

Usuard, whose detailed account illustrates the routes connecting Cordova and France (R528). An Arab observer explicitly notes that some traders traveled from Frankland to the Middle East (and beyond) via Spain and the land route across north Africa.⁷⁷ However many (or few) travelers or traders followed such a circuitous route from Frankland to the Middle East, it seems clear that interlocking communications and probably also trade zones provided yet another alternative in the ninth century for long-distance exchanges. Certainly Jewish and Christian traders as well as some diplomats traveled between Frankland and Spain. Their movements were probably reinforced by the powerful Frankish bridgehead around Barcelona.⁷⁸ Since most of this indirect route lies within the House of Islam, it is enough for us to have recognized its implications for our theme, and leave more exhaustive study to those who are better equipped for it.

Around 700, western Europe was joined to the Middle East only by sea, only through Byzantium, and only sporadically. A century or so later, shipping had become considerably less sparse in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Sea links between Italy and Africa, between the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Seas, between Italy and France had come back to life. The north-south sea route connected western Italy to the major communications axis of the Islamic world that ran along the Mediterranean's southern rim. Within a generation, another almost entirely overland route was available through Spain. The birth or rebirth of these routes was important indeed. But the most dramatic change was occurring elsewhere. It was occurring in the once dormant Adriatic Sea.

77 Ibn Khurradadhbih, trans. Jacobi, p. 253; for the overland and sea routes linking Africa with Spain, see Ya'kūbī, trans. Wiet, pp. 210-11 and 217.

78 On diplomats, El-Hajji 1970, 119-52; one

suspects that this was the route by which a rabbinical letter traveled from Syria to Barcelona in the middle of the 9th C.: R526; for traders, see Ch. 23.3.

Venetian breakthrough: European communications in the central Mediterranean

THE VENETIANS' arrival on the western shores of Italy around 748 casts a sudden shaft of light on the central Mediterranean. The Adriatic returns to life in the eighth century amidst a flurry of ship movements. A couple of generations later, another communications corridor funneled into the Ionian Sea and reinforced it: the land and sea routes which converged at the gulf of Corinth. Tracing the return of shipping to these two great corridors will fill out our picture of the origins of medieval European shipping patterns and allow us to address their structure.

1. Venetian breakthrough

In the twilight of antiquity, local shipping in the upper Adriatic sputtered along.¹ As empire ended, the Roman population had fled offshore to security among marshy lagoons and islands; necessarily, boats moved them around their watery world. Some administrative traffic up the 740 km-long sea had persisted through the late seventh and earlier eighth centuries, running a lifeline to outposts like Ravenna or those along the Balkan coastline. But the ties that bound were stretching ever thinner.² No imperial

1 E.g., the duke of Friuli had sailed from Istria to Ravenna and then up the Po to Pavia in the late 7th C.: Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Lang.* 6, 3, 165.15-16, cf. Krahwinkler 1992, 53-4; the Venetians participated in an attack on Ravenna c. 732-3: R137.

2 For the deportation of prisoners and their return to Ravenna c. 709-12, see R70-2; an embassy from Ravenna to Constantinople, R91; on trading activity, Claude 1985b,

151-2 and on the administrative ties of Ravenna, Istria, and Constantinople in general, Brown 1984, 144-63. On present archaeology, the recently discovered port of Classe ceased functioning in the 7th C.: Maioli and Stoppioni 1987, 33-55. The chronology of other landings further east and north which may have supplemented this port is unclear: see Schmiedt 1978, 223-6 and pl. xlvi. The Rijana Plea,

fleet appeared in the Adriatic between around 709 and 806.³

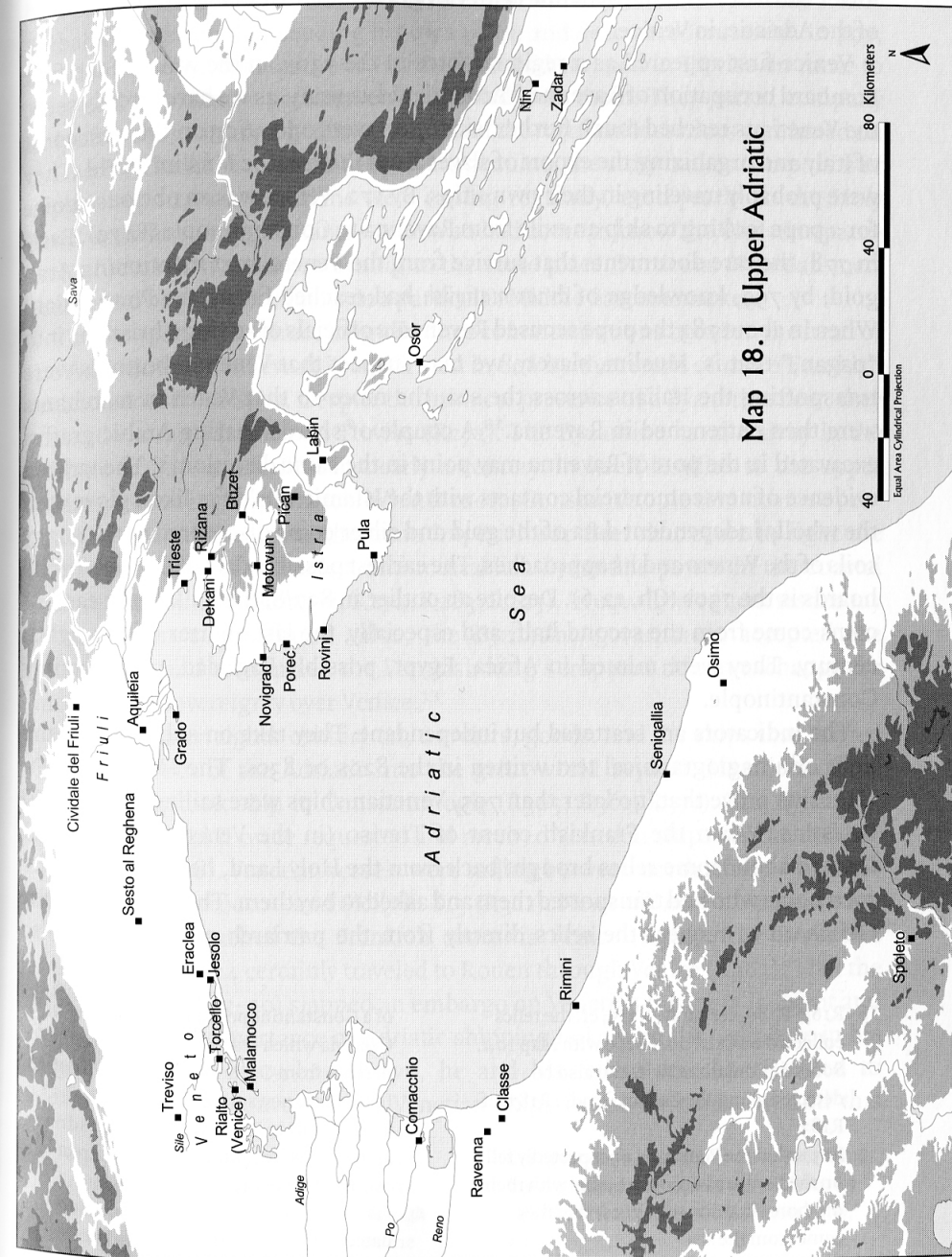
There is more than silence to the lack of direct long-distance movements from the Adriatic in the first half of the eighth century. Although Agnellus of Ravenna's grasp of its geographic details sometimes slips, he knows where Sicily is – his church had owned much land there – and he considers it a normal stop for travelers sailing to Byzantium around 700.⁴ Another story makes the same point, when Agnellus depicts someone in a hurry to reach his Adriatic home from Constantinople looking for a “ship bound for Ravenna or Sicily.”⁵ Around the same time, a few officials traveled from Constantinople to Ravenna via Rome. This implies that they sailed first to Sicily and thence to Rome before traveling overland to Ravenna.⁶ Finally, there is the positive evidence of early eighth-century spice imports. Some were reaching the Po thanks to the salt merchants of Comacchio. But the quantities were minute: only a trickle of trade flowed into the northern Adriatic via a route as uncertain as the number of intermediaries (R88). On the opposite shore at Split, the flow of eastern and Sicilian ceramic into Diocletian's old palace tells the same story, for it dwindled away in the course of the seventh century.⁷

Footnote 2 (cont.)

- 60.26–34; 62.3–4 and 64.4–66 documents shipments of tax payments and requisitions for passing governmental officials; 8th-C. Istrian notables traveled occasionally to Constantinople to obtain a state dignity: *ibid.*, 62.17–20; cf. McCormick 1998b, 45–51. The seal of an 8th-C. exarch of Italy has been discovered at Solin, Croatia: Cheynet and Morrisson 1990, 125; seals from the late 6th or 7th, and later 7th C., respectively, of Thomas stratēlatēs-magister militum and Anastasios patrikios have been discovered in the Veneto: Dorigo 1989.
- 3 Although Ravenna may have been the destination of the ill-starred expedition of 732–3: R139; see also R70; R270; a Byzantine attack on Ravenna or Treviso was rumored but never materialized in 788: R219.
- 4 Agnellus, *Liber pont. eccl. Rav.*, 137, 367.25–368.3, twice describes early 8th-C. trips from Constantinople to Ravenna via Sicily. He uses terms borrowed from the *Aeneid* 3, 699–708 and erroneously locates Trapani, Palermo, and Cape Tyndarides

between Constantinople and Cape Passero, moving his editor to dismiss his testimony (*ibid.*, p. 368n1; 373n2); cf. *ibid.*, 145, 372.43–373.6. Whatever we may think of his Virgilian pastiches – note that Palermo and Cape Tyndarides do not occur in the passage he seems to be emulating – Agnellus clearly means to tell us that travelers bound for Ravenna transited via Sicily. Agnellus on the Sicilian landholdings of the see of Ravenna: *Liber pont. eccl. Rav.*, 111, 350.3–28. Finally, this route seems not to conform to the situation in Agnellus' own time – he was writing between 830/1 and the late 840s – when Byzantine control over Sicily collapsed.

- 5 “. . . usum navis discurrentis Ravennae ad Siciliam,” Agnellus, *Liber pont. eccl. Rav.*, 131, 364.18–22, with the commentary of Claude 1985b, 151n143.
- 6 Very probably R74; R85; also R83. Further examples may be the possible or certain itineraries of diplomats traveling between Pavia and Constantinople: cf. R149 or R158.
- 7 Dvoržak Schrunk 1989.



Map 18.1 Upper Adriatic

Things change after 750, whether we look at travelers, goods like spices (Ch. 24.3), or foreign coins. We find some travelers embarking at Apulian ports, in the lower Adriatic.⁸ But the dynamic center of gravity, unmistakably, lies at the head of the Adriatic, in Venice.

Venice first appeared as a regional force in the 730s, in the wake of the first Lombard occupation of Ravenna.⁹ Around mid-century, as we have already seen, the Venetians reached much further, since they were operating on the west coast of Italy and organizing the export of slaves from there to the Muslim world. They were probably traveling in their own ships. By 772, Venice was an obvious choice for a pope looking to ship an exile from Ravenna to Constantinople (R179). Early in 778, the rare documents that survive from the Veneto start mentioning Arab gold; by 799, knowledge of *dinar manqūsh* had reached far up the Po to Milan. When in about 783 the pope accused Ravennate officials of selling Christians into "pagan," that is, Muslim, slavery, we may suspect that Venetian bottoms were transporting the Italians across the sea, the more so that Venetian merchants were then entrenched in Ravenna.¹⁰ A couple of sherds bearing Arabic graffiti excavated in the port of Ravenna may point in the same direction.¹¹ The written evidence of new commercial contacts with the Islamic world fits like a glove with the wholly independent data of the gold and silver coins discovered in the soggy soils of the Veneto and its approaches. The earliest possible date of deposit for the hoards is the 750s (Ch. 12.6). Despite an outlier in 837/8, the bulk of the eastern coins come from the second half, and especially, the last quarter of the eighth century. They were minted in Africa, Egypt, possibly Baghdad, and certainly Constantinople.

The indicators are scattered but independent. They take on substance in the light of a hagiographical text written in the 820s or 830s. The *Miracles of St. Genesius* prove that, no later than 795, Venetian ships were sailing regularly to Palestine. When the Frankish count of Treviso (in the Venetian hinterland) learned about some relics brought back from the Holy Land, he summoned the merchants who had transported them and asked to buy them. They advised Count Gebahard to request the relics directly from the patriarch of Jerusalem. The

8 R167; R180, certainly; R215; cf. the relics collected on ChLA no. 682, 9 with Map 10.1. Some diplomatic activity can also be detected along the Balkan façade: R187; cf. R183.

9 R137; that the Venetians unexpectedly fell on the Lombard occupiers joins with their offshore situation to suggest that they came from the sea.

10 R201 and R216; cf. too R213 about a report

of a Constantinopolitan force landing in Calabria which reached the pope simultaneously from Gaeta and from the Po delta. In this case news traveled all the way around Italy to Rome via the upper Adriatic as swiftly as it mounted the more direct route of the western seaboard.

11 Fiaccadori 1983, nos. 23.9 and 10, there dated "7th–8th C. (?)" ; the later date best fits the broader context.

Venetians felt that he would probably respond favorably to a request – accompanied by gifts. These the merchants transmitted to the patriarch on their next trip. The patriarch acquiesced, but insisted that clerics be sent to transport the relics. Gebahard answered by sending his own priest and deacon to Jerusalem. In 797, Charlemagne's ambassadors to Harun al Rashid stopped in Treviso en route to Iraq, and Gebahard's personal envoys sailed with them. They parted company only after the group reached Jerusalem, and the royal ambassadors continued on to Iraq.¹² Whether or not the relics were genuine, the story makes two points of capital importance. Venetians were sailing regularly, even yearly, to the Holy Land. And the same merchants – men who had come to know the Christian patriarch of Jerusalem – were returning to the same place. Particular Venetian merchants had begun specializing in a particular Middle Eastern market.

The new pattern of direct long-distance communications between the head of the Adriatic and the Levant is confirmed in 806 by the return of more Frankish ambassadors from Syria. Despite the inimical presence of a Byzantine fleet, they traveled via the Adriatic and Treviso (R271). The Byzantine naval activity in the Adriatic in 806–9, the first in nearly a century, in itself testifies to the upper Adriatic's growing importance. What is more, Constantinople sent no mere provincial detachment: it was the main imperial war fleet that came to fight the Franks over control of Venice, and reestablish Byzantine power in the coastal enclaves of Dalmatia (R270–1; R274; R283; R295). In equally eloquent testimony to the Veneto's new-found value, the Byzantine government accepted the unthinkable and recognized the Frankish king's imperial title in exchange for uncontested sovereignty over Venice.¹³

From the later eighth century on, travelers, goods, and the ships that carried them sailed out of the Adriatic into the great world beyond. Members of the doge's family took ship to Constantinople (R305; R361; R371). The Byzantine emperor Michael II twice requested and received Venetian ships for the defense of Sicily (R376–8). Venetian vessels were sailing between north Africa – perhaps as far west as Morocco – and Sicily in 813 (R321). News of Leo V's assassination seems to have reached the Frankish court via Venice (R366). The Byzantine ambassadors of 824 certainly traveled to Rouen through Venice (R383). That the emperor Leo V (813–20) slapped an embargo on Venetian business in Egypt and Syria proves the importance of Adriatic shipping links with the Caliphate in his reign. As Bonus' story has shown, he and his fellow merchants sailed to Alexandria with a convoy of ten Venetian ships in the next decade, and this

12 R230; R233; R238, based on the *Miracula S. Genesii* (BHL 3314), 2, pp. 9–10, written at Reichenau between 822 and 838. Although the *Miracula* do not state explicitly that the third trip involved the same merchants as

the first two, it is difficult to avoid concluding that the ambassadors sailed aboard a ship from the lagoon. Cf. Borgolte 1976, 49–54.

13 See Classen 1985, 91–3.

Venetian merchant was clearly at home among the Christians of Alexandria.¹⁴ The convoy was no flash in the pan. An Egyptian family which had agreed to emigrate to Venice with the relics and got cold feet simply took another ship for their new home on the lagoon the following year (R413). As the subsequent pattern of Venetian history amply demonstrates, these connections with Alexandria, Syria, and Constantinople were destined to grow and prosper. There is no sign of a break in the kind and volume of traffic that we have just described.¹⁵

The rise of piracy along the Balkan coast, particularly in the mouth of the Neretva river, tells a similar story. Shipping then as now preferred the eastern edge to the exposed western shore of the Adriatic. In the shadow of the Balkans, the sailing was easier and countless islands, coves, and lagoons provided shelter. They were also perfect for pirates. That piracy was appearing there tells us that enough ships carrying valuables were taking this route to make them attractive prey; that Venice counterattacked, repeatedly, tells us where those tempting merchant vessels were going (R428; R446; R633).

The evidence is strong that the surge in documented traffic out of the Adriatic reflects a true change in shipping patterns. The fact that so much of it was with the Arab world indicates that this surge was propelled by commerce. More than documents and coins make the point. After late antiquity, the record of shipwrecks along the sea lane toward Venice resumes in the ninth or tenth century (Table 20.3). Ambassadors' movements in the Mediterranean indicate that diplomats also began using the new route – instead of the old trunk route down Italy's west coast – around the same time that the other evidence indicates quickening communications. Between 781 and 803, the four Constantinopolitan embassies about whose itinerary we know something all appear on the west coast of Italy. This suggests that they traveled via the old route.¹⁶ That changes around 810, when negotiations

14 Ch. 9.1. I cannot follow Cahen's suggestion (1980, 7) that a relic theft from a Christian church proves that the Venetians did not envision continuing commercial relations with Alexandria. See too R413.

15 Ship movements are documented in every successive decade of the 9th C.: R358; R361; R376–8; R408–9; R419; R421; R449; R452; R523; R550; R632; R635; R644–5; R657–8; R695–6; R700; R734. Conversely, Arab raiders first appear in the upper Adriatic in 840: R451; subsequent raids: see e.g. R454; R618; R628.

16 The circumstances make the two embassies of the 780s the strongest case: 781, whose audience was granted at Rome; and

787, at Capua; 802 and 803 probably used the old west coast route: R197; R211; R262; R264. Two more contacts, one originating in Sicily (799), and the other traveling from Constantinople to Aachen via the *stratēgos* of Sicily are ambiguous, since Sicily in the earlier 8th C. served as a hinge for the Adriatic as well as west coast movements, and the communications could have been forwarded from Sicily to e.g. Venice. However, the fact that the better-documented exchange of letters between the *stratēgos* of Sicily and Charles occurred in 813 via Rome and the pope, suggests that the two earlier contacts still used the western route.

to resolve the conflict in the Adriatic began with a Byzantine embassy which traveled to Aachen via Pavia. Against the backdrop of the intensive Byzantine naval presence in the Veneto, ambassador Arsaphius' itinerary suggests that he took the Adriatic route. Apparently, when he headed home from Aachen, Arsaphius intervened in the internal government of Venice (R296–7; R299–300). Around the same time, two envoys from the Adriatic translated the relics of a saint to Zadar from Constantinople (R285). Two years later, Amalarius certainly took the new Adriatic route outbound, and probably returned home the same way.¹⁷ The embassy of 824 also transited via Venice. But if all these independent indicators add up to change on this scale, would not such expanding activities leave tangible traces elsewhere, for instance in the tiny settlements from which these movements stemmed?¹⁸

Archaeological exploration of the waterlogged remains of early medieval Venice has barely begun.¹⁹ Even so, first results tend to confirm the sometimes controversial written record on two critical issues. Offshore immigration had indeed gotten under way in the decades of crisis which ended antiquity. More importantly for us, however, in the key settlements around the lagoon, occupation intensified in the eighth and ninth centuries.²⁰ Renewed scrutiny of the ecclesiastical vestiges of early medieval Eraclea and especially Jesolo has equally indicated a first phase around 600, followed by new construction in the ninth century.²¹ The beginnings of settlement growth around the present-day square of

17 R316. The return route is not so unambiguous, although the mention of Nonantola may also point to the Adriatic route: R330.

18 In its present unsettled state, the history of Venetian treaties with the mainland power does little to clarify this issue. Fanta 1885 argued that lost treaties can be deduced from the earliest surviving treaty (840) back to King Liutprand. With the exception of a few clauses without much implication for our theme, it is difficult to see what exactly would have come from where; Fanta nonetheless considered that pacts struck in 805 and 812 were essential stages in the development of the treaties. Cessi 1951, 175–243 adduced serious reasons for doubting many of Fanta's conclusions; cf. Röscher 1982, 7n4. But all would agree that the 9th C. saw significant development in Venice's treaty relations with the mainland.

19 For an informative survey of the (mostly later medieval) urban development of the lagoon, written before the archaeological

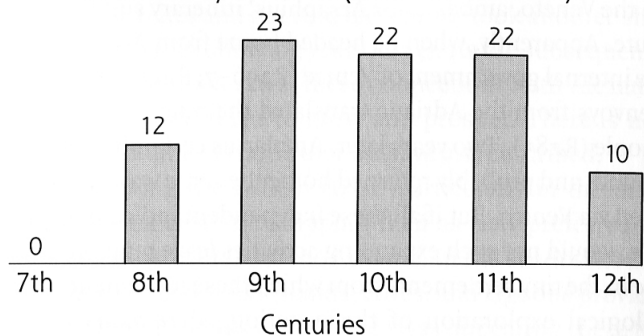
evidence began to appear, see Goy 1985; on the early topography, Biason 1992.

20 The chronological insights gained from early core samples are valuable – the controverted ancientness of the lagoon is now established – and underscore that occupation of several key sites reached back to late antiquity; what is more, of twelve core samples from the area around San Marco's yielding C_{14} dates from the first millennium, ten are from a 7th/8th or 8th/9th C. range. They confirm the traditional 9th-C. construction date for San Lorenzo in Venice, but do not much clarify the extent and nature of occupation: Ammerman et al. 1992 and Ammerman et al. 1995. On San Lorenzo, see the early report of De Min 1990, which detected the 9th-C. structure but had as yet located no new and firm dating criteria. This was of course also the site of the largest Arab treasure from our period, A37.

21 Dorigo 1994, 123–61.

Chart 18.1. Church foundations in Venice, 600–1200

Numbers by centuries (total = 89 churches)



This chart shows the leap in church foundations in Venice between 700 and 800, which doubled again between 800 and 900. The ninth century saw more foundations than any other century before 1200. Where was the new money coming from?

Source: Dorigo 1983, 2: 494–5, Prospetto 28.

St. Mark's seem to build on late antique vestiges and certainly reach back to the early ninth century.²² Torcello might have started in the fifth century, but again the key early phases appear to be around 600, when efforts were made to make the site more suitable for settlement, and then around 800, when the area around the cathedral began to look more like a town.²³

Overall, church building is the best documented type of construction. It is also the most monumental and expensive. If we are right that wealth surged suddenly into the Veneto, it should have left traces here. In fact, in Venice church building jumped in the eighth and boomed in the ninth century, as Chart 18.1 shows. The picture remains essentially the same if we extend the comparison to other churches founded across the duchy of Venice prior to 1200.²⁴ Such sudden and massive investment in building churches may indicate a growing population. It surely testifies to a surge in the wealth available on the mud flats of the lagoon.

Movements of travelers, coins, and ships all intensify dramatically in the Veneto in the decades on either side of 800. New churches – the most monumental, best

22 See the overview in Agazzi 1991, 13–20; 25; 34; debate continues about the configuration and size of the original St. Mark's: e.g., Dorigo 1993.

23 Leciejewicz et al. 1977, 288–9, cf. 293; see also the 1983 excavation: Tombolani 1988, 206.

24 Dorigo 1983, 612–15, Prospetto 46, lists seventy-two churches for which written

traditions of varying strength indicate that they were built before the early 13th C. Twenty-three of these report foundations in the later 8th or 9th C. (for four a second tradition also reports an earlier foundation date). In Dorigo's eyes, thirteen of these churches supply reliable monumental evidence for an 8th- or 9th-C. date.

preserved, and best documented type of building – sprang up on the mud and sand spits of the lagoon in numbers unparalleled in any earlier period. In other words, multiple series of independent evidence document major changes in the upper Adriatic and its wealth, even as its communications networks burgeoned in the later eighth and early ninth centuries. And those networks stretched across the sea. Small wonder that in the 820s one of the wealthiest laymen in the Veneto had substantial cash invested in ships currently away on business. At the same time, one of the region's richest churchmen adorned his churches with imported silken textiles and Byzantine artwork, and estimated his own wealth in terms of Arab money. Another bishop's valuables included sacks of exotic spices.²⁵ And, like the coins, the trail does not end at the water's edge. We shall return to this crucial observation.

2. The reopening of the Gulf of Corinth

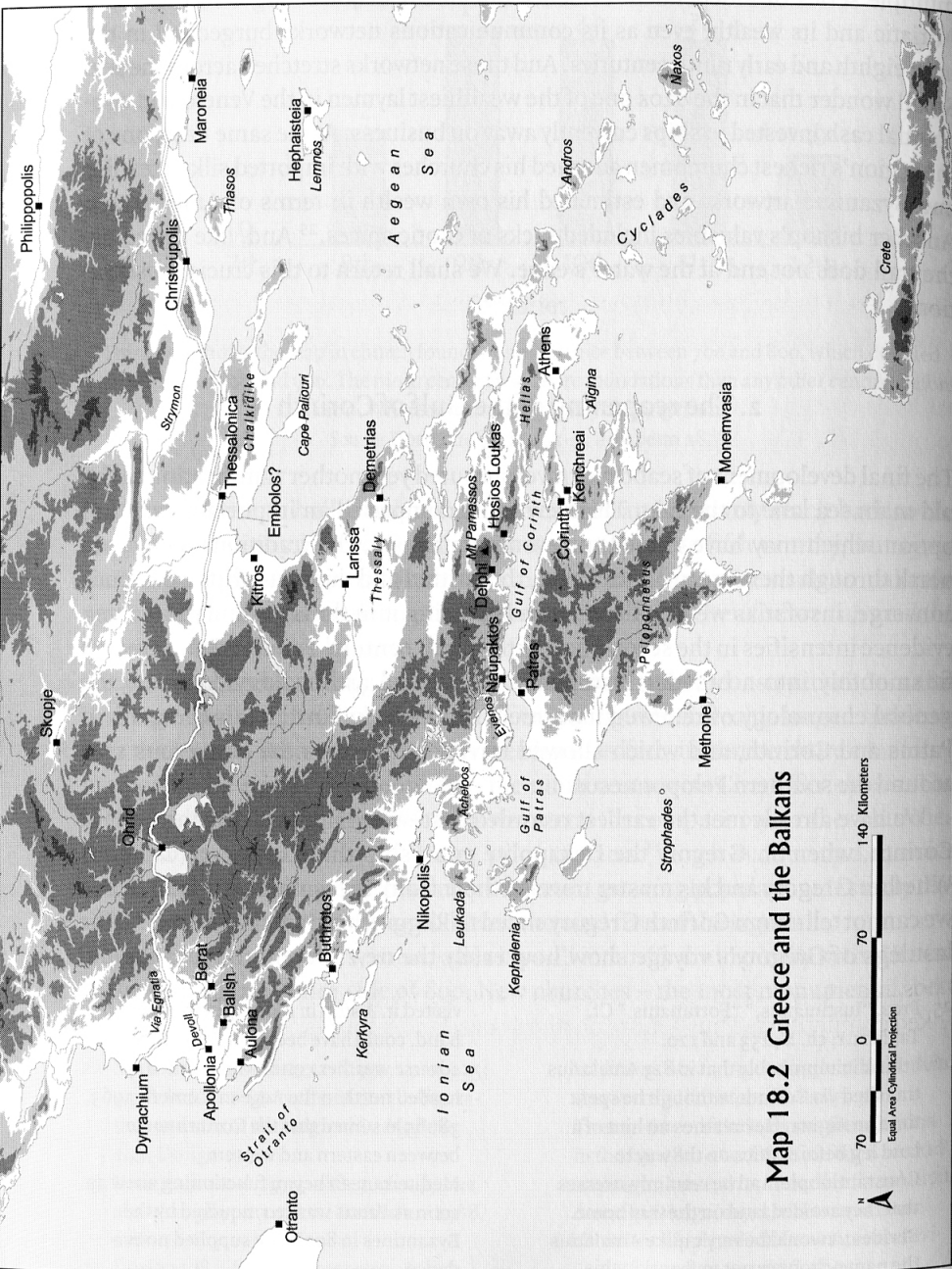
The final development of seaborne travel sprouted yet another ramification of the old main sea lane to the east. This new route comprised an important overland option which may have rivaled, or even outstripped, the traditional sea route north through the Aegean. Once again, the written and the non-written evidence converge, insofar as we first detect travelers using it in the 830s and the written evidence intensifies in the second half of the ninth century. Travelers' movements fit smoothly into a broader historical context, and archaeology confirms the general chronology of renewed movement on the long fjord that is the gulfs of Patras and Corinth, and which allowed travelers to bypass the dangerous seas around the southern Peloponnesus.

We have already met the earliest recorded east–west trip involving the Gulf of Corinth, when St. Gregory the Dekapolite got a ship there c. 831–3 (Ch. 7.3). Whether Gregory and his master traveled there from Thessalonica by land or sea we cannot tell. From Corinth Gregory sailed to Reggio, and hence to Rome.²⁶ The last legs of Gregory's voyage show how easily the new route fitted into the old

25 Pros. "Iustinianus," "Fortunatus." Cf. Table 11.1; ch. 24n53 and 120.

26 I think it improbable that in 813 Amalarius transited via Corinth, although he spent time on Aigina. He breathes no hint of a land leg before Attica on the way to Constantinople; and he certainly stresses that they avoided land on the way home. Besides, it would be very unlike Amalarius the name-dropper not to mention this important biblical site, if in fact he had

visited it. A stop in Aigina, on the other hand, could have been conditioned by adverse weather conditions as his ship headed north in the Aegean. Lemerle 1963, 38n65 assumed that the Corinth route between eastern and western Mediterranean began functioning anew as soon as Patras was reconquered by the Byzantines in 805/6; he supplied no evidence.



Map 18.2 Greece and the Balkans

trunk route from Kephallenia or Leukada westward. A generation later, enough was going on in the gulfs of Patras and Corinth to attract Arab raiders all the way from Crete. This in turn gave rise to a celebrated naval exploit, when the Byzantine admiral Nicetas Ooryphas dragged his warships out of the Aegean and across the isthmus of Corinth to surprise and defeat the Arab raiders in the gulf. The extraordinary effort to defend the route confirms it must have been an interesting target indeed around 873 (R627).

The Byzantine end of this route allowed either sea passage up the Aegean from the eastern side of the isthmus or something novel: land passage. One important reason for increasing shipping out of the Gulf of Corinth lay in the development of a mountainous overland route toward Constantinople across Greece from the western reaches of the gulf. The earliest unambiguous use of this Greek route came around 877, when the widow Danelis traveled from the small fortified harbor and castle town of Naupaktos on the gulf to Constantinople and back, in a litter, and accompanied by hundreds of slaves. She repeated the exploit a decade or so later.²⁷ St. Elias the Younger's travels testify to Calabria's connections with western Greece and particularly the Gulf of Corinth (R719). By the early tenth century, travel between Italy and Constantinople routinely flowed this way. When Leo VI summoned Elias to Constantinople in the spring of 903, the holy man traveled from Reggio to Thessalonica through Naupaktos. This description of his trip implies that from Naupaktos Elias turned northeastward, traveling overland via Larissa toward Thessalonica, and bypassing Corinth (R759). A year later, some Italian pilgrims heading for Thessalonica probably followed the same route (R764). Around the same time, Byzantine pilgrims returning from Rome stopped on the north shore of the Gulf of Corinth, en route to Jerusalem via Athens (R775). In 953, a Paphlagonian eunuch and monk who was traveling to Italy stopped at Chryson, just west of Delphi, while about a decade earlier, two aged monks on their way to Rome encountered St. Luke on the bay of Antikyra.²⁸ Liudprand of Cremona followed the same route when he reached Naupaktos overland in the early winter of 968, going to Italy (R828). It occasions little surprise that one of the first buildings raised at the monastery of Hosios Loukas was a hostel for travelers.²⁹ Typically for a new and growing route, it ramified and provoked competitors. Thus a more northerly overland track also reached the Ionian

27 Theoph. Cont., 5, 74, 317.10–321.10. The date of the first trip follows from the statement that it occurred while the Nea Church was being built: Theoph. Cont., 5, 76, 319.10–14; the foundations of the new church were started in 877 or early 878: Jenkins 1965, 100. On the route: TIB I: 95 and 97–8; on Naupaktos, TIB I: 210–11.

28 R819; R809. For a lively portrait of this zone of transit in the first half of the 10th C., based largely on the *Life of Luke*, Oikonomides 1992a, 252–4.

29 V. Lucae Iun., 81, p. 209; cf. Oikonomides 1992a, 254.

Sea at Buthrotos (mod. Butrint), to judge from another trip of 904.³⁰ Whether they were expected to head overland from Naupaktos or cross the isthmus of Corinth, foreign ambassadors and other official travelers traveled through Patras frequently enough in the ninth century that the Byzantine government imposed the obligation of quartering them on the local Slavic population.³¹ The only such envoys on this route would have been western Europeans from the Adriatic littoral and beyond. In fact their connection with Patras is demonstrated by both legs of Liudprand's 968 embassy to Constantinople.³²

Objects found along the route extend and reinforce the travelers' testimony. The lead seals which once authenticated official documents survive when the papyrus sheets they hung from have decayed. Those that have emerged from the soil illuminate the flow through this region of the instructions of empire.³³ Toward the west, the seal of Theophylact, imperial *prōtospatharios* and *archōn* of Dalmatia, indicates Corinthian communications with the Adriatic in the ninth century.³⁴ One from Dyrrachium points in the same direction.³⁵ Others parallel the movement of travelers between Italy and the Corinth corridor.³⁶ Toward the east, seals document relations with the Cyclades, Strobilos on the Asian coast, and the church of Monemvasia.³⁷ Three seals of tenth-century Constantinopolitan officials have also turned up at Corinth.³⁸

30 The group transporting Elias' relics back to Italy crossed Thessaly and Hellas, and boarded a ship at Butrint: R762.

31 Constantine VII, *De adm. imp.*, 49, 1.230.65–71, with Kresten 1977, 61–2n141a. Kresten admits some uncertainty, but believes that this provision appeared already in the *sigillion* issued by Nicephorus I in 805 or early 806; Belke 1996, 90–1, thinks that these dispositions were taken shortly after 805. Lemerle 1963, 39–40, on the other hand, observes that the provision certainly dates to Leo VI at the latest. This seems to fit our data on ambassadors better.

32 R824 and R828, although Liudprand did not actually stop there on his way home – note that he lacked the proper papers for the return trip's expenses (*Legatio*, 58, 207.17–21).

33 On the value of such evidence: Cheynet and Morrisson 1990.

34 Davidson 1952, 319, no. 2697. The elevation of Dalmatia to theme status by 878

places this seal before that date.

Oikonomides 1972, 353; CBSDO 1: 46 and Ferluga 1978, 131–6.

35 Davidson 1952, 327, no. 2817.

36 A seal of George, metropolitan of Patras, dated s. ix¹ and found in Sicily has been hypothetically linked with the fall of Palermo in 831 and possible immigration from Sicily to Patras: Laurent, 5.1, no. 627. In any case the document to which the seal was once attached links both places, since the metropolitans of Patras appear to have resumed their residence in Greece by this time: Kresten 1977, 53n124a; for the seal of a 10th-C. bishop of Santa Severina in Calabria discovered at Corinth: Cheynet and Morrisson 1990, 121. Closer to home, a seal from Patras attests movement within the gulf: Davidson 1952, 319, no. 2705: cf. Cheynet and Morrisson 1990, 127.

37 Respectively, post-949: Davidson 1952, 319, no. 2704; *ibid.*, 321, no. 2727, cf. Cheynet and Morrisson 1990; and *ibid.*, 121.

38 *Ibid.*, 123.

The movements these trips and seals evince make sense in the broader and regional historical context. From the close of the seventh century, Byzantium's imperial tentacles began once again to encompass at least the water's edge in the southern Balkans. The embrace tightened toward 800, as the establishment there of themes (military provinces) shows.³⁹ Bishoprics roughly parallel the secular administration.⁴⁰ Nicephorus I's 805 privilege concerning the Slavs of Patras demonstrates progressive Byzantinization of the region.⁴¹ Growing administrative ties further fanned travel between the gulf and the capital: imperial officials, like the future emperor Basil I, the *prōtospatharios* Zenobius as well as other powerful individuals, such as Basil's benefactor Danelis and her escorts of hundreds of slaves, traveled back and forth between Naupaktos and the capital, although only in the latter case can we document the route.⁴² Danelis' stupendous wealth c. 850 testifies to local economic development, which was rich in slaves and in the labor-intensive production of textiles. Her 4,000 freedmen transferred from the Peloponnesus to Italy also will have traveled along a segment of this route in the late 880s.⁴³ The imperial authorities may have recognized the route as an economic corridor, to judge from a *kommerkiarios*, Joseph, around 900. Such officials are usually reckoned to have collected taxes on trade. According to his seal, Joseph exercised these duties for Thessalonica and Kephalaria, that is, at either end of the Corinthian route.⁴⁴

So texts and context suggest that use of the gulf route started around 830 at the latest and became a regular point of passage by the mid-tenth century. Archaeology further confirms that Gregory's voyage came at a time when Corinth was awakening. Unmistakable refurbishing of older structures in Corinth has

39 For a discussion of data demonstrating the imperial expansion, see Hendy 1985, 69–85. The themes along this route are, in chronological order of their establishment: Hellas, late 7th C., CBSDO 2: 22; Kephalaria: 8th C. (c. 750–75?), CBSDO 2: 1 (*ibid.*, no. 1.5); Peloponnesos (capital Corinth), c. 800: CBSDO 2: 62; and Nikopolis (capital Naupaktos): late 9th C., after 879; cf. CBSDO 2: 9; TIB 3: 53–4. For an unpublished seal of an *exartistēs*, i.e. a provisioner of the fleet, at Naupaktos, CBSDO 2: 18.

40 On the recovering diocesan order and promotion of older sees to metropolitan status see, in addition to Hendy 1985, 76–7, e.g. CBSDO 2: 49, 78, 83, 85, 90, etc.

41 Kresten 1977.

42 Basil: Theoph. Cont., 5, 11, 228.15–17; Zenobius: *ibid.*, 5, 77, 320.16–19 and, for Danelis, above. On the role of administrative travel in connecting provinces to the capital, McCormick 1998b, 38–40.

43 A. Kazhdan, ODB 1: 583; McCormick 1998b, 35.

44 The point is only reinforced if he is indeed identical with the homonymous contemporary Joseph *vestitor*, *abydikos* (“controller of a checkpoint for maritime circulation”) and *kommerkiarios* of Thessalonica, the west and the theme of Hellas: *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 2, no. 1075, and CBSDO, 2, no. 8.30. Given the identity of dignity, chronology, place and the functional overlap, the relatively uncommon name reinforces the identification.

TABLE 18.1

Corinth excavations: bronze coins per regnal year, 775–959

Coins per regnal year	Years	Reigns	Regnal years	Number of coins
0.2	775–802	Leo IV–Irene	27	4
0.6	802–29	Nicephorus I–Michael II	27	15
4.6	829–67	Theophilus–Michael III	38	175
15.2	867–86	Basil I	19	288
36.8	886–912	Leo VI	26	957
48.6	912–959	Constantine VII “and family”	47	2,284

Source: Metcalf 1973, esp. the totals on 186. From 775–912, Metcalf lists only one non-bronze coin, a miliaresion (216, no. 21) which has been subtracted from the total of Theophilus' coins. The 2,284 coins from 912–59 may include some non-bronze issues.

been dated to the tenth and possibly ninth centuries.⁴⁵ The coins found at Corinth are overwhelmingly copper stray finds, and are of particular value as indicators of activity on the site. Because the coins are reliably datable only to reigns, the ratio of coins found per regnal year offers the best standard of comparison. Theophilus' copper coins moreover continued to circulate under Michael III.⁴⁶ This means that combining the figures for the reigns of these two emperors yields a more accurate picture than their separate tallies, as indicated in Table 18.1.⁴⁷ The chronological progression is unmistakable, and it leaps ahead precisely in the generation during which St. Gregory transited through Corinth.⁴⁸

Whether east–west movements took the mountainous overland route from Naupaktos or were entirely seaborne except for the isthmus of Corinth, they obviously were less suitable for bulk transport.⁴⁹ In the later Middle Ages, Venetian

45 Scranton 1957, 34–49; note the numerous prisoners' graffiti in the administrative building constructed out of the Roman northwest shops, tentatively dated to the 9th–10th C. (Scranton 1957, 46): *Corinth. Greek Inscriptions*, 8.1, nos. 199–220; cf. *ibid.* 8, 3, no. 722.

46 Cf. *DOC* 3.1: 456 and Metcalf 1973, 182–3.

47 If we were to separate the coins of Theophilus from those of Michael III, the increase in the 830s would be even more pronounced, but it would be followed by a misleading drop for the period 842–76. The separate counts would be twelve coins per annum under Theophilus (829–42),

i.e. 156 coins over thirteen years; and 0.8 per annum under Michael III (842–67), nineteen coins for twenty-five years.

48 The most recent publication brings to light fewer coins further from the medieval town nucleus; its chronological distribution suggests that this zone of the town began to recover under Leo VI: MacIsaac 1987, 101. It should be noted however that this last set of coins has suffered loss (of presumably illegible specimens) of uncertain dimensions (97–8). Cf. too the cautionary words of Grierson 1986, 44–53.

49 The much smaller numbers of coins found at nearby Kenchreai (Hohlfelder, 1978,

cargo ships continued to circumnavigate Greece into the Aegean, just like the merchant ship aboard which St. Blaise sailed late in the ninth century.⁵⁰ But some goods certainly did travel overland, as the story of Danelis shows, for she came to the capital laden with the gifts of hundreds of slaves, rugs, various textiles, and gold and silver vessels.⁵¹ The overland leg in particular had some advantages, once imperial control made it relatively safe. It will have prolonged the traveling seasons, since the route around Mount Parnassos may have been passable much of the winter.⁵² And it was presumably cheaper for a light traveler to walk than to pay the fare for a ship around Greece. Were there other, non-economic advantages to this route? We will have to remember the question when we seek to explain the changing gamut of routes by which communications flowed in the ninth century.

There is one final consideration. If they needed reminding, the emergence of even a partial land route to the west will have recalled to the authorities at Constantinople the advantages of overland communications. Sometimes, land travel was faster and more reliable than ships. In this sense, the Gulf of Corinth intimates one of the ninth century's most dramatic changes in the Mediterranean infrastructure of communications, for the substantial land leg from Naupaktos to Thessalonica was only one among the new overland routes that were springing up between east and west. The full bearing of the overland leg from the Gulf of Corinth becomes clear only in this wider context. But before proceeding to that vital issue in the next chapter, let us consider more fully the structure of the sea routes we have uncovered.

3. Home ports and the regional structure of shipping routes

Tracking the movements of early medieval travelers has uncovered the history of four major complexes of sea routes. One was inherited from late antiquity and remained in continuous operation. The other three were new; even if ships had used them in late antiquity, they were now reborn, in new form. But how were these routes structured? Did travelers board one ship and stay on it until they reached their final destination? Or did traffic fall into interlocking zones within which one or more regional centers dominated shipping? If so, what were the

4–50), i.e. the Aegean port which serviced Corinth may hint that much of the traffic that took ship at Corinth for the west had reached the isthmus from the east overland.

50 See the account of the Venetian routes in *TIB* 1: 101–2; R729.

51 *Theoph. Cont.*, 5, 75, 318.3–19.

52 This may have been the path that Liudprand took when he traveled from Constantinople to Naupaktos in October and November: R828; United Kingdom, Admiralty 1944–5, 1: 99.

zones, and where were the regional centers? Did longer-range couriers exist alongside them? Regional zones would imply frequent ship changes for freight and passengers traveling longer distances, which would have further implications for the economic characteristics of early medieval shipping. It is important to remember that this is not necessarily the same thing as the often observed early medieval predilection for coastal tramping, and which could take one ship over great distances, albeit with frequent landings. The sources shed little direct light on these issues, so that we must approach them somewhat indirectly; again, travelers prove a precious resource.

Several general factors militated for regional shipping zones. Overall, the western and Byzantine economies were fairly small and dispersed. The distances separating populations were substantial. Small and scattered population centers obviated the need for the massive transports of a few staples such as grain from a few centers of production to a few main centers of consumption, which had been so characteristic of the late Roman economy. A second factor was the kind of coastal navigation then practiced. As we have seen, it placed a premium on intimate familiarity with the shoreline, and so circumscribed some shippers' horizons (above, p. 422). So far as we can tell, navigation rested on oral tradition and personal experience. As late as 828, in order to raid the coast of north Africa, a Carolingian count shipping out of the Tuscan coast and bent on war was forced to find pilots in Sardinia (R404). In the relatively frail craft and underdeveloped maritime system of the early Middle Ages, it was safer to stick to the familiar waters of one's home region, even if it was broadly defined. This habit finds a lovely illustration in a tenth-century saint's life, about a ship from Italy in the Gulf of Corinth. Struggling through a storm in the dead of night, the Italians decided the safest thing would be to beach on a desert island. They had been there before, since they knew the hermit who lived on it (R810).

Another general condition which points to the prevalence of regional shipping zones is the disappearance of eastern merchant vessels from northwestern waters. We have already seen that the final centuries of antiquity witnessed a shift in the center of gravity of Mediterranean shipping. Commercial vessels shipping out of western ports declined dramatically, and eastern vessels from a few great eastern ports, especially Alexandria, came to dominate even in the western basin in the sixth and seventh centuries (Ch. 4.5). In the 660s, a Constantinopolitan observer described the profitable voyage to Gaul of a merchant ship whose home berth was in his city (R24). This is the last merchant mariner from Constantinople that I know of in the west. Things do not look much different for Arab ships, as we shall see in a moment.

The last great bubonic plague argues powerfully that most sailors in fact stuck to their home regions, at least in the 740s. The infection crossed over from Ifriqiya to Sicily and Calabria between September 745 and August 746, and

reached Greece and the Aegean sometime during that same period. Theophanes' comparison of the contagion to the spread of a fire apparently does not imply speed. The epidemic moved rather gradually, for it traveled for the entire indication, and did not reach Constantinople until the summer of 747.⁵³ In other words, ships carrying the infection took at least eleven or twelve months, and perhaps as much as two years, to cover the distance between Africa and Constantinople. The infection crept from port to port along the main trunk line that ran from Sicily to the Aegean, via Calabria, Monemvasia, and Greece. This and the delay in reaching Constantinople suggest that not much direct shipping connected Italy and the Byzantine capital, the sort most liable to transmit the infection swiftly. The step-like progress of the infection describes a shipping pattern dominated by multiple interlocking zones of slow-moving regional traffic, rather than direct and speedy long-distance connections. A ship will have brought the infection from Africa to Sicily; another ship will have taken it to Calabria, and so on, from port to port until, almost a year later, it reached the local shipping zone of the capital. This contrasts sharply with the situation 200 years before, when the infection appears to have traveled from Alexandria to Constantinople within a maximum of about five winter months.⁵⁴ Although our knowledge of early medieval ceramics is in its infancy, the cargo discovered aboard early medieval wrecks so far also points mainly to regional transport.⁵⁵ Our travelers confirm these indications of regionally based shipping, and they begin to sketch the interlocking zones inside the Mediterranean, for the shipping of Europe's Atlantic coasts was clearly now a world apart.⁵⁶

The Muslim southern rim had its own shipping systems. We can just make them out from Christian sources. We found an Egyptian ship, presumably from Alexandria, in port at Naples in 723, prolonging the pattern of late antiquity

53 Theophanes says
δι' ὅλης τῆς ἰδ' ἰνδικτικῶνος; R153.

54 The infection arrived in Alexandria in the second half of 541, possibly in October, and reached Constantinople no later than 1 March 542: Conrad 1981, 99–108; cf. McCormick 1998a, 53n27.

55 Tables 20.2, ship 12; 20.4, ships 17–19; 20.5, ships 22, 26, 28, 35 and 20.7, ships 45–6.

56 It is just possible that Arculf sailed from the Mediterranean to his home in Gaul through the straits of Gibraltar, since his ship was blown off course and wound up on the west coast of England or Scotland. But he may simply have been sailing along

the coast of France after having traveled overland to the Atlantic coast: R44. Otherwise, only the Vikings crossed from the North Sea into the Mediterranean, and that was exceptional even for them: R471. The growth of Cordova nonetheless indicates traffic through the strait of Gibraltar. The Byzantine dromons which traveled there in 839 perforce entered the Atlantic, and the Viking attack seems to have led the authorities of al Andalus to develop their war fleet along the Atlantic: R445; R473; finally a 10th-C. shipwreck off the French Riviera may have loaded its freight at Cordova: Table 20.4, ship 18.

(R109). Significantly, this is the last time we meet an Egyptian ship so far north in Italy.⁵⁷ Toward the middle of the eighth century, the Byzantine fleet of Sicily preyed on the occasional Arab merchantman. Such vessels were presumably following an east–west course along the African coast, in the straits of Sicily (R159). Beginning in the 820s, the Arab conquest naturally integrated Sicily's ports into the shipping patterns of the Islamic world.⁵⁸ In the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the Arab shipping linking Sicily, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt becomes visible in the excerpts of Muḥammad ibn 'Umar (d. 912 or 923), and the first indications of undersea archaeology.⁵⁹ In 848, the emir of Cordova sent a fleet against Majorca to oblige the islanders to cease damaging Muslim ships which passed through its waters. Four decades earlier, the Carolingians had intercepted there Arab raiders returning to Spain, but these might have been merchant vessels. Ships passing Majorca will most probably have been on courses from Sardinia and Corsica.⁶⁰ Other ships from Islamic Spain headed further eastward, judging from a couple of texts and shipwrecks off southern France assigned to the tenth century (Table 20.4). We hear only rarely of merchant mariners from the Islamic world docking in non-Islamic ports.⁶¹ A significant silence? Mentions of all kinds of ships in Italian waters increase considerably, but not of Muslim merchant ships. Of course, ships whose home ports are explicitly identified are the exception. Even so, enough have turned up to warrant the observation that, by the ninth century, ships out of western ports increasingly replaced eastern ships in the western basin of the Mediterranean.

The boundaries and structure of shipping zones in the northern waters of the Mediterranean's western basin are not yet clear. A series of regional shipping systems may have sprung up and overlapped along the coasts of Spain, Provence, and northern Italy. The easternmost system is the most clearly delineated by the quickening communications we have seen. But where were the ships' home ports? The merchant vessels which were docking at Marseilles in the 820s are just "Italian" (R372; R426). There is thin but sure evidence for Ligurian and Tuscan ships. Liguria supplied the convoy Charlemagne sent to Africa to get his elephant

57 A possible exception might be the vessel that transported the Arab merchants Anons. 125–6, to Rome c. 800, but we do not know its home port.

58 For the 11th C. on, see e.g. Goitein 1967–93, I: 211–17.

59 Tr. Christides 1993, 92–3; cf. 66; see Clark and Tite 1994, for the deep-water discovery of two Islamic amphoras at separate sites north of Skerki Bank (Map 4.1), which presumably reflect ship movements linking

Africa, Sicily, and perhaps Sardinia, and are dated by thermoluminescence to 915–1115 and 850–1080.

60 R490; cf. R246. On Majorca and sailing courses, *Ocean Passages* 1987, 189 (esp. section 8.23).

61 Naples would nonetheless become a congenial port for Arab raiders in the course of the 9th C., an exception that was decried: R514; cf. Louis II, *Ep. ad Basilium I*, 393.20–33.

(R255); Genoa sent ships to defend Corsica.⁶² Tuscan ships – presumably merchantmen adapted for the cause – allowed the Carolingians to stage their naval raids on Africa (R404; R736).

The southern Tyrrhenian Sea forms a distinctive and better-documented regional shipping zone. It looks like the center of gravity for Christian shipping in the western basin of the inland sea. From Gaeta to Amalfi, the Campanian coast (Map 16.1) was putting ships to sea by 800. In 812, when the Byzantine governor of Sicily needed vessels to defend the island, he turned to Naples, Amalfi and Gaeta.⁶³ Travelers' movements indicate that ships out of these ports mostly stayed within their home region. In 723, St. Willibald and his companions took one ship from Gaeta to Naples, where, after a two-week layover, they changed to an Egyptian ship and continued on to Reggio. This might suggest that the first vessel was a local one, plying very local routes (R108). A century later, when St. Gregory Dekapolites was heading in the opposite direction, he changed ships in Reggio. There he boarded a vessel out of Naples, for Rome (R422). It is possible that even the Byzantine navy had used different ships and crews for Tyrrhenian and Ionian navigation in the seventh century (Chapter 16n69). As we shall see, the ships of the Campanian sea cities transported goods and merchants around a zone which reached at least as far north as Rome and Sardinia and Corsica; to the southeast, they probably went as far as Taranto (Ch. 21.2).

Toward the end of our period, new regional shipping zones seem to have sprouted on the edges of the "Venetian gulf." Perhaps in part they responded to reemerging land routes leading to the lower Adriatic. In the same year, Frankish and papal legates returned from Constantinople overland as far as Dyrrachium. The Frankish party sailed across the Adriatic to Siponto, while the papal envoys' ship went north along the Balkan coast toward a crossover point to Ancona (R599; R601). It may be that Dalmatian ships were particularly active in this area

62 R269; Airaldi 1983 makes some interesting suggestions, but supplies no specific references; Airaldi 1981, to which she refers, is an Italian version which improves little on this score.

63 Of course, Naples and Gaeta were ports of call for ships of other or of unidentified origin much earlier: R73 and R79 (Roman ships?), R108, etc. 812: R310; only Naples balked. The only earlier reference I know to Amalfitan shipping is implicit and suspect: Leo III supposedly led an expedition of 120 dromons to "Campania, Naples, and Amalfi" for some kind of naval engagement early in the 8th C.: *Epistula trium patri-*

archarum (BHG 1387), 11, PG 95.357C. Notwithstanding Hendy's optimism (1985, 668–9), there is little reason to trust this falsification (cf. A. Kazhdan, ODB 2: 1219–20 on the apparently earlier version BHG 1386). But it does show that Amalfi ranked already with Naples in contemporary Byzantine eyes. A Neapolitan ship: R422. The pact of 836 implies that Neapolitans and Amalfitans were selling Lombards "across the sea": R432; according to a Byzantine version of the Translation of St. Bartholomew, the "Lombard" ships which brought the relics from Lipari came from Amalfi: R442. See also R476.

of the lower Adriatic. This, at any rate, is the implication of the Life of St. Leucius, which shows its holy hero switching to a ship from Dalmatia when he wished to sail the short distance from Otranto to Brindisi. The Dalmatian sea cities, Brindisi, and Otranto were Byzantine possessions when the Life was written, so we may be catching a glimpse of a Byzantine provincial shipping zone in the late ninth-century coastal waters of the lower Adriatic.⁶⁴ According to an account dating from the 950s at the latest, yet another shipping region overlapped this one (Map 19.1). In a passage generally reckoned to derive from the late ninth or very early tenth century, Constantine VII's confidential manual on foreign policy describes a Croatian shipping zone. The Croats, if attacked, mobilized for war both larger and smaller commercial ships (*sagēnai* and *kondourai*) with which they usually coasted along the gulfs of Pagania and Dalmatia as far as Venice.⁶⁵ Juxtaposed, these two accounts suggest that Dalmatian ships may have frequented the Byzantine ports on both shores of the lower Adriatic, while Croatian ones traded mainly in the ports of the upper, eastern edge of the sea. Political allegiances shaped these contiguous shipping zones.

From the Adriatic to the Byzantine heartland of the Aegean and the Sea of Marmara is nearly a blank as far as home ports are concerned.⁶⁶ But there are hints in the Ionian Sea of another regional shipping system linking the fringes of the western Mediterranean with western Greece and even the Aegean. Travelers' movements may suggest where many of its ships had their home port. Around 830, St. Gregory Dekapolite took one ship from Corinth to Reggio, where he found another, Neapolitan ship to continue his trip to Rome.⁶⁷ The Balkan junctures of sea and land routes may point in the same direction, for instance, when St. Elias the Younger's body was transported overland to Buthrotos and then placed aboard a ship for Rossano, en route to Reggio.⁶⁸ A detail in the romance of

64 *V. Leucii*, p. 364.

65 Constantine VII, *De adm. imp.*, 31, 1.150.52–7. *Ibid.*, 30, 144.104–6 makes clear that Pagania stretches north from the mouth of the Neretva River, at least as far as Makarska: cf. Dvornik, in *ibid.*, 2.122–3; the Gulf of Dalmatia presumably comprises the waters to the north, around the theme capital of Zadar. For the date of this segment of c. 31, *ibid.*, 2.99–100. A gloss believed to have been inserted in the 950s (*ibid.*, 100) mentions 80 *sagēnai* and 100 *kondourai*, bearing 40 and 10 to 20 men, respectively. If we may take these two statements together, they would imply that this was the total size of commercial shipping fleet in the 950s.

66 In 880 the Byzantine commander granted captured Arab ships to Methone: R675.

67 R422; that the saint had to persuade the sailors in port at Corinth to head to Sicily (and Reggio) implies that these were not their home ports. Ignatius, *V. Gregorii*, II and 12, 55.12–25.

68 R762; cf. R167 and R180, who took ships in Apulia for the Aegean and Constantinople; Liudprand who sailed from Kerkyra to Otranto: R828. Note too that in 653 Pope Martin may have changed ships in Messina, en route from Rome to Constantinople: R19. Unfortunately, none of these cases identify the ship's home port, so they remain inconclusive.

St. Leucius reinforces the historical hints: en route to Brindisi, the saint found a ship from Reggio in the Aegean (at Andros), and sailed with it as far as Otranto.⁶⁹ Other Greek ships operating in the same zone could have shared the same home berth; at least, there is no evidence that they came from further afield. The tenth-century ship from Italy which one stormy night found familiar refuge on a tiny island in Gulf of Corinth has already illustrated the safety advantages of a regional shipping system. The ship was presumably bound for Corinth, and one is inclined to locate its home port in Byzantine southern Italy (R810). A few "Greek" ships show up in the Tyrrhenian zone and further north, off Tuscany in 776.⁷⁰ Greek merchant ships seem to have become a significant presence in the port controlled by the church of Arles in 921; although they could have come from anywhere in the empire, Byzantine Italy was nearest (R796). An Arab legal writer argued that Muslims should not prey on Christian merchant ships approaching Africa, whether they were near or far from the port (of their destination?), so long as they were merchants known for their commercial relations with the lands of Islam. One is naturally tempted to think of Venice, but Byzantine Italy was closer (R515). Until new light comes from the bottom of the sea, the picture here must remain faint.

However many ships entered its waters from abroad, the Aegean, with its northern extension, the Bosphorus, functioned in many ways as the eastern equivalent of the pivotal Tyrrhenian Sea zone. This much is already clear from Byzantine naval organization.⁷¹ The Aegean will have been home berth to not a few trading ships, as well as to the other vessels required for daily life in the island-studded sea. Though we glimpse it performing an act of charity, it is not improbable that the ship from Smyrna putting in at Lesbos with a load of grain, vegetables, and gold had a commercial vocation.⁷² Another echo of the Aegean regional pattern of shipping comes from Willibald's travels. When he wished to sail east from Patara, on the southern shore of Asia Minor, he was forced to return into the Aegean, to Miletus, to find a ship to take him to Chelidonia and Cyprus (Map 5.1).⁷³ A century later, St. Gregory Dekapolite's spring convoy of merchantmen out of Ephesus for the Sea of Marmara probably illustrates a recurring pattern of Ephesian shipping (R417).

69 *V. Leucii* (BHL 4894), p. 364.

70 R186. One is tempted to think that the ship boarded by St. Elias the Younger and traveling from Rome to Demetrias was Greek, but there is no evidence to support this temptation: R729.

71 Naval organization: Ahrweiler 1966, 76–81; on Aegean shipping patterns, TIB 10: 99–108.

72 R202: the text does not allow us to conclude that the gift equaled the ship's carrying capacity.

73 Hugelburc, *V. Willibaldi*, 93.20–94.5. To Tobler and Holder-Egger, this appeared illogical, and they proposed emending the text to remove the back-tracking into the Aegean.

In the written sources, Constantinople looms large and it is hard not to imagine that much of the broader region's shipping revolved around it. The capital and its environs were home to merchant ships throughout our period.⁷⁴ Given the great value of ships, it is no surprise to find three ninth-century brothers sharing ownership and operation of the same vessel, perhaps an inheritance from their father.⁷⁵ We know little indeed about the northern approaches to Constantinople and the Black Sea. The situation of the Byzantine seashore towns crouched at the foot of the rugged mountains of northern Anatolia, and growing Byzantine interest in the Crimea both made Black Sea shipping vitally important. It wove together the coastal settlements and constituted a lifeline to the capital.⁷⁶ Some ships which transported grain levies for the imperial treasury may have been based on an island off the Black Sea coast.⁷⁷

On the empire's southeastern sea frontier, the waters around Cyprus constituted another zone. Certain ships specialized in the blue-water passage from Attaleia to Cyprus and presumably had their home port in one or the other place.⁷⁸ At least one Isaurian ship plied the sea between Cilician Seleukeia and Cyprus (R499). The presence of Willibald's skipper out of Cyprus in Emesa (Homs) indicates Cypriot ships' involvement in the eighth-century Caliphate.⁷⁹

The diversity of home ports that emerges from this review is in itself striking, and tends to confirm that shipping was chiefly organized by regional zones. The two shipping zones or systems which look pivotal in their respective basins of the Christian Mediterranean are the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Aegean. Apart from them stands Venice. Structurally, this contrasts sharply with late antiquity, when the two Italian home zones had no real parallel. Another difference appears within most regional systems. In this early stage, one suspects that the polyfocal Campanian model prevails: a multiplicity of smallish port towns – Gaeta, Naples, Sorrento, Amalfi – rather than one main center dominate local traffic. From them only the occasional ship went deep into a neighboring zone, or even further. The

74 Justinian II collected ships or contributions from the shippers of Constantinople for his large expedition against Cherson: R78; a century later Nicephorus I levied special taxes on the shippers of Constantinople: Ch. 20n20.

75 Theosterictus, *V. Nicetae Medicii* (BHG 1341), 45, AASS April. 1, app., xxvii. The miracle is awkwardly appended to the end of another story; no place is given. If it is in the right place, the storm and miraculous preservation of the ship presumably occurred in the vicinity of the saint's incarceration, on the island monastery of St. Glykeria, off Cape

Akritas (mod. Tuzlaburnu), in the Sea of Marmara across from Constantinople; see Janin 1975, 56–7.

76 TIB 9: 135–7; *V. Nicetae patricii* (BHG 1342b), 30, p. 347; R225.

77 Ignatius, Ep. 21, 68.11–70.52 with comm., *ibid.*, pp. 179–81.

78 R498. The former is perhaps the more likely, since it was a great naval center and its province of Pamphylia gave its name to a type of ship: C. Foss, ODB 1: 228–9; Ahrweiler 1966, 415.

79 Hugeburc, *V. Willibaldi*, 95.4–9.

easiest thing for a traveler was to disembark and shift to a different ship out of a different port at key harbors, or hubs, along the route, just as we have seen Sts. Willibald, Gregory the Dekapolite and the mythical Leucius do. Whether or not a similar system of multiple and overlapping multifocal regional shipping systems also obtained in the southern, Muslim Mediterranean is a question it would be rash for us to answer, although some research may suggest that this was the case.⁸⁰

The second striking characteristic is that the shipping systems were dynamic. In the first half of the ninth century, Frankish customs grants to southern French churches begin to mention Italian ships, while in the early tenth century, a similar grant refers to Greek ships. This seems to indicate that one zone at least widened as traffic intensified (R372; R796). The explosion on to the scene of Venice represents a major change with great ramifications for the overall pattern of routes, and probably also for the regional vocations of the other zonal systems. One wonders whether the distinctively long-distance horizons of Venetian shippers did not also contribute to the emergence of the more local Croatian and Dalmatian shipping operations late in our period.

This represents only a first sketch which future research will certainly improve. More research, especially into shipwrecks and the still uncharted coastal diffusion of durable wares will define more precisely the boundaries and interaction between zones. More sub-zones, and perhaps even change inside and among the zones, may appear. But for now, two things seem clear. Much, probably most, shipping in the Christian Mediterranean moved within geographically limited (although not inconsequentially small) regional systems. And some ships broke out of these regional systems. At the outset of the eighth century the ship we saw sailing around the southern Tyrrhenian Sea hailed from Egypt, and provided a very late survival of the ancient pattern. In the second half of our period, we meet a few long-distance couriers whose home port remains uncertain: the ship on which the relics of St. Genesius were transported from Palestine to Rome or, later, the slavers running their human cargoes from Taranto to Africa and Egypt; later still, the merchant skipper whose ship was supposed to travel from Rome to Constantinople via Methone and Demetrias (R242; R577–9; R729). But the greatest and most complete exception does have a name. That name is Venice, and it was exceptional right from the start, trading – and surely transporting – slaves between Rome and the Islamic world.

80 For the later period, Goitein 1967–93, 1: 211–13 (cf. 318–19), seems to be of two minds, since in the former pages he stressed the “overlapping of long- and short-distance itineraries,” and in the latter, “the predominance of the long-over

the short-distance routes,” notwithstanding his own statement. I see no reason why the same methodology of travelers' movements I have developed here could not be applied to the richer documentation of later periods.

The prevalence of regional shipping systems makes clear how extraordinary the Venetians' earliest seafaring exploits were. As we have already seen, Venice's sea ventures become visible in the eighth century, and Venetian ships are explicitly mentioned from the early ninth century onward.⁸¹ But they are different from the other western European shipping systems in that they typically ranged further afield. When Campanian shipping was just beginning to come back to life, Venetian ships were already there in their home waters. Early on, the Venetian ships ranged astonishingly widely: from Rome to somewhere in the Caliphate, between Africa – perhaps indeed Morocco rather than Tunisia – and Sicily, to the Holy Land, to Egypt. All across the Mediterranean, the Venetian vessels were active. But predominantly, they sailed to the Islamic world, in contrast to the Byzantine harbors that would become their favored destinations a little later. Paradoxically, we see them only sporadically in their home shipping zone of the Adriatic.⁸² One feature of Venetian navigation underscores its structural distinctiveness. In the Veneto, even the shortest and most banal of movements required a boat, so there was no shortage of navigational opportunities of a limited sort.⁸³ But Venetian shipping, if it was ever to surpass the local level, had to get out of the Adriatic. This meant that shipping was either very local, or very long-distance by nature, since just to exit the Adriatic required a voyage of 415 NM, and population centers were thin and far between, once one left the head of the Adriatic.



In 700, Christian long-distance communications in the Mediterranean were dominated by the ancient trunk route stretching from Rome to the Aegean, around Greece. Around 750, there are signs of renewed activity in the Tyrrhenian Sea, expanding an important new branch of the trunk route. Peaceable links with Africa increase then and would scarcely diminish with the Muslim conquest of Sicily. At the same time, we can detect movement along the Muslim coastal sea and land routes of Africa. By 767, it had become feasible to reach Rome by traveling to Africa and taking a ship there for the north, opening an alternative way to and from the Middle East.

81 For a Venetian attack on Dalmatia by ship: R267; two Venetian ships sailing between Tunisia or Morocco and Sicily: R321. Fortunatus of Grado's ships: below.

82 This is not to deny that Venetian ships were very active in the upper Adriatic: one has only to see the role of ships in, e.g. the local movements of a Fortunatus of Grado to grasp this. One possible instance is not certain: R428, the Venetian merchantmen attacked by Neretva pirates en route home

from Benevento. These ships may have been returning from the eastern shore of the Beneventan principality, e.g., around Salerno, rather than the western shore, around Bari.

83 One wonders, for instance, whether the transhumance of sheep, from Aquileia to other pastures in Istria, might not have been effected by ship: DKar 1, no. 174, 4 August 792.

The third major route opens with the resurgence of the Adriatic as a home zone of shipping and a launching pad for long-distance enterprises. The Venetians supply the first hint of significant Italian links to Africa around 748, but the evidence grows most dramatically from about 775 onward; shipping links with the Byzantine empire existed, but those with the Arab world appear to have grown more. The fourth major route, the Gulf of Corinth, sets in a generation or two later. By the 830s it was an important piece of the communications infrastructure, and certainly attracted some of the traffic which, in earlier decades, had circumnavigated Greece. From the isthmus of Corinth, one could continue by land or by sea, although the land route north to Constantinople may have gained the upper hand.

Aggregate movements, seasonal trends, rates of movement, and now sea routes: everywhere we look, the picture is one of change. We started out with one main sea route from west to east and end up with four. The major changes in routes occur within a generation or two of the year 800, precisely the era of maximum aggregate movements, precisely the era of the influx of Arab coins.

Even so, this was also an age of predominantly regional shipping zones. Some ships of course ranged much further, and none more so than those of Venice. For now at least, the data are lacking which would allow us to gauge the importance of Venice's long-distance ship movements, in quantitative terms of volume and value, relative to the regional shippers. But qualitatively, it is now undeniable that, right from the outset, Venice followed a different course, and that this course marked an important new departure for the future. Why this new departure, and why Venice? To answer these questions, we will need, finally, to turn to what these ships were carrying, to the broader and more controversial problem of early medieval commerce, on which routes and communications have already opened these new perspectives. But first, we must complete our survey of ninth-century communications by recovering one of their most distinctive features, the reemergence of long-distance land links.