹. Whenever

possible, comparisons are drawn with the better studied regions of Byzantine Italy—mainly Apulia and Calabria, two regions in close proximity to the Illyrian coast. The purpose of this exercise is to trace the information provided by the numismatic evidence regarding contact and economic exchange in the two rims of the Adriatic.

Unlike Italy, which had a turbulent history during the Early Middle Ages, most parts of Albania remained under Byzantine control throughout this period. Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the archaeology or history of this era. Italian fascism and post-war communism, both political movements with little or no interest in the Middle Ages, deeply influenced Albanian archaeology and consequently numismatics. Mussolini’s plan to create a protectorate in the Albanian territory spurred archaeological and research activity in the country, which aimed to establish a connexion between contemporary fascist claims and past Roman and Venetian presence. A similar attitude, dictated by other interests, was adopted by Enver Hoxha’s (1908-1985) isolationist regime after the Second World War. Only two historical periods were of interest to Albanian scholars: the civilisation of the Illyrians, considered to represent the autochthonous population of Albania before the Greek colonisation, and the civilisation of the Arbërs, the medieval ancestors of modern Albanians and supposed direct descendants of the Illyrians. In both cases, Byzantium and its civilisation offered no support for the official propaganda and were therefore ignored².

It is thus not surprising that, besides sporadic references in excavation reports, only two studies concerning Byzantine coins in Albania have been

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published. Our main source of information on Byzantine coin finds from the territory remains Hëna Spahiu’s article from 1979/1980⁴. Despite its errors and anachronistic attributions, it provides a valuable catalogue of 529 Byzantine coins discovered in Albania. Her study was later supplemented by Afrim Hoti’s and Halil Myrto’s catalogue of 127 Byzantine coins found in Durrës (Byzantine Dyrbachion)⁴. This extremely short list of publications, paralleled by an almost total absence of archival and historical sources, sharply contrasts with the situation in Byzantine Italy, where the scholar is overwhelmed by the abundance of numismatic publications and the richness of archival material⁵. The following commentary is based on the aforementioned Albanian publications, as well as on my own observations on the numismatic material studied during visits to Albania beginning in 2003⁶.

Geographically, the Illyrian coast forms a closed world, isolated from the rest of the Balkans by formidable mountains, with narrow valleys on the coasts that allow only limited agricultural production and few ports. Nevertheless, it was a region of commercial and strategic importance throughout the medieval period. The ports of Dyrbachion (Durrës) and Aulona (Vlorë) were no doubt essential to its commercial and military significance. They functioned both as entrances to the eastern parts of the Empire for anyone coming from Italy by sea and as the endpoints of the Via Egnatia, the most important land route from Constantinople to the west⁷.

Administratively, the Albanian territory was divided into three provinces (Provincia Praevalis, Nova Epirus and Epirus Vetus) and later into two the-
mata (Dyrhacchion and Nikopolis/Kephallenia). The area from Durrës up to the lake of Shkodër formed the Provincia Praevalis, later part of the theme of Dyrhacchion. Three important fortified cities guarding the passage of Lake Shkodër and protecting Dyrhacchion were situated on its northern edge: Shkodër (Scutari), Lezhë (Lissus) and Krujë (Kroia). The combined numismatic evidence from these sites and stray finds from other parts of the area offer a circulation pattern similar to the one typically observed in most Byzantine sites: namely, after a great influx of coins during the 6th century, particularly under Justinian I (527-565), coin finds cease under Constans II (641-668), only to resume at a relatively late date under the reign of Leo VI (886-912).8

Moving southwards we reach the Province of Nova Epirus, the middle Byzantine theme of Dyrhacchion. This is not only the most fertile area of Albania, with coastal valleys to the west and the Ohrid and Prespa lakes to the east, but also the most important area commercially and militarily because its boundaries coincide with the important port-cities of Dyrhacchion and Aulona, the two western termini of the medieval Via Egnatia.9 The strategic significance and commercial role of these ports increased after the loss of Byzantine Italy, making the Illyrian coast the westernmost frontier of the Empire and allowing for the integration of these port-cities into the commercial network of the Italian maritime cities.10 It is certainly not a coincidence that both ports were included in the treaties granting privileges to Venetian merchants active in the territories of the Empire since 1082.11 The role of these port-cities in earlier periods is less clear and must have depended largely on the changing fate of the connected maritime and

9 A. Ducellier, La façade maritime, p. 76-77.
land routes. In any case, *Dyrbacchion*, though later known as a major commercial centre, was more important on a regional level and as a stronghold during the Middle Byzantine period; it was the capital of the province and, beginning in the 9th century, the capital of the homonymous theme. Other medieval fortified sites in the area include *Pulcheriopolis* (Berat), Kaninë, *Apollonia*, Korcë and Pogradec.

In the case of Durrës, the modern city lying on top of Byzantine *Dyrbacchion*, excavations revealed a significant number of Byzantine coins. Besides a gold *solidus* of Constantine IV (668-685), all of the coins are copper. This could be attributed to the nature of the numismatic material, which comes from excavated sites for the most part, and furthermore to the nature of the sites.

1. Graph showing the mint distribution at Dyrrachium, AD 498-668.

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15 The coins published by A. Hoti and H. Myrto come from three excavated sites within the modern city: the amphitheatre that at some point in the Byzantine period
In the 6th century, Anastasian coins made up 30% of the total coins in circulation, whereas the most numerous (44%) are again the coins of Justinian I. The important presence of Anastasius I’s (491-518) coins is no doubt related to the fact that Dyrhacchion was the emperor’s birthplace. Significant building activity, including the late antique fortification and the hippodrome, was undertaken during his reign. As far as mint distribution is concerned, there is a clear preponderance of the metropolitan mint, followed by Thessalonica, the capital of Illyricum (fig. 1). Carthage and Antioch are also represented, but counter to expectation, no Italian mints have been found, save for Syracuse. This numismatic phenomenon parallels trends in other sites, as discussed below.

According to the available data, there is a clear prevalence of the higher copper denominations, namely the *follis* and the half-*follis* (fig. 2). If this phenomenon is not due to the difficulty of recovering and identifying small

became a residential area, the Macellum in the Roman forum and the necropolis. *Ibidem*, p. 91 with bibliography. This material is supplemented by sporadic references in H. Spahiu, «Monedha bizantine», *passim* and by twenty-odd unpublished coins in the Durrës Archaeological Museum. P. Papadopoulou, «Tétartèra d’imitation du XIIIe siècle: à propos du trésor de Durrës (Albanie)», *Revue Numismatique*, 161 (2005), p. 146, n. 7. It is clear that the nature of the evidence is too fragmentary to be considered as representative of the whole city of Dyrhacchion.

denominations, it reveals a differentiation in the circulation pattern of copper denominations between the provinces of Nova Epirus and Epirus Vetus; as will be shown, small denominations are plentiful in the latter region. It is also noteworthy that purely Thessalonian denominations, such as the dekaexanoumion and the tetranoumion, have also been recovered in Dyrhachion. In total, fourteen dekaexanomia have been found in Albania, but none from the south. With the exception of four specimens found in Shkodër and Korcë, the rest come from Belsh in the Elbasan region, Lin, Pogradec and Durrës. Based on the testimonies of 11th- and 12th-century Byzantine historians, Alain Ducellier suggested the existence of an alternate route leading from Macedonia to the Albanian coast with a course that differs in part from that of the ancient Via Egnatia. Coincidently the dekaexanomia finds come from fortresses on or very near this other itinerary and possibly indicate that it was already in use as early as the 6th century.

Returning to coin circulation in Dyrhachion, the relatively short duration of the grande brèche (that is, the discontinuity observed in the coin circulation of most Byzantine sites between c.668 and 820) is perhaps an indication of the city’s military and commercial – albeit regional – importance in the Dark Ages. It seems to have lasted only from 741 to the reign of Theophilus (829-842). The late 7th-century gold solidus of Constantine IV reinforces this argument. The next period is marked by the strong presence of Leo VI’s follis, which represent 77% of all coin finds, whereas the anony-


18 H. Spahiu, «Monedha bizantine», nos 159-171; A. Hoti, H. Myrto, «Monedha», no. 20. From the descriptions, it can be deduced that nine belong to type MIB I, 169a, two to MIB I, 169c, and one to MIB I, 170a. Only one tetranomia is known; it was recovered in Durrës. Ibidem, no 21 (MIB I, 176a).

19 This alternative itinerary diverges from the route of the Via Egnatia west of the lake Ohrid and is directed to the south, along the northern shore of the river Devoll, through Deavoli and then northwards, through Petrëli and the Ezren valley to Dyrhachion. A. Ducellier, La façade maritime, p. 76-79 and map on p. 684.

mous *folles* of Class A2 (976-1030/5) prevailed in the late 10th-11th centuries. Given the fragmentary nature of our documentation for the 11th century, it is difficult to make any secure observations regarding coin circulation. There are, however, indications that anonymous *folles* of Class I, dating from c.1075 to c.1080, were quite common. Their presence can be connected to Alexius Comnenus’ campaigns against the Normans in 1081-1085\(^2\). Although these coins are not commonly found in Italy as single finds\(^2\), they often occur overstruck by *follari* of Robert Guiscard (1059-1085), an indication of their earlier arrival in southern Italy\(^3\).

Another important site in this area is Byllis, an episcopal see and one of the eight most important cities of Nova Epirus\(^4\). It was refortified by Justinian I\(^5\), but did not survive the Slav attacks and was abandoned in the 6th century\(^6\). Excavations yielded 461 Byzantine coins, belonging for the most part to Anastasius I, Justin I (518-527) and Justinian I. *Minimi* of Baduila (541-552) as well as Vandal coins were also found there. The majority of coins are small denominations, mainly *nummi* and *pentanoumia*, in stark contrast to the large denomination finds at Dyrbacchion. In this case too, Justinian’s coins prevail, reflecting this emperor’s concern for the de-

\(^2\) Also see P. Papadopoulou, «The Middle and Late Byzantine, Medieval and Early Modern Coins», in *Butrint: Excavations at the Triomph Palace*, eds R. Hodges, W. Bowden, K. Lako, Oxford, forthcoming.


fensive system of the Albanian territory. Three hoards consisting mainly of Justinian’s coins were found in the destruction layer of the cathedral; they can be connected with the Slav invasions27. At least one of the hoards, about which more information is available, closes with a *follis* of 547/548 and can thus be associated with the 548-551 invasion of the Sklavens28.

A more extended chronological sequence is available from the city of Pogradec on the Ohrid Lake29. Although it was not a town of great significance in the Byzantine period, it represents a non-coastal settlement and thus offers an interesting point of comparison. There is a strikingly long absence of numismatic finds during the Middle Byzantine period: coin finds cease under Justin II (565-578) and resume only at the end of the 10th century with two anonymous *folles* of Class A2 (fig. 3). Pogradec’s geographical position in the interior of the Albanian territory justifies the long absence of coin finds, a common feature of all non-coastal Albanian sites.

29 H. Spahiu, «Monedha bizantine», *pāsim*.
Besides the three small hoards of Byllis, another hoard was discovered in Gjegjovë in the Berat area. It consisted of 10 folles of Anastasius I, Justin I and Justinian I, all found in a bronze plate(30). The hoard, closing with a 539/540 follis, has been associated with the first Kutrigur incursion (539-540)(31). Along with the hoards from Byllis, the Gjegjovë hoard extends into the Albanian territory, the ‘routes des invasions’, as they have been traced by Vujadin Ivanišević on the basis of Balkan hoards(32).

In general, coin circulation in Nova Epirus is characterised by a more regular and continuous coin supply than northern Albania, thanks to its contacts with the capital and the rest of the Empire. This, however, does not hold true for the whole region: the sites in the interior, such as Pogradec and Kërçë, present a picture analogous to that of Central and Northern Balkans, where the so-called Dark Ages lasted longer(33).

The southernmost part of the Albanian territory is a mountainous area, and along with parts of Greek Epirus, it formed the Province of Epirus Vetus and later on the theme of Nikopolis. One of the best-documented sites of this area, in both the literary and archaeological evidence, is Butrint, Byzantine Bootroto. The numerous mentions of the site in written sources are supplemented by the archaeological evidence revealed in the course of excavations conducted there since the 1920’s, first by Italian and then by Albanian archaeologists(34). From 1994 onwards, excavations in several areas of the site (Triconch Palace, Vrina Plain, Western Defenses, Diaporit, Forum etc.) have been undertaken by a British-Albanian mission, revealing hundreds of medieval coins(35). Diff-

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32 Ibidem, p. 75-93.
33 As, for example, in Serbia, V. Radić, V. Ivanišević, Byzantine Coins from the National Museum in Belgrade, Belgrade, 2006, p. 61. See also, F. Curta, «Byzantium in Dark-Age Greece (the numismatic evidence in its Balkan context)», Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 29/2 (2005), p. 113-146.
Different circulation patterns can be discerned in different parts of the site, but for the purposes of the present study the site will be considered as a whole (fig. 4).\footnote{I have taken under consideration the Butrint coin finds published in H. Spahić, «Monedha bizantine»; P. Guest, J. Mitchell, E. Nallbani, S. Gjongecaj, «The small finds and coins», in R. Hodges et al., Byzantine Butrint, p. 301-304; D.M. Metcalf, Coinage in South-Eastern Europe, 829-1386, London, 1979, p. 22, 202, n. 7; K. Lako, «Rezultatet e gërmeve arkeologjike në Butrint në vitet 1975-1976», Iliria, 11/1 (1981), p. 125-129; T.S.N. Moorhead, «The Ancient and Early Mediaeval Coins from the Triconch Palace at Butrint, c. 2nd century BC-c. AD 600», The Numismatic Chronicle, 167 (2007), p. 287-304; P. Papadopoulou, «Middle and Late Byzantine coins». I have also included unpublished coins from the excavations carried out in the 1990s, currently kept at the Numismatic Cabinet in Tirana and the Butrint Archaeological Museum. A great part of the material considered here has been revealed during the British-Albanian excavations (1998-2007). The material is currently being prepared for publication by the author.}

The 6th-century coin evidence presents a picture of relative economic prosperity. Coin finds stop with three folles of Phocas (602-610) – or possibly with a folli of Heraclius or Constans II\footnote{A folli of possible 7th-century date was found in a tower at the Western Defenses site, but its pre-conservation attribution to Heraclius or Constans II remains speculative.} – and reappear as early as the beginning of the 9th century with Syracusan folles of Michael II (820-829), Theophilus and Michael III (842-867). This early group is followed by a
A large number of Constantinopolitan folles dating from the reigns of Basil I (867-886) to Basil II (976-1025), as well as silver miliareia and a gold tetarteron. This prosperity carries on in the 11th century with significant numbers of anonymous folles found in every part of the site. The described evolution is largely in accordance with the archaeological evidence that brought to light the fluctuating destiny of Bouthrotos.

Since the numismatic material from Butrint is known in some detail, it is possible to make several interesting observations. During the 6th century (fig. 5), a clear preponderance of the coins of Justinian I is again observed; unlike Dyrrhacchion or Byllis, however, it is not accompanied by a comparably high level of coins of Anastasius I, since the latter represent less than 12% of this century’s coin finds. Although there is no written evidence regarding building activity in Bouthrotos under Anastasius I, the excavators attribute the construction of the early Byzantine fortifications, dated roughly to the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century, to his reign. Although it cannot be excluded, the limited presence of Anastasius’ coinage casts doubts on this hypothesis, especially given the strong presence of this emperor’s coinage in areas where such activity under his reign is at-

58 For an overview of the archaeology of Butrint with emphasis on the Middle Ages, see W. Bowden, R. Hodges, «An 'Ice Age settling on the Roman Empire'» with bibliography.
59 Ibidem.
tested in both the literary and archaeological records. In general, the first half of the 6th century sees a large investment in Christian building, reaching its apogee in the second quarter of the century with the construction of a large basilica and a baptistery. Yet, this picture of urban vitality is moderated by the abandonment of the monumental Triconch palace, its use for small-scale domestic occupation and processing of shellfish, and the fact that it was apparently stripped for building materials. The situation has correctly been interpreted to suggest that “the presence of major Christian buildings cannot be used as an indicator of wider urban vitality, but at the same time that post-built structures and secondary occupation of monumental buildings cannot be seen as indicative of more general urban decline”40. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the numismatic material. Along with the new coin supply reaching Bouthrotos, stratigraphic analysis of coin finds reveals that part of the 6th-century circulating medium was provided by earlier coins, mainly nummi. The reasons behind this phenomenon are still unclear, and the suggestion that it reflects the familiarity and adhesion of the local society in the ‘nummus economy’ provides only part of the answer41. As for the second half of the 6th century, archaeological and numismatic evidence are fully in accordance. Along with the dwindling coin finds, change is evident in both the developed environment of the town and its outlying settlements, which was also accompanied by a radical retraction of imported fineware and amphorae – and presumably perishable food imports. This process continued and even accelerated at the beginning of the 7th century, after which, the absence of coin finds parallels the absence of new construction, with the material culture of the settlement reaching a vanishing point around the mid-7th century42.

Another interesting feature of this early period is the denominational pattern, which is distinctly different from the one observed for Dyrbachchos43. There is a strong concentration of higher value copper coins – folles and half-folles – and of the smallest denomination, the nummi, with the intermediate values being practically absent (fig. 6). Earlier specimens of nummi still in circulation should also be added to these 6th-century nummi, as has already been mentioned. This clearly suggests that Bouthrotos was, throughout the 6th century, part of the nummus circulation area which cov-

40 Ibidem.
41 T.S.N. Moorhead, «The Ancient and Early Mediaeval Coins», p. 298. See also below.
42 W. Bowden, R. Hodges, «An 'Ice Age settling on the Roman Empire' ».
43 Small denominations are difficult to identify and are thus likely to be excluded from publications. Until a revaluation of the numismatic material from Dyrbachchos is available, any conclusions on this matter must be regarded as provisional.
ered several parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, a fact that should probably be attributed to its proximity to North Africa and Italy, where this denomination was produced and circulated. Indeed, *folles* are by far the prevailing denomination in Southern Italy, but the evidence from hoards, such as Massafra and Lucera in Apulia or from single finds, such as those from Saint Michael’s sanctuary in Monte S. Angelo, show that the *nummi* were also widely used.

As far as mints are concerned, *Bouthrotos* again diverges from *Dyrhacchion* with a prevalence of coins from Carthage (fig. 7). These are mostly, but not exclusively, *nummi* of the Vandal ruler Thrasamund (496-523) and of Justinian I. In her study of the diffusion of the coins of Carthage outside the administrative boundaries of Africa, Cécile Morrisson has associated the intensification of this phenomenon with Justinian’s reconquest of Africa. The almost absolute preponderance of coin finds dating from the twelfth

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45 E.A. Arslan, *Repertorio*: nos 5220 (Lucera), 5230 (Massafra), 5250 (Monte S. Angelo, Santuario S. Michele). See also, E.A. Arslan, «Goti, Bizantini e Vandali: a proposito di ripostigli enei di VI secolo in Italia centrale», *Quaderni ticinesi di numismatica e antichità classiche*, 12 (1983), p. 213-228. It should be noted, however, that *minimi* and *nummi* are also frequently found in southern Greece, especially in Attica and the Peloponnese. C. Morrisson, «La monnaie sur les routes fluviales et maritimes des échanges dans le monde méditerranéen (vième-ixe siècle)», *L’acqua nei secoli altomedievali*, Spoleto, 2008 (*Settimana del Centro italiano di studi sull’Alto Medioevo LV*), p. 654.
and thirteenth year of his reign (538/9-539/40) confirms this view. The picture in Butrint and Albania more generally, however, is slightly different. Although the sample is not large, it is characteristic that out of 24 datable coins found in the country, 12 predate Justinian’s reform (538/9). It is also interesting that these earlier coins prevail in the south, whereas coins postdating the reform become more common in the north (Table 1).

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<td>Butrint</td>
<td>2 + 6 nummi + 2 (?) nummi</td>
<td>1 + 3 nummi + 1 (?) nummi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gjegjovë</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byllis</td>
<td>Vandal coins + nummi (unspecified)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durrës</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Shkodër</td>
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The same is observed for the Vandal coins that are mainly found in the south – Byllis included. Although it cannot be excluded that all coins arrived in Albania after the reconquest, their geographical distribution suggests an earlier penetration of Carthage coinage in the south and a later one in the north. The latter observation brings these territories closer to the Central Balkans, where African coins are exclusively of a post-538 date. In the particular case of Butrint, the numismatic evidence coincides with that of ceramics, since a rise in Tunisian imports is observed in the first half of the 6th century; after 550, both African pottery and coins become scarce. It must be stressed though that a nummus of Maurice (582-602) was found in Butrint, four folles and a half-follis of Constans II were recovered in Durrës and a half-follis of Heraclius was recorded from an unspecified location in southern Albania, all from the mint of Carthage. The continued presence of the mint of Carthage throughout the 6th and 7th centuries suggests that the circulation pattern of the Illyrian coast was closer to that observed in the western parts of the Empire, especially those of eastern Sicily and Ravenna.

Another point worth noting is the relatively early reappearance of coins in Bouthrotos after the grande brèche and their exclusively Sicilian provenance. On the basis of historical and hagiographical sources, as well as monetary finds, Michael McCormick has shown that people and goods were circulating between Sicily and Constantinople, Asia Minor and even Jerusalem in the 8th and 9th centuries. A testimony for the use of this maritime route is the vita of Gregorius Decapolites. This Isaurian saint left Corinth in 831


48 This fact has been attributed to troop movements. C. Morrisson, «La diffusion de la monnaie de Carthage», p. 112-113 with examples and bibliography.


for Rome via Reggio, stayed for a while in Syracuse and then sailed again to Otranto; from there he headed to Thessalonica (834) and Constantinople where he died in 838. The *vita* is contemporary with the Sicilian *folles* from Butrint, dating from 820 to 867 and providing the first coins in the site after a total absence of monetary finds for more than a century. They are of particular interest, since they offer the missing link between Sicily and the Peloponnese, where Syracusan coin finds have already been recorded. Moreover, they differentiate southern Albania from the rest of the Balkan façade of the Adriatic rim, where the coin evidence suggests a shift away from Byzantine Italy already in 775. However, it must be stressed that the Sicilian coins do not necessarily indicate direct contact between the island and Bouthrotos, but contact between the latter and the south Italian coast. Monetary finds from Calabria and Apulia show an exclusivity of Sicilian coinage from the second half of the 7th to approximately the second half of the 9th century; only Otranto presents an exception to this pattern, perhaps due to the Lombard presence there or, more likely, to the particular nature of the excavated site.

In the Vrina plain, the same part of Butrint where the Sicilian *folles* were found, excavations also revealed 46 copper *folles* from the mint of Constantinople dating from the reign of Basil I to the 11th century – of which an anonymous *follis* Class B (1030-/1042) is the latest. More than 70% of these *folles* belong to the reign of Leo VI, with several among them in almost mint condition; along with the recovery of a silver *miliaresion* of Leo VI, these *folles* indicate an intensive and direct influx of coinage into

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53 As already mentioned, coin circulation resumes in the 9th century with four *folles* of Michael II (1), Theophilus (1) and Michael III (2) from the mint of Syracuse. They were found in the Vrina plain, where the center of activity seems to have moved during the 9th - 10th centuries.


57 A list and commentary on the coin finds from the Vrina plain by the author will be included in the final publication of the site currently under preparation.
Bouthrotos during that period\textsuperscript{58}. The numismatic evidence and the exceptional nature of the other finds from this area led the excavators to interpret the Vrina plain as a significant middle Byzantine regional administrative centre\textsuperscript{59}. Crucial for this identification was the recovery of five Byzantine lead seals dating from the late 9\textsuperscript{th} to the 10\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{60}. One seal is of particular interest, since it indicates links between Bouthrotos and southern Italy. The seal dates from the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century and belongs to John, patriarch, imperial protospatharios and strategos of Sicily. Although the seal identifies Sicily as John’s seat, he must have been based in Calabria, where the strategoi of Sicily resided after the fall of Taormina (902)\textsuperscript{61}. It thus allows us to prolong the connexion between Bouthrotos and southern Italy into the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, as suggested by the early 9\textsuperscript{th}-century Sicilian coins.

The literary evidence confirms this hypothesis. According to the Life of the Sicilian saint, Elias the Younger, written in the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, but referring to events that took place in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century, the saint and his disciple Daniel travelled from Sparta in the Peloponnese to Bouthrotos around 880-884. Upon their arrival in the town, Elias and Daniel were accused of being Agarenoi (Muslims) and spies, and were subsequently imprisoned. Their pleas towards the archon himself did not help. The story ends, of course, with the triumphal liberation of the two companions thanks to divine intervention. In 904, the relics of Saint Elias who had died in Thessalonica, were brought to Bouthrotos via Thessaly, Hellas and Thesprotia in order to be taken to Calabria – first to Rossano and then through Bisignono into the Saline region, where the saint had spent a large part of his life\textsuperscript{62}. The combination of the numismatic evidence, referring to the period 820-867, the documentary evidence dating from the late 9\textsuperscript{th} century and the sigillographic evidence covering the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, point to a direct, albeit sporadic, connection between

\textsuperscript{58} It is perhaps worth noting that no folles of Basil I or Leo VI found in the site of Butrint belong to the types attributed to the mint of Reggio. D. Castrizio, «I ripostigli di Via Giulia (RC) e del Kastron di Calanna e la zecca bizantina di Reggio sotto Basilio I e Leone VI», Revue Numismatique, 155 (2000), p. 209-219.

\textsuperscript{59} W. Bowden, R. Hodges, «An ‘Ice Age settling on the Roman Empire’».

\textsuperscript{60} P. Papadopoulou, «Five lead seals from Byzantine Butrint (Albania)», Studies in Byzantine Sigillography, 11 (forthcoming). A brief description of the seals is also included in W. Bowden, R. Hodges, «An ‘Ice Age settling on the Roman Empire’».


Sicily, Calabria and Bouthrotos from the early 9th to the mid-10th centuries.

In the next period, at the end of the 10th century, another indication of contact between Bouthrotos and Italy appears. A denaro of Otto III (983-1002) from the mint of Pavia was found in the Triconch palace (CNI IV, p. 482, nos 12-13). The ottolini, as these coins are commonly known, circulated widely in Italy long after their issue and appear in the literary sources until the mid-12th century. Apart from being broken, however, the Butrint coin seems to have barely circulated, dating its arrival in Bouthrotos shortly after its issue. It is probably during that period, the end of the 10th century, that the ottolini also first entered the southern Italian territory. Whether this is an indication of closer contacts between the two regions is unclear, but the presence of ottolini on both sides of the Adriatic is a positive indication.

In that respect it is worth mentioning that three denari of a slightly earlier date – Otto I and Otto II (967-973) from the mints of Pavia (two specimens) and Lucca (one specimen) – along with a Sachsenpfennig of Otto I (936-973), possibly from the mint of Magdeburg, were found in the excavations of an early Christian basilica in Palaiopolis, 2 km south of the town of Kerkryra, on the east coast of the island of Corfu. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the numismatic evidence from this island is almost non-existent, rendering the evaluation of these coins – as exceptional finds or as part of a larger circulation pattern – impossible. In any case, they are significant of the important role that the Corfu straits – with the homonymous island to the west and Bouthrotos to the east – played in maritime travel and commerce during that period.

65 E.A. Arslan, Repertorius: Calabria: nos 0940 (Santa Severina: 1), 0990 (Scribla: 1), 1020 (Stalettì, Santa Maria del Mare: 2); Apulia: no 5250 (Monte S. Angelo, Santuario S. Michele: 1 or 2). It is, however, difficult to be certain of the date, given the long circulation of the ottolini, a fact attested by both literary and hoard evidence. A. Rovelli, «Il denaro di Pavia», p. 86-89.
67 The extreme rarity of non-Byzantine coin finds in the territories of the Empire before the 12th century strengthens the argument.
In general, Butrint, an exceptionally well-studied Albanian site, is indicative of the potential for such studies towards a better understanding of the Illyrian coast, a territory on the boundaries between East and West.

By combining the evidence mentioned above, we can obtain an overview of coin circulation in medieval Albania (fig. 8). Already under Anastasius I, the Albanian territory was characterised by an economic prosperity that continued throughout the 6th century, reaching its peak under Justinian I. During his reign, important building activity, including fortifications and basilicas, took place in the Illyrian coast. Beginning with Tiberius II (578-582), a decline in monetary finds is evident; although there are finds from the 7th and 8th centuries, their number and geographical diffusion is substantially reduced, mainly to coastal sites. Circulation slowly resumes under Theophilus and regularises towards the end of the 9th century. From this period onwards, numismatic finds become all the more plentiful and by the end of the 10th century they even reach parts of Albania’s interior.

As mentioned, it is impossible to compare this picture directly with the one obtained from southern Italy, given the different historical circumstances reigning in the latter\(^68\). Still, I would like to raise some points re-

\(^68\) The administrative structure of the Byzantine empire, at least during the Early Byzantine period, was another factor of divergence in circulation patterns observed even in neighboring regions, as has been demonstrated by the study of early Byzantine coin hoards in relation to the provinces of the Empire. C. Morrisson, V. Ivanišević,
Regarding both regions and the contact between them as evidenced by the numismatic material. In this effort, I will focus on common features shared by both regions and the presence of the products of Italian mints on Albanian soil.

Regarding the latter, one must begin by clarifying that the presence of Byzantine coins minted in Italy is extremely restricted in Albania. This is not surprising though, given the small output of Italian mints. Having said that, we can identify two different periods in the phenomenon. During the


6th century, Italy is represented in Albania mainly by Ostrogothic issues of Baduila and to a lesser extent by Byzantine issues of the northern mints of Rome and Ravenna. Finds from these mints tend to be concentrated in central and southern Albania70. During the next chronological period we only have sporadic finds: four early 9th-century Sicilian folles and a late 10th-century ottolino that have already been noted. The evidence suggests irregular and limited contacts.

Some phenomena observed on both coasts of the Adriatic could also indicate contact. One of them, mentioned above, is the persistence in the circulation of coins minted in Carthage after the mid-6th century. Also from this period, a shared circulation pattern concerning the gold solidus and its fractions can be identified. Clearly, the Albanian territory is characterised by a preponderance of the solidus over its fractions and by a minimum presence of the half solidus, the semissis (fig. 9)71. Both facts are well attested from other regions too72. What is surprising though is the high percentage of the one-third solidus, the tremissis, representing 36% of all gold coins. A comparison with gold finds from Calabria – Byzantine gold coins from this period are absent from the numismatic record of Apulia – shows that the same phenomenon can be observed in that area (35%). In both cases, the percentage is about 10% higher than the calculated average of the tremissis production73. In the case of Italy, the significant role played by the tremissis is confirmed by both the continuation of its use and its continued production by the Byzantine imperial mints in Rome, Ravenna and Syracuse as well as the Ostrogothic and Lombard mints74. The significantly reduced role of the tremissis is attested in the Balkans, where it represents only 13% of the gold coins.

70 Ostrogothic coins: Byllis (unpublished), Butrint (T.S.N. Moorhead, «The Ancient and Early Medieval Coins», p. 304), unspecified location in southern Albania (S.L. Cesano, «Monetazione e circolazione», p. 74). The total absence of these coins from the list established by H. Spahiu, «Monedha bizantine», is likely due to the author’s failure to identify these issues.
71 Data for Graph 9 is provided in the case of Albania by H. Spahiu, «Monedha bizantine» (14 coins, presumably all isolated finds) and by E.A. Arslan, Repertorio, in the case of Italy (Calabria) (62 coins, all from the hoard of Crotone, Punta Scifo except for a tremissis of Maurice).
72 C. Morrison, V. Ivanišević, «Les emissions des VIe-VIIe siècles», p. 45, 47.
found in hoards\textsuperscript{75}. If this is not due to a preference of the population for *solidi* over its fractions for hoarding, then it presents an interesting subject for further investigation\textsuperscript{76}. Is it just a coincidence or could there be a common supply pattern in the two coasts of the southern Adriatic?

The available numismatic evidence shows only sporadic, random contact between the two rims of the Adriatic. During the Early Byzantine period, when, thanks to mint-marks, the circulation and movement of coinage from one region to another is easily identified, the Illyrian coast seems to be steadily oriented towards the East. It nevertheless shares some common features with the southern Italian peninsula, such as the persistence of the *nummus* circulation – with the parallel use of new and older, Late Roman, coins\textsuperscript{77} – the arrival of products from the mint of Carthage after Justinian’s reign and the strong presence of the *tremissis*. What is the relative significance of these similarities when compared to the absence of Italian monetary products in Albania? As any argument *ex silentio*, the latter evidence has to be considered cautiously. The study of the diffusion of copper coins from the mint of Ravenna, for example, shows that their circulation outside the exarchate was limited in any case, with relevant coin finds coming mainly from Dalmatia and, to a much lesser extent, from southern Italy (Calabria)\textsuperscript{78}. During the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries, there is evidence of contact between the two rims once more – again, only movements from Italy towards the Illyrian coast are traceable. In this case too, it is sporadic and geographically restricted, but supported by sigillographic and literary evidence. This picture, however, is contrasted by the testimony of ceramics that show direct and intense contact between the Adriatic rims during certain periods\textsuperscript{79}. It is therefore clear that if

\textsuperscript{75} C. Morrissom, V. Ivanišević, «Les emissions des VIe-VIIe siècles», p. 45-47.

\textsuperscript{76} The margins of error concerning the comparison of single finds and hoard evidence seem to be less important in the case of gold coins. C. Morrissom, «Trouvailles isolées et trésors: reflets de la production monétaire à Byzance?», in *Ritrovamenti monetali nel mondo antico: problemi e metodi*, ed. G. Gorini, p. 236-239.

\textsuperscript{77} It should be noted, however, that the same holds true for the western Peloponnese. Cf. the large *minimi* hoards found there, C. Morrissom et al., *Les trésors monétaires*, nos 169, 179, 185, 207.

\textsuperscript{78} B. Callegher, «La diffusione della moneta di Ravenna», p. 253-254. In Calabria, out of 139 coins dating from Anastasius I to Heraclius, only 5 come from the mint of Ravenna (3.6%) and 18 (13%) from the mint of Rome. E.A. Arslan, *Catalogo del Museo di Catanzaro*, p. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{79} It is characteristic that about 50\% of the pottery recovered from the site where the Sicilian *folles* in Butrint were found is composed of amphorae of a distinctive Otranto type. W. Bowden, R. Hodges, «An ‘Ice Age settling on the Roman Empire’». For further examples, see Joanita Vroom’s contribution in this volume.
The numismatic evidence from Southern Adriatic (5th-11th centuries)

The analysis of numismatic material is used to determine the degree of contact between the two coasts of the Adriatic, the relationship would tend to be underestimated\(^8\). Despite the misleading conclusion to which this exercise led, it is still useful as a case study on the use of numismatics as evidence of inter-regional contact and provides a caveat for similar, future studies.

Abbreviations

\(^8\) Cf. similar observations in C. Morrisson, «La monnaie sur les routes fluviales et maritimes», p. 665-666.