

The transformation of classical cities and the Pirenne debate

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R. HODGES AND D. WHITEHOUSE, *MOHAMMED, CHARLEMAGNE AND THE ORIGINS OF EUROPE: ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE PIRENNE THESIS* (Duckworth, London 1983). Pp. ix + 181. Out of print; currently reprinting in paperback £9.20. ISBN 0-7156-1703-6 (1744-3 for paperback).

B. WARD-PERKINS, *FROM CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY TO THE MIDDLE AGES: URBAN PUBLIC BUILDING IN NORTHERN AND CENTRAL ITALY, A.D. 300-850* (Oxford University Press 1984). Pp. x + 286. £30. ISBN 0-19-821898-2.

It is now some 50 years since the publication of Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, and more than 60 since the appearance of his *Mediaeval cities*. Archaeology and numismatics have now advanced our data on the economics and material culture of the 5th to 9th c. by great strides; our understanding lags far behind, treading and retreading the theories and problems that he laid out: when, why, and to what degree did the urbanised and united social economy of the Roman world disintegrate? Were the Germans or the Arabs to blame? Was it plague, climatic change, or the intolerable financial and administrative burdens of the later empire? The recent study by Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse attempts a synthesis of the new evidence and a reinterpretation which respects but modifies the judgements of Pirenne. Confining themselves to the material evidence, set in a strangely limited framework of political narrative, they conclude that Roman trade, cities, rural settlement and population levels collapsed in the west not in the 7th c. but in the 5th, at least in part under the impact of barbarian invasion. In the east, this change took place in the late 6th and early 7th c., thanks largely to the wars of Justinian. The result was a general entropy of social and economic life: in the countryside, autarkic settlements, with population and production in severe decline; cities vanishing, or at best reduced to ecclesiastical and administrative nuclei; commercial markets all but dead, the limited movement of goods directed by "complex chiefdoms or incipient states" for non-commercial ends. In the west, recovery came suddenly, when the early Carolingians linked hands, through the Baltic, with the Abbasid Caliphate, to import the silver they needed to unite and govern their empire. Compared with the thriving commerce and political developments of Mesopotamia and northern Europe, trade in the dark-age Mediterranean was "reduced to an almost 'prehistoric' scale", and the Byzantine empire was an irrelevancy.

It makes some apparent sense to treat the post-Roman world as roughly uniform in its destiny, if not in its chronology. One scholar has recently likened the Arab invasion of a decaying Syria to the Lombard invasion of Italy.¹ Aphrodisias and Luni, both marble-quarrying cities, suffered a similar fate. Thessalonica was dominated by its patronal basilica, like many western towns.² The structures which replaced the baths basilica at Wroxeter may recall, in a provincial way, the private *fora* of 5th c. Rome, and also the *suqs* that were coming to dominate the Syrian east.³ Wroxeter, Silchester, Amiens, and, eventually, Rome itself all developed industrial activities in their monumental hearts. And, by c.700,

- 1 H. Kennedy, in "Antioch from Byzantium to Islam and back again," a paper given at the Nottingham Conference on the late antique and early mediaeval city, April 1988, proceedings forthcoming.
- 2 Aphrodisias and Thessalonica: see R. Cormack in *Byzantium and the classical tradition*, ed. M. Mullett and R. Scott (Birmingham Univ. 1981) 103-22. Luni: see Hodges and Whitehouse 30-32.
- 3 P. Barker, *Wroxeter, Roman City: Excavations, 1966-1980* (Dept. of Environment pamphlet) 13, gives the *suq* comparison; 18, the private complex interpretation. Not all archaeologists are convinced by his reconstructions. For private Roman *fora*, see Olympiodorus fr. 41. 1 (Blockley), *C. Th.* 13. 5. 29, *ILS* 1281.

Rome as portrayed by Krautheimer and Constantinople as portrayed by Mango resembled each other closely in under-population, dilapidation, and the fading or distorted traditions of their past.⁴

This picture, however, is indirectly challenged by Ward-Perkins' local and architectural study of the towns of northern and central Italy. Although Hodges and Whitehouse discuss the fate of Rome and Luni and the archaeology of Italian settlements, his book and theirs have curiously little in common. He is mainly late-Roman in his emphasis; they are more concerned to account for Carolingian and Abbasid developments. Methods and conclusions are also in contrast. Ward-Perkins is an archaeologist who has also mastered the literary and epigraphic evidence for urban life in his region; he is as much concerned with human values, social and religious, as with buildings; and he grounds his studies of late antiquity in an appreciation of Italian towns in their classical heyday. He charts the 3rd-c. decline of patronage by the local aristocracies, and its replacement, at first by the state and the senatorial nobility, then by state and Church; he marks the 6th c. change from a sentimental and aesthetic attitude to public monuments to something more strictly utilitarian; yet he argues for a real continuity in the life of many cities through the dark ages, displayed especially in the survival of their street-plans. Hodges and Whitehouse never quite clarify their concept of society and economy in the classical or late antique city, but they seem to think of it as distinguished essentially by shops and "manufacturing industries" (p.83), which disappeared in the 5th c. Classical historians, though, would define the city less as a place of economic production than as a centre of religion and politics, culture, local administration, and display. To them, and to readers of Ward-Perkins, the fate of the *nobiles*, of the secular administrators, and the secular, Roman-style governments, the patrons and stimulants of these consumer cities, may seem more important. To take the most obvious case, Rome itself was never really a commercial or industrial city, and its decline was bound up with the *Gottterdammerung* of its aristocracy, and of the conservation-minded Ostrogothic regime. Ward-Perkins' limits are intentionally narrow, and he seldom steps outside them to consider the political and economic contexts of these developments. Nor does he explicitly give us a general view of the altered character of the dark-age city.⁵ He has done enough, however, to remind us of the rich regional variations behind the uniform façade of Roman urbanity, and to suggest that the appearance of 7th c. entropy needs rigorous examination through the study of provincial conditions in a disintegrating empire.⁶

Types of post-Roman city

What happened to the *nobiles*, to the administrators, to the state? And what happened to the population and organisation of the countryside on which the city depended?

These questions may be set against various types or examples, descriptive or explanatory, of the post-Roman city. Cassiodorus gives us three versions from southern Italy: the old fashioned city of a public, competitive lifestyle, luxurious amenities, liberal education, and gentry who earn office and honour from the central government; the unfortified, semi-rural city, whose inhabitants enjoy watching harvest and vintage on the plain below; and the radically new city, the monastery, based outside the old, and offering

4 R. Krautheimer, *Rome, profile of a city, 312-1308* (Princeton 1980) ch. 3, 192ff; C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople (IV^e - VII^e siècles)* (Paris 1985) ch. 4, and in *17th International Byzantine Congress: major papers* (La Rochelle, New York, 1986) 117-36.

5 Since publication, he has, in fact, been working on these problems. See his "La città altomedievale," *ArchMed* 10 (1983) 111-22, and "The towns of northern Italy: rebirth or renewal," forthcoming in *The rebirth of towns in the west*, ed. B. Hobley and R. Hodges.

6 This was attempted some years ago by M. Hammond, "The emergence of mediaeval towns: independence or continuity?," *HSCPh* 78 (1974) 1-33. Cf. the remarks and suggestions of P. A. Février in *European towns*, ed. M. Barley; also his "Permanence et héritages de l'antiquité dans la topographie des villes de l'occident pendant le haut moyen âge," *Settimane del Centro di Studio sull'alto medioevo* 21 (1974) 41-138. Note, too, the recent survey, concentrating on the 4th c., by R. MacMullen, *Corruption and the decline of Rome* (New Haven and London 1988) 8-35.

religion, morals, and medicine to the local peasantry.⁷ In the case of Spain and North Africa, Keay and Panella have recently argued for towns increasingly detached from their *territoria*, which were dominated by a now ruralised nobility. In the 5th c., they were compelled to import in order to survive — hence the growing pottery evidence for lively movement of goods in the western Mediterranean at that date — but they decayed drastically in the 6th c.⁸ As for the eastern empire, Wickham has suggested that we should see it as evolving into one giant city-state, centred on Constantinople, long a magnet for the urban aristocracies.⁹ Local taxation ceased to be organised through the *curiales*; instead, it was managed by civil servants with their roots in the capital, and the cities shrank to tiny nuclei of residence for the secular and episcopal administrations.¹⁰ (Similarly, R. Reece has described the late Roman cities of northern Gaul and Britain as “administrative villages”¹¹.) Justinian’s attitude to the *curiae* may have been as disastrous for the Asian cities as was his war taxation, or the bubonic plague.¹² In Sicily (and perhaps also in Syria) they may have been partly replaced by ‘agro-towns’. While offering some of their amenities, these lacked the formal urban plans, monuments and institutions which distinguished the cities from the countryside, and were devoted primarily to the production and movement of food supplies for the state and the great landlords.¹³ (Cassiodorus claims nearby Squillace as by now an unfortified *civitas ruralis* or *villa urbana*.¹⁴) C. Mango, too, has laid strong emphasis on the highly ruralised character of the early Byzantine empire.¹⁵

Religious historians give a different picture, at least for the provinces of the European west.¹⁶ In the 5th to 7th c. as never before, the town invaded and dominated the countryside, imposing on it, with a network of monasteries, priests, and parishes, the new beliefs, morality and rhythms of Christianity, calling in squire and peasant to seek healing or charity, and to celebrate the major festivals at patral basilica or urban reliquary shrine.¹⁷ Rogations at Clermont, Sidonius Apollinaris hoped, would recall his

7 *Variae* 8. 31, 12. 15; *Institutiones* I. 31. 1, 32. 2-3.

8 S. J. Keay, *Late Roman amphorae in the western Mediterranean* (Oxford 1984) 417, 426; *Roman Spain* (London 1988) 189ff, 214f; C. Panella, “Le anfore di Cartagine,” *Opus* 2 (1983) 53-74, 60ff J. F. Haldon, “Some considerations on Byzantine society and economy in the seventh century,” *ByzForsch* 10 (1985) 75-112, 87f, supposes a similar break with their *territoria* for 7th c. Byzantine cities.

9 C. J. Wickham, “The other transition: from the ancient world to feudalism,” *Past and Present* 103 (May 1984) 3-36, 35f M. Angold, “The shaping of the mediaeval Byzantine city,” *ByzForsch* 10 (1985) 1-37, 2-8, argues that, following the loss of Syria and Egypt, the impoverished capital could not return the surplus which it drained from the cities: it therefore checked instead of stimulating civic life.

10 Cf. Haldon (supra n.8) 85-89. This will also have been true where tax systems survived outside the Byzantine empire.

11 “The third century: crisis or change?” in *The Roman west in the third century*, eds. A. King and M. Henig (Oxford 1981) 27-38, 36.

12 Cf. C. Roueché, “Cities and the imperial government in the early Byzantine empire,” Nottingham Conference paper, forthcoming.

13 On Sicily, see R. J. A. Wilson, “Changes in the pattern of urban settlement in Roman, Byzantine and Arab Sicily,” in *Papers in Italian archaeology* IV. i, eds. C. Malone and S. Stoddart (Oxford 1985) 313-44, 323f; for more detail, see his unpublished Oxford thesis of 1977, *Sicily under the Roman empire*, esp. 336ff On Syria, see Libanius, *Or.* 11. 230; below, nn. 44 and 98. Contrast W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford 1952) 106, n. 1, on the lack of amenities of Numidian villages; but the Castellum Tidditanorum near Cirta might be a counter example.

14 *Var.* 12. 15. 5; cf. Rutilius, *De reditu suo* I, 223f.

15 *Byzantium, the empire of New Rome* (London 1980) ch. 2-3.

16 See, especially, C. Violante, “Le strutture organizzative della cura d’anime nelle campagne dell’Italia settentrionale (secoli V-X),” *Settimane del Centro di Studio sull’alto medioevo* 28 (1980) 963-1162, 972-1013; Ch. Pietri, “Chiesa e comunità locali nell’occidente cristiano (IV-VI d.C.): l’esempio della Gallia,” in *Società romana e impero tardoantico* 3, ed. A. Giardina (Rome-Bari 1986) 761-800; P. R. L. Brown, *The cult of the Saints* (London 1981) ch. 6; C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his hagiographer* (Oxford 1983) ch. 23.

17 Christianity might counter the centrifugal tendencies of the *nobiles* — cf. J. D. Harries, “Christianity and the city in late Roman Gaul,” Nottingham Conference paper, forthcoming.

something of this aspect, a fact which suggests that the presence of Church or secular officials was not enough to guarantee a high level of urban continuity.²⁹ The double city, one of its poles the *burgus* of a suburban church, was a related phenomenon, especially in Merovingian Gaul,³⁰ and one which may show genuine and vital urban change, as the city reordered itself outside the walls. Drastic decline in the old town was not an inevitable result.³¹ Other Gallic cities have been seen as reverting almost to the condition of "pre-Roman hillfort towns".³² Then there is the type, illustrated both by charters and by excavation, which Wickham has characterised as "a run down garden suburb": street frontages maintained, though with stone often giving place to wood, but the interiors of *insulae* now courtyards or gardens.³³ Public spaces and their use shifted slowly and, by no means decisively, from a classical to a Christian orientation; while care of the secular public monuments and civic pride in them decreased, but never quite vanished.³⁴ At the other extreme, some Syrian towns arguably lost their monumental character and sense of urban identity, but not their population. They were privatised and 'orientalised' on a bazaar pattern, a development which had long been a threat to the Hellenistic and Roman foundations of the east.³⁵

We should, perhaps, compare the ancient consumer cities, characterised above, to buildings undergoing radical and varying reconstructions. Some, like those of Britain, were completely demolished; but more often, while their fabrics were largely stripped, their frameworks were left standing while they were being remodelled. Also, there were new constructions: incipient cities might form around the rural nucleus of church, monastery or *castrum*. The *castrum* and potential *civitas* of Dijon, as described by Gregory of Tours, much resembles the villa of Nicetius of Trier as described by Venantius Fortunatus; it also seems comparable to the fortresses of Castelseprio, Trino, or Invillino in northern Italy.³⁶ But the new towns

29 Contrast, though, Basil, *Ep.* 94, and James 47, on the service population which might be created. Angold (supra n.9) 9 sees bishops as seldom effective guarantors of urban continuity. Both Rome and Constantinople, of course, remained very large by the standards of their day. Note Libanius *Or.* 18.35 on warfare and 4th c. Gallic cities.

30 See James (supra n.28) 65ff, J. Drinkwater, in *The Roman World*, ed. J. Wachter (London 1987) I, 377, D. Boyson, "Romano-Burgundian society in the age of Gundobad," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988) 91-118, 106-11. For a detailed study of one such city see L. Pietri, *La ville de Tours du IVe au VIe siècle* (Rome 1983).

31 Thus, Imola retained a good deal of its Roman street plan; yet a large suburban ecclesiastical complex from the early Byzantine period has been excavated there. At Cappadocian Caesarea (supra n.21), however, the new ecclesiastical centre eventually replaced the old city altogether; see W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman empire* (London 1893) 464. Why so complete a break with the past?

32 E. M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (London 1985) 308.

33 C. J. Wickham, *Early medieval Italy* (London 1981) 81, D. Bullough, "Late antique and early medieval Pavia: topography and social change," *Atti del Convegno di Studio sul Centro Storico di Pavia* (Pavia 1968) 91ff. For the archaeology, see P. Hudson, "La dinamica dell'insediamento urbano nell'area del cortile del tribunale di Verona," *ArchMed* 12 (1985) 281-302, C. La Rocca Hudson, "'Dark Ages' a Verona" *ibid.* 13 (1986) 31-78, criticised by G. P. Brogiolo, "A proposito dell'organizzazione urbana dell'alto medioevo," *ArchMed* 14 (1987) 27-46, but accepted, on the whole, by Wickham, "L'Italia e l'alto medioevo," *ArchMed* 15 (1988) forthcoming.

34 Cf. Wickham 83; contrast Ward-Perkins, *From classical antiquity* 179ff, for continuity of public space. In 6th c. Rome, poetry might be recited in a church or in the Forum of Trajan.

35 See H. Kennedy, "From 'Polis' to 'Madina': urban change in late antique and early Islamic Syria," *Past and Present* 106 (Feb. 1985) 3-27, modified by more recent work, below nn. 40 and 44; note also H. Kennedy and J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, "Antioch and the villages of northern Syria in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.: trends and problems," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988) 64-90, 64ff. Note how, in Dura Europos, under the Parthians, the open Greek *agora* became an eastern bazaar. On the lack of 'civic cohesion' in the Muslim city, see J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch* (Oxford 1972) 263f.

36 Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 3.19 (supra n. 26), Venant. Fort., *Carm.* 3. 12. For a comparison of Castelseprio and Invillino, see M. Dabrowska *et al.*, "Castelseprio: scavi diagnostici, 1962-1963," *Sibrium* 14 (1978-79) 1-138, 109ff; for Trino, M. M. Negro Ponzi, "Trino, Chiesa di San Michele," *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Piemonte* 1 (1982) 192. The Theopolis of the prefect Claudius Postumus Dardanus in the Alpes Maritimes would be one such site that failed to develop. On this villa and territory turned into fortified and probably monastic zone, see H.-I. Marrou, "Un lieu dit Cité de Dieu," *Augustinus Magister* (Congrès International Augustinien, Paris 1954), I, 101-10. I suspect that the area would well repay survey and excavation.

that interest Hodges and Whitehouse are the emporia for trade directed by élites across natural and political frontiers — Dorestad and Quentovic, Birka and Hedeby, sites not without parallels in the late Roman world.³⁷ With no landed gentry resident and competitive, none of these bore much resemblance to cities in a classical sense.

How do these types and images relate to the varying local conditions suggested earlier, and to the initial strength of the traditions of urban life in different regions?

Regional survey of urban changes and survivals

To look at Syria and Palestine first, and in more detail:³⁸ by c.500 these had inherited a great urban tradition from the classical world, although texts suggest that merchants enjoyed an unclassically high status, often being nobles and benefactors of their cities.³⁹ This chimes with archaeological and other evidence for the export of oil and wine, and may be linked in part with the demands of the eastern frontier army and the growing population of Constantinople. Urban building in the diocese of Oriens reached its peak in the 6th c. During much of the 6th and early 7th c., the region suffered heavily from earthquakes and warfare, but it was little disturbed after the Muslim conquest.⁴⁰ That conquest put an end to most architectural state patronage, but also to the remote attractions of Constantinople, with its calls on the crops, the cash, and the educated classes of the provinces. In Damascus, an impressive local capital was substituted, perhaps also replacing Antioch.⁴¹ Bishops, often a major factor in urban survival, must have declined in importance, but the local administration continued under the Umayyads, and, for a while, was still manned by the native Christian gentry. At the same time, under the impact of Islam, the classical memories of their culture dwindled.⁴² The result, as noted, was a fair measure of continuing life in the cities — how much is disputable — but also a very radical change in the urban lifestyle. We should observe, though, that this change may have been under way well before the Muslim conquest.⁴³ Exactly when decline began in the supporting rural economy is uncertain: it seems to have continued gradually under the Umayyads, but did not become acute until the Abbasids.⁴⁴

Western Asia Minor of the 6th c. also started from prosperity and a strong urban tradition, and I do not think that its cities show the Syrian signs of incipient 'orientalisation'. In the 5th c., architectural patronage by local citizens apparently increased, at the expense of that by governors.⁴⁵ From 610 onwards, the region came under severe military pressure. Bishops, centralised administration, state patronage, and ties with Constantinople all continued. It is likely that the provincial nobility, who did not have the vast country estates and semi-rural lifestyle traditional to their western counterparts, tended to migrate to the greater security and opportunities of the capital. Even as benefactors in the 5th c., they had prided

37 Compare the authorised markets of the Danube and Persian frontiers, and the private emporia indicated by CIL 9. 10, *Nov. Valentiniani* 24.

38 For a general view of prosperity in Syria, Palestine and Cilicia, see MacMullen (*supra* n.6) 31ff, 43f.

39 Cf. *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 22, 24, 33; Procopius of Gaza, *Ekphrasis* (ed. P. Friedländer), *Studi e Testi* 89 (1939) 42, pp. 18 and 83f.

40 See Marlia Mango, article forthcoming; contrast H. Kennedy, "The last century of Byzantine Syria: a reinterpretation," *ByzForsch.* 10 (1985) 141-83, esp. 150ff, 168ff. See Patlagean (*supra* n.19) 74-85 for the 6th c. disturbances; *infra* n. 99.

41 Suggestion by B. Ward-Perkins, in discussion on H. Kennedy's paper (*supra* n. 1).

42 See H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the age of the Caliphates* (London and New York 1986) 117f.

43 Kennedy (*supra* n. 35).

44 See E. Ashtor, *Social and economic history of the Near East in the middle ages* (London 1976) 46-65, perhaps too reliant on the evidence of state revenue returns. On Mesopotamia see R. McC. Adams, *Land behind Baghdad: a history of settlement on the Diyala Plain* (London and Chicago 1965) 80-85, 97-102, 116. Detailed excavation of one north Syrian village suggests an economic and demographic rise down to c. 600; slow decline in the 7th to 9th c.; see J.-P. Sodini *et al.*, "Déhès (Syrie du Nord), campagnes I-III (1976-1978): recherches sur l'habitat rural," *Syria* 57 (1980) 1-304, esp. 288-301; contrast Kennedy (*supra* n.40) 157-62.

45 See Roueché (*supra* n.12) and "A new inscription from Aphrodisias," *GRBS* 20 (1979) 173-85.

themselves on imperial, not local ranks and honours.⁴⁶ The return of provincial surpluses from Constantinople to the cities through state patronage came to an end, with the loss of Syrian and Egyptian revenues.⁴⁷ Urban discontinuity seems to have been marked: recent archaeological interpretations may have been over-pessimistic, but some cities eventually vanished altogether, and many were probably reduced to the 'island' pattern of settlement or to mere forts.⁴⁸ Much of this could probably also be applied to Greece and southern Thrace, Thessalonica being a partial exception.

The case of Africa is more complex. Its numerous cities stagnated architecturally in the 3rd c., but did not decline, and were improved and restored under Diocletian and in the late 4th c. (Some in Asia may be comparable.) The chief benefactors tended to be the leading local decurions, although Roman senators were often honorary civic *patroni*. (In Asia, the benefactors were more usually governors or *honorati*, ex officials.⁴⁹) Against the arguments of Fulford,⁵⁰ we may surmise that the Roman *annona* was not always a grave burden. Indeed, in the form of *coemptiones*, it may often have allowed considerable profits to the suppliers.⁵¹ In 429-39, these social and economic ties with Rome were severed; a hundred years later, they were renewed, but with Constantinople. During much of the Vandal period, Africa was under growing pressure from the Moors; and through the 5th and 6th c., its cities were in physical decline, despite a notable urban tradition, and much aid from Justinian.⁵² We should note savage Vandal confiscations from the nobility, and ask whether the vital third of urban revenues continued to reach the cities under the conquerors.⁵³ Before the reconquest, however, the overseas trade of the province seems to have been especially lively in direction, if not in quantity: new markets perhaps were opened up in Spain and the east, to compensate for the loss of the *annona* system.⁵⁴ The Byzantines brought about prolonged peace, and very possibly a high level of rural production, now directed to the needs of Constantinople. With the revolt of Heraclius, Africa played a vital part in imperial politics, as, indeed, it did against the empire after the Arab conquest.⁵⁵ We should envisage a province increasingly ruralised, but neither isolated nor

46 See Haldon (supra n.8) 88, Wickham (supra n.9) 33ff, Roueché (supra n.12).

47 Cf. Angold (supra n.9) 4f. Note that the demands of Constantinople will have declined with the decline of its population.

48 See C. Foss, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia," *AJA* 81 (1977) 469-86, Hodges and Whitehouse 62ff, Angold 4ff, with important cautions on method by J. Russell, "Transformation in early Byzantine life: the contributions and limitations of archaeological evidence," in *17th International Byzantine Congress* (supra n. 4). Russell suggests rather more continuity than Foss and others would allow.

49 See C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au bas empire* (Paris 1979-81) I, chap. II. iii; Angold 2f, Roueché, Nottingham Conference. Note also MacMullen (supra n. 6) 29ff, 45.

50 See, most recently, his "The long distance trade and communications of Carthage, c. A. D. 400 - c. A. D. 650," in *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission I. 2*, ed. H. Hurst (Sheffield 1984) ch. 12, 258f; but contrast him in "Pottery and the economy of Carthage and its hinterland," *Opus* 2 (1983) 5-14, 10f on the 2nd-3rd c.

51 On *coemptio*, see P. Vanags, "Taxation and survival in the late fourth century," in *The Anonymus De Rebus Bellicis*, ed. M. Hassall and R. Ireland (Oxford 1979) 47-57, 49ff. Wickham has lately suggested that the *annona* carried on its back much of the trade in African luxury exports; "Marx, Sherlock Holmes, and late Roman commerce," *JRS* 78 (1988) 183-93, 192f.

52 Lepelley 411 suggests that late 4th c. Africa was living above its means. See in general F. M. Clover, "Carthage and the Vandals," in *Excavations at Carthage 1978*, VII, ed. J. H. Humphrey (Univ. of Michigan 1982) 1-22. Under Vandal rule, the gentry still kept up the imperial cult. Moreover, Syrian mosaic workers, imported by the emperor to his new foundations, deployed the abstractions of classical and pagan civic life in their iconography — a testimony to the traditions of both provinces. See N. Duval and A. Chastagnol in *Mélanges W. Seston* (Paris 1974) 88-118; A. Grabar, "Une nouvelle interprétation de certaines images de la Mosaïque de Qasr-El-Lebya (Libya)," *CRAI* 1969, 264-84.

53 On this see Lepelley 67-72.

54 Wickham (supra n.51) 193 has argued that transport costs rose damagingly in consequence of this loss. But some estates must at least have been freed from the burdens of the *functio navicularia*. Some landowners, though, saw this duty as preferable to curial service (*C.Th.* 12. 1. 149).

55 See Fulford, supra n.50, allowing for a possible decline in actual agricultural production in the Vandal period; D. Pringle, *Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab conquest* (Oxford 1981) 111-19; W. H. C. Frend, "The end of Byzantine North Africa," *BAC* n.s. 198 (1983) 387-97. On the monetisation of the province, see R.

greatly impoverished. Sicily, southeast Italy, and possibly certain parts of Syria may have been comparable.

As noted earlier, Panella has produced an explanation for the Vandalic contrast between trade and urban architecture, one which Keay has applied to the Spanish cities and great rural villas: high import levels indicate the dislocation of town and country. Surviving town-dwellers turned for victuals and luxuries to the sea, not to the *territorium*, where landlords who had broken with their cities now held sway. This account can be only partly valid. The towns must have paid somehow for their imports, either by cash, or by exports of their own. Indeed, Procopius, commenting on the vast hoards found by Belisarius in the Vandal treasury, claims that Africa had no need to send gold abroad, being virtually self-sufficient in foodstuffs.⁵⁶ This is clearly an exaggeration; but it may be that imports were paid for in kind, not in money — hence the African pottery finds in the eastern empire. Such exchanges do not suggest the isolation and autarky of rural estates, at least in Africa. While imported pottery is found chiefly in the towns, we may suppose that landlords — Roman, Vandal, or even Visigothic — did not cut themselves off from these luxuries, any more than they severed themselves from the great urban churches of Spain and Africa. *Vivunt illic rustici epulis urbanis*, says Cassiodorus of the Bruttian cities.⁵⁷ As noted, prolonged residence at country villas was an ancient tradition in the Roman west, and did not necessarily preclude activity in town. Thanks, perhaps, in part to barbarian land-owners, and to barbarian kings, with their penchant for hoarding and duty of personal largesse,⁵⁸ the ability and inclination to spend on urban buildings, secular at least, declined all the same.

In northern to central Italy, classical urban traditions were more recently formed than those in the east, especially in Samnium and Cisalpine Gaul, and had been gravely weakened in the 3rd c.⁵⁹ (The 1st to 2nd c. A.D. phase of public building has recently been called a "splendid parenthesis" in the history of the Italian city.⁶⁰) At the same time, the courts of the last emperors and the Ostrogoths, peripatetic between Rome and the great northern cities, long sought prestige and legitimacy in the preservation of urban monuments.⁶¹ Evidence for senatorial aristocrats of northern origins suggests that they were much involved with the cities in the 5th-6th c., and especially in the building of churches, rather than in the traditional secular benefactions typical of 4th-c. Campania and Samnium. Also, by contrast with southern Gaul, they shared this involvement with a 'bourgeoisie' of tradesmen and minor officials.⁶² The region was intermittently affected by invasion and civil war during much of the 5th c.; between 535 and 550, it suffered gravely during the Gothic wars; and, from 568 onwards, it was much disturbed by the Lombard invasion. In Byzantine territories, the episcopal organisation survived,⁶³ so too did a complex, centralised system of tax-gathering. The distant capital also exerted its lures for a while, although government was perhaps more localised and devolved than further east.⁶⁴ There was some state patronage of ur-

Guéry, C. Morrisson and H. Slim, *Recherches archéologiques franco-tunisiennes à Rougga 3* (Rome 1982), contrasting Slim 86f, 93f with Pringle's views on security.

56 Wars 4.3. 24-28; cf. 5.2.26. On possible western imports of gold from the east, see S. J. B. Barnish, "The wealth of Iulianus Argentarius," *Byzantion* 55 (1985) 5-38, 10ff; on the temptation of western wealth to Justinian, Barnish, "Pigs, plebeians, and potentes," *PBSR* 55 (1987) 157-85, 180.

57 Var. 8.31.5; note, though, that the letter deals with desertion of the cities.

58 Cf. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The long-haired kings* (London 1962) 66ff, on the financial aims and methods of the Merovingians. Contrast Justinian.

59 See Ward-Perkins, *From classical antiquity* 15ff.

60 By C. La Rocca (*supra* n.28).

61 See Ward-Perkins, esp. 47, 83, 105ff, 207ff.

62 See S. J. B. Barnish, "Transformation and survival in the western senatorial aristocracy," *PBSR* 56 (1988) 120-55, 133f, 151.

63 See L. Duchesne, "Les évêchés d'Italie et l'invasion Lombarde," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 23 (1903) 83-116 — a sharp distinction between Lombard and Byzantine territory: episcopal survival seems better evidence for state politics than for urban continuity; on the north, cf. G. P. Bognetti in *Settimane del Centro di Studio sull'alto medioevo* 6 (1959) 80f.

64 See A. Guillou, *Régionalisme et indépendance dans l'empire Byzantine au VII siècle* (Rome 1969) 73ff; T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and officers* (British School at Rome 1984) 28ff, 147f.

ban architecture in the later 6th c., but it almost vanished thereafter. In much of this, Lombard and Byzantine territory differed greatly. Yet, in both the north Italian domains, most city sites survived, some new ones developed, and many retained their street grids.⁶⁵ This feature need not imply dense settlement; but it suggests both a population and a degree of civic pride and social control sufficient to protect the streets from the rubble of ruined buildings and from the encroachments of private houses and gardens.⁶⁶ These cities therefore were not reduced to the 'island' pattern. They remained the theatres of political events, and were the residences of Lombard kings, dukes and gastalds. The residence of the local gentry is indicated by the frequency of church building of the 8th-10th c.⁶⁷ Much surviving centuriation in the Po valley suggests that the labour-intensive cultivation of their rural *territoria* may have continued with little change either in population or in land-holding patterns. Luni, cited by Hodges and Whitehouse as typical of urban decay, is clearly exceptional, with its poor hinterland and dependence on the marble trade.⁶⁸ The field surveys which they also adduce to show extensive rural depopulation in Etruria are, at best, ambiguous in their implications.⁶⁹ On the whole, the evidence suggests that some of the provincial gentry hung on, and retained their tastes for a semi-urban life, even imparting them to the Lombards.⁷⁰

Central to southern Gaul is different. Outside Provence, traditions of urban life were comparatively weak, especially in the more northern parts. From the early 5th c. onwards, internal wars and barbarian invasions were frequent, though never so devastating as the Gothic wars in Italy. The tax-gathering administration went into a long, slow decline, and links with Rome and the imperial courts, probably seldom very intimate, were gradually severed. However, the formation of an episcopate in which the great families of the provinces predominated gave some measure of urban continuity, even as the structures of authority changed. The tribal *civitates* long retained local loyalties, sometimes playing an important rôle in politics, and they were focussed on their episcopal cities.⁷¹ Excavations at the Marseilles Bourse have helped to confirm Pirenne's belief that imported luxuries reached the Gallic Church and aristocracy in some quantities well into the 7th c.; so too did the plague. And, in the 5th c. at least, pottery from the Marseilles area was reaching Spain, Italy, and the eastern Mediterranean.⁷²

⁶⁵ Ward-Perkins, *From classical antiquity* 179-86; "Towns of northern Italy" (supra n.5).

⁶⁶ But for an important caution see Bullough (supra n.33) 87, Brogiolo (supra n.33) 31ff Angold (supra n.9) 14f, sees the survival of Thessalonica's plan as due to accident, not civic control. Note Hudson (supra n.33) 289 on the tendency at Verona to keep up the street frontages, while the interior of *insulae* were generally clear of buildings.

⁶⁷ Cf. Wickham (supra n.33) 84f, 87: "the chance for aristocrats to measure themselves against their peers came best in an urban context — if someone built a church in the city, other people could actually see it." Contrast, though, the combination of church building with a lost street plan at Sufetula in Byzantine Africa — Averil Cameron, *Past and Present* 88 (1980) 133, n. 24 (review).

⁶⁸ See La Rocca (supra n.28), Ward-Perkins, "Towns of northern Italy" (supra n.5).

⁶⁹ Are they signs of depopulation, or merely of impoverishment among the producers or consumers of dateable pottery? See Ward-Perkins in the forthcoming proceedings of a Cambridge colloquium on land and labour in late antiquity, ed. C. R. Whittaker; cf. also Barnish, *PBSR* 55, 175. Wickham (supra n.51) 192f, would explain the phenomenon more as a failure of supply, through rising transport costs, than of demand. Pollen analyses, and the study of local history, in place names and farm boundaries, may offer our best hope of tracing the history of rural population. Despite the arguments of Wickham (supra n.33) 13 and 94, and "L'Italia e l'alto medioevo", *ArchMed* 14 (1988) forthcoming, there must have been significant decline in many areas. Urban populations certainly tended to fall, and it would be very hard to maintain that rural numbers rose correspondingly.

⁷⁰ See Wickham (supra n.33) 68, 86f; cf. G. P. Brogiolo, *ArchMed* 10 (1983) 85.

⁷¹ See E. James (supra n.28) 49-63; for a detailed study see I. Wood, "Ecclesiastical politics of Merovingian Clermont," in *Ideal and reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon society*, ed. P. Wormald (Oxford 1983) ch. 2. Contrast P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London 1969) 421, on the African cities. Note that the decline of the *curia* of Timgad apparently coincided with the ascendancy of the Donatists (Lepelley [supra n.49] II, 471ff). Was Timgad's decay partly due to a power vacuum created when these, in turn, declined. For bishops and cities in northern Gaul see Wightman (supra n.32) 241f, 286ff, 303ff.

⁷² See M. Bonifay and J.-P. Palletier, "Céramiques de l'antiquité tardive à Marseilles," *RANarb* 16 (1983) 286-346; E. James, *Merovingian archaeology of S. W. Gaul* (Oxford 1977) 239-43. News from Marseilles that plague had reached Provence, and was spreading north along the roads: see Desiderius of Cahors, *Ep.* 2. 20 (MGH *Epp.* 3).

Fewer towns than in northern Italy seem to have retained their classical grids — those that did so tended to be major administrative centres — and the greater number probably declined to the 'island' pattern. Still, dark-age Trier, shrunken and huddling around its internal strongpoints, remained Roman in its layout.⁷³ As in Italy, the building and maintenance of urban aqueducts long continued, at least at Clermont and Cahors.⁷⁴ The decisive changes seem to have come in the later Merovingian period, when royal grants of immunities and the formation of local lordships in the *territoria* fragmented what survived from the social and political structures of the Roman *civitas*.⁷⁵

Urban survival and the rôle of the middleman

Does this very crude survey suggest any factor which may specially have affected the survival of towns, and the ways in which they changed? To be a Christian centre, to be an administrative centre, to be involved in official supply systems, to be freed from the burdens imposed by a remote regime — all these had their effect, but none would seem to have guaranteed continuity or decline. If a prosperous supporting countryside were enough, the African cities would have done better. Northern Italy and Oriens are the regions in which continuity seems most plausible, and there is a common factor: in both, towns might serve as gateways or middlemen, standing on or exploiting the frontiers between distinct geographical, cultural, and political zones which had some need for contact and exchange. In Syria and Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia and the Mediterranean meet. Some north Italian towns, themselves interlocked by excellent fluvial communications, linked the trade and culture of Byzantium to the Lombards or to Transalpine Europe. In the 8th c., the settlements of Venetia were emerging as nodes in a trading network which joined Italy and Sicily with Byzantium, North Africa, and the Arab east; by the early 9th c., or before, Campanian Gaeta and Amalfi were doing likewise. The process was much assisted when Arab piracy in the west and Byzantine blockade in the east left only the central Mediterranean free to merchants: "La dissoluzione dell'impero", P. J. Jones has written, "permise la rinascita d'Italia".⁷⁶ Some of the more prosperous cities of central Italy — Lucca or Spoleto — were well sited to play a similar part at more local levels. Urban industrial production may have been taking on a new, non-classical importance.⁷⁷ And, where trade continued to pass through a city, or to be carried in its ships, tolls could still be exacted, and nobles still be tempted to reside in the hope of exotic luxuries and opportunities for their display.⁷⁸

By contrast, the cities of Byzantine North Africa were mediators only for the Moorish tribes;⁷⁹ those of coastal Asia gave access only to the impoverished hinterland of Anatolia, where the decay of imperial roads and posts must have deprived many farms and cities of their administrative and economic

73 Roman plans survive at Cologne and Trier (the latter well illustrated in M. Wheeler, *Roman art and architecture* [London 1964] figs. 49-50); perhaps to some degree at Apt, Arles, Autun, Bordeaux, Méln, Orleans, Paris, Sens and Troyes; and possibly at Bourges, Rouen, and Soissons. These conjectures are based chiefly on the plans and descriptions in A. Grenier, *Manuel d'archéologie gallo-romaine* I (Paris 1931) and S. Johnson, *Late Roman fortifications* (London 1983). Note the warning on the dangers of plan-identification in the important work of P. A. Février et al., *Histoire de la France urbaine: la ville antique* (Paris 1980) 57f. A systematic survey of town plans of the Roman empire, showing modern survivals, would be very useful.

74 Desiderius, *Ep.* 1. 13; cf. Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 2. 33.

75 E. James (supra n.28) 61ff; cf. Wood (supra n.71) 55.

76 *Storia d'Italia* II. 4 (G. Einaudi, Turin 1974) 1620-30; see also A. O. Citarella, "Patterns in medieval trade: the commerce of Amalfi before the Crusades," *J. Econ. Hist.* 28 (1968) 531-55, esp. 535-43; J. Ferluga, "Navigation et commerce dans l'Adriatique aux VIIe et VIIIe siècle," *ByzForsch* 12 (1987) 39-56, esp. 44ff. On the social and political context of the rise of Venice, see A. Carile, "La presenza Bizantina nell' alto Adriatico fra VII e IX secolo," *ByzForsch* 12 (1987) 7-35. On rivers and town survival in northern Gaul, cf. Wightman (supra n. 32) 241.

77 See Ward-Perkins, "Towns of northern Italy" (supra n.5), on the implications of Forum ware.

78 Cf. Wickham (supra n.33) 87.

79 Frend (supra n.55) argues that the Moors assisted the Arabs in the destruction of the rural economy; the cities had already declined.

raison d'être.⁸⁰ In general, the exchanges of the Byzantine empire tended to take place not on the borders but at the capital.⁸¹ The emergence of Frankish Gaul, from the 4th c. on, may help to explain the partial survival of Gallic cities further south, and even in the north itself. In the mid 6th c., the *negotium exercentes* of Verdun, sponsored by their king and their bishop, disposed of large sums of gold.⁸² At the end of the 6th c., gold coins and papal missionaries were being passed north from Provence to England, while Aquitaine turned to face the Atlantic long before the Carolingian era.⁸³ Thus far we can follow Pirenne and Hodges and Whitehouse. Continuity in such Spanish cities as Mérida, Córdoba, Barcelona, Saragossa, and Tarragona may be a similar case.⁸⁴ We should note the development of capitals far inland at Reccopolis and Toledo; also, the passage of Mediterranean amphorae through the straits of Gibraltar to Britain, Ireland, and western Gaul.⁸⁵ The north Balkans can have offered few opportunities to the cities that linked them with the Aegean or Adriatic, but Thessalonica, at least, may have owed much to its position between the Byzantine empire and the Slav tribes: its street plan survived, and, even under Phocas, it still visualised its political life in a curious mixture of Christian and classical imagery.⁸⁶ Abydos, the customs station of the Hellespont, may also have retained its classical character.⁸⁷

Such factors were probably not on their own sufficient for survival, but they may well have been necessary. They also correspond to the arguments of Hodges and Whitehouse for the reappearance of town life in northern Europe. Emergent 'gateway communities' like Quentovic, Dorestad, and Hamwih would then be the counterparts of Torcello/Venice or Heraclea in the south. They lacked, though, the independent and aristocratic life of the Italian town that was arguably an inheritance from the classical past and can still be seen in the history of Agnellus of Ravenna with its patriotic combination of *romanitas* and *campanilismo*.⁸⁸ Exchange may have had increasing and even decisive importance, but for long it will have been only one element, and not the most conspicuous, in the life of the southern city.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Cf. Procop., *Anec.* 30, John Lydus, *De Mag.* 3. 61.

⁸¹ See Angold (supra n.9) 4.

⁸² Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 31. 34, claiming that the merchants were still wealthy in his own day. (See Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* [London 1974] 100, for discussion.) It would be very interesting to know in what goods they dealt, and how far they belonged to the local land-owning classes. Serious archaeological investigation has not taken place at Verdun, so far as I know. In the 4th c., the town achieved independence from Metz; in the 9th-10th c., it was a notorious entrepôt for the east-west slave trade (Y. Dollinger-Leonard in *Vorträge und Forschungen* 4 [1955-56] 208-15; Février et al. [supra n.73] 111, 114, 533). On the survival of the northern cities in general, see Wightman (supra n.32) ch. 10, and 305ff. Note esp. 241: "There is certainly a sense in which later economic geography was pre-figured in the 4th c., and this lends support to the view that a certain, albeit low, level of economic activity persisted throughout and that the cities never sank to the passive, essentially pre-urban form that has sometimes been suggested". According to Reece (supra n.11, p.37), "The Rhine-Thames axis which was to direct much policy in Medieval Europe was already forged by the 3rd c."

⁸³ James (supra n.72) ch. 7.

⁸⁴ On Mérida and Cordoba, see R. Collins in *Visigothic Spain: new approaches*, ed. E. James (Oxford 1980) ch. 7; also his *Early Medieval Spain* (London 1983) esp. 88-105. A coin hoard from the territory of Mérida, its most frequent mints being Antioch, Arles, Constantinople, Nicomedia, Rome, Lyons, suggests substantial and extensive commercial contacts, at least down to the early 5th c. See A. Velásquez Jiménez, in *Augusta Emerita I* (*Excavaciones Arqueológicas en España* 126, 1983) 85-173. Note also L. A. García Moreno, "Colonias de comerciantes orientales en la península ibérica, s. V-VII," *Habis* 3 (1972) 127-54. On Tarragona, see A.-M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford 1989) 268-73. Modern Spanish town-plans suggest at least a possibility of continuity at Barcelona, Mérida, Saragossa and Tarragona, but not at Córdoba, Gerona, León, Salamanca, Segovia, Seville, Toledo, or Tortosa. I suppose that a more oriental concept of the city may have come in with the Arabs. Keay, *Roman Spain* (supra n.8) 183-89, 210-17, argues more for the gradual reduction of many towns to the Gallic 'island' pattern.

⁸⁵ James (supra n.72) 244f; cf. Hodges and Whitehouse 90, and, most recently, C. Thomas, "Tintagel Castle," *Antiquity* 62 (1988) 421-34, 429f.

⁸⁶ R. Cormack (supra n. 2); *Writing in Gold* (London 1985) ch. 2, esp. 69f.

⁸⁷ See Angold (supra n.9) 15.

⁸⁸ Cf. T. S. Brown in *The inheritance of historiography* (supra n.20) 107-14.

⁸⁹ Cf. Wickham (supra n.33) 85f.

However, the classical features of that city gradually changed. Industrial production may have increased. Michael Hendy has contrasted the very Roman and contemptuous attitude to trade of the emperor Theophilus (829-42) with that of his near contemporary, the Venetian Doge Giustiniano Partecipazio.⁹⁰ A life of a middleman demanded some reversal of values on the part of the urban governing classes.⁹¹ If the expenses of their life were much reduced, so too were their estates. A shortage of those educated slaves and clients through whom Roman aristocrats had probably tended to handle their affairs may have forced them to take some personal interest in trade. Law and administration, moreover, were offering far fewer lucrative jobs for impoverished gentry. And in Syria, as remarked earlier, commercial attitudes may for long have been more positive. Above all, the state-directed production and movement of goods was lacking, or was less prominent than in the Byzantine east. We should note, too, the exchanges of letters and presents which had knitted together the late Roman orders of nobles and churchmen.⁹² Gregory the Great swapping trade gifts of timber with the Patriarch of Alexandria, or bishop Rufus of Turin sending *artifices* to his colleague Nicetius at Trier, are representatives of the exchange technique who may also foreshadow new methods and values: hence, perhaps, the bishop of Naples whom Gregory denounced for spending more time on ship building, in which he lost over 400 *solidi*, than on his pastoral duties.⁹³ Rufus's dependents travelled in a direction which coincides in an interesting manner with the movement of many coins and precious objects from Italy. Not trade, however, but kindred and diplomatic exchanges are usually surmised as the means of transmission.⁹⁴ At the same time, political disintegration meant the slow fragmenting of these Roman networks, along with the ending of state requirements, and the loss of the costly, cosmopolitan lifestyle of the great landowners: hence, probably, a declining need for surplus production and exchange.

Our study of urban survivals, then, has led to an awareness of the flows and blockages of goods in the post-Roman world — we are back to the theories and questions of Pirenne. "Differences in voltage", Braudel remarked of the 16th-c. Mediterranean, "determine electrical currents".⁹⁵ Between what points did the currents of the dark ages run?

Post-Roman unity, disintegration and renewal

On the whole, recent archaeology has tended to confirm Pirenne's picture of a lively Mediterranean commerce in the 5th-6th c.⁹⁶ For goods in pottery containers, at least, the flow was increasingly from east

90 B. Ward Perkins, "Towns of Northern Italy" and "La città altomedievale" (both *supra* n.5) 118ff; M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine monetary economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) 247 and n. 155.

91 Was the failure of the African cities due also, in part, to the peculiarly archaic and self-consciously Roman vigour of their *curiales* noted above? Vandal rule, followed by the empire of Justinian, nominally conservative, but in fact innovatory, must have been very demoralising.

92 Cf. C. R. Whittaker in *Trade in the ancient economy*, ed. P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins and C. R. Whittaker (Cambridge 1983) ch. 13.

93 Greg. Mag., *Reg. Ep.* 7. 58, 8. 28, 13. 29 (MGH); *Ep. Austrasiacae*, 21.

94 See J. Werner, *Münzdatierte austrasische Grabfunde* (Berlin and Leipzig 1935) 19-28; "Fernhandel und Naturalwirtschaft im östlichen Merowingerreich" *Bericht der römisch-germanischen Kommission* 42 (1961) 307-41, 310-23; P. Richards, *Byzantine bronze vessels in England and Europe* (unpublished Cambridge D. Phil. diss. 1980) ch. 9-11; Hodges and Whitehouse 88ff. The evidence will probably never allow us to understand how goods were transmitted in this region and period, but I suspect that while purely non-commercial exchanges played some part, this was limited. Compare the tied merchants of Verdun (*supra* n. 82) against Desiderius, *Ep.* 2.11, Cassiodorus, *Var.* 4. 1, 5. 1-2. Note also Jordanes *Getica* 21. Where Roman sales and customs duties survived, this should indicate some continuity in trading methods. For Gaul, cf. Pirenne (*supra* n.82) 105f; for Istria in 803, Ferluga (*supra* n.76) 46. Despite ties of kinship and diplomacy, 6th c. Italy sent few luxuries or coins to southern Gaul and Burgundy.

95 *The Mediterranean and the mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (London 1973) 1, 136ff.

96 This is best surveyed by C. Panella, "Le merci: produzioni, itinerari, e destini" in *Società romana* 3 (*supra* n.16) 431-59. There is some conflict between the evidence of marine and dry-land archaeology, especially evident at Porto Torres and in the Straits of Bonifacio. With A. J. Parker, "Shipwrecks and ancient trade in the Mediterranean," *Archaeological review from Cambridge* 3. 2 (1984) 99-113, 102, contrast F. Villedieu, "Turris

to west, especially from Syria, Palestine, and the southern Aegean. Eastern arable techniques and buildings in town and country seem almost like those of a 'First World', against the west's 'Third World'. Tchalenko explained the astonishing stone-built farms, villages, churches and monasteries of northern Syria as the results of a monoculture economy, producing oil for the market of Constantinople. (Compare Africa; something similar may have been happening in Lycia.⁹⁷) Mixed farming, and some exports to the west, now also seem likely, but in general his account still holds good.⁹⁸ Syria may even have needed to create new outlets for its surplus in the west as military activity on the Persian frontier slackened in the 5th c. Bubonic plague, man-assisted soil erosion, climatic change, and similar disasters have been seen as decisive in forming the dark ages in the east.⁹⁹ Yet, it is arguable that not even the 6th c. sequence of earthquakes, crop failures, plagues, wars, and heavy taxation terminated prosperity in the diocese of Oriens.¹⁰⁰ As for the west, Justinian's *reconquista* followed up the flow of trade to that quarter but probably did something to block the movement of the more archaeologically detectable luxury goods: imported pottery falls off sharply during the later 6th c. at Rome, Naples, Carthage and Porto Torres.¹⁰¹ In view of this, Wickham's theory that large scale production in late antiquity was created chiefly by, and depended on, the demands of an efficiently taxing state seems rather doubtful.¹⁰² I believe, though, that Africa, Sicily and southeast Italy did play an increasingly important part in the supply system of the eastern empire, through taxes, compulsory purchase, and state-directed trade.¹⁰³ (We should note, however, that the evidence of amphorae from Constantinople and elsewhere in the east does not at present support this view, at least as far as oil is concerned.¹⁰⁴) Byzantine tax policies and strategic

Libisonis," *Società romana* 3, 160f. In general, though, wrecks are apparently twice as frequent in the 6th c. Mediterranean as in the 5th c., falling again in the 7th, and virtually vanishing in the 8th, but at all times rare compared with the early empire. Parker notes, however, that accurate wreck-dating is very unreliable, and comments on the surprising lack of wrecks from the Greek age of colonisation. Cf. MacMullen (supra n.6) 8f, on the problem of wreck discovery areas, and note also S. Tortorella, "Ceramica di produzione africana e rinvenimenti archeologici sottomarini della media e tarda età imperiale," *MEFRA* 93 (1981) 356-80, who emphasizes that the data are no true reflection of ancient trade.

97 See R. M. Harrison, "Churches and chapels of central Lycia," *Anatolian Studies* 13 (1963) 117-51 – a theory rather lacking in argument.

98 G. Tchalenko, *Les villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord* (Paris 1953) I, 422-56; modified by Kennedy, Sodini *et al.*, (supra nn.40, 44). Cf. also Liebeschuetz (supra n.35) 68-83.

99 A useful list of disasters in H. Haeser, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Medizin und der epidemischen Krankheiten* (Jena 1882) 3, 37ff. For this interpretation see Patlagean (supra n.19) 74-85, C. Mango (supra n.15) 66ff. On the plague see P. Allen, "The Justinianic plague," *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 5-20; on climate and erosion, (e.g.) H. Lamb in *The environment of man*, eds. M. Jones and C. Dimbleby (Oxford 1981) ch. 3, J. Bintliff in *Palaeoclimates, palaeoenvironments and human communities in the eastern Mediterranean region in later prehistory*, eds. J. Bintliff and W. van Zeist (Oxford 1982) 512-19; J. Wagstaff, "Buried assumptions," *JArchScience* 8 (1981) 247-64.

100 M. Mango (supra n. 40). Kennedy and Liebeschuetz (supra n.35) 68f, 87, suggest that plague and population decline stimulated prosperity in the Syrian countryside at the expense of the towns.

101 D. Whitehouse *et al.*, "The Schola Praeconum II," *PBSR* 40 (1985) 163-210, 185ff; P. Arthur, "Archeologia urbana a Napoli: riflessioni sugli ultimi tre anni," *ArchMed* 13 (1986) 507-25, 521f; Fulford, *Excavations at Carthage* I.2 (supra n.50) 260ff; Panella (supra n.96) 454-59.

102 Wickham (supra n.51) 189-93.

103 On Africa, see Pringle (supra n.55) 113ff; on southeast Italy, A. Small, forthcoming. Important texts are *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne) I, 344, 366, 368f; Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* 111; Theophanes *Chron.* A.M.6100. African Red Slip ware continued to appear in the eastern Mediterranean while disappearing from the west; see S. Tortorella, "La ceramica fine di mensa africana dal IV al VII secolo D. C.," *Società romana* 3 (supra n.16), 211-25, 218ff. But note Panella (supra n.96) 455, on the decline of trade with the east from c. 600. For what it is worth, as high a percentage of the wrecks of southeast Sicily apparently date to 450-650 as to 150-300 (Parker [supra n. 96] fig. 5).

104 J. W. Hayes, personal comm.

preoccupations suggest that, when the Persians, followed by the Arabs, occupied Egypt and Syria, this part in the supply system may long have proved vital.¹⁰⁵

These economic circuits of the Mediterranean were only one element in a religious and cultural *koinê* which, c. 600, still stretched from Constantinople to Córdoba, from Alexandria to Marseilles.¹⁰⁶ North and east, however, lay other cultures, other poles of energy. Syria, as noted, faced east as well as west. Essentially Pirenne argued that the back of the Mediterranean was broken by, on the one side, the weight of the ancient and wealthy civilisations of Asia, reinvigorated by Islam; on the other, by the newly emergent force of the Baltic/North Sea/Channel area. West of Italy, the Mediterranean became desolate. On the whole, Hodges and Whitehouse have followed his estimate of these two weights, but hold that the Mediterranean was already an invertebrate and decaying body by the end of Justinian's reign. Zeev Rubin has recently and vigorously depicted Justinian's *reconquista* as a final, desperate attempt to prevent the Roman world from becoming a satellite of the superior Sasanian power.¹⁰⁷ To the Sasanians, the Umayyads succeeded; and the northeastern and northwestern corners of the Mediterranean became isolated Christian backwaters. I doubt whether these stimulating theories do justice to the politics and strategies of the 7th and 8th c.

When, in the reigns of Phocas and Heraclius, the centuries-old struggle between Rome and Persia entered its last phase, it was new Rome that proved the stronger, led to victory by a rebel general from reconquered Africa. Byzantium survived the Moslem onslaught; Persia did not. Ctesiphon was deserted, and, for a century, until the foundation of Baghdad, Mesopotamia lacked a great city centrally placed. Power in the Fertile Crescent instead shifted west, to Damascus, where it faced the Mediterranean as much as central Asia or the Persian Gulf. Doubtless western commerce declined, and trade to Persia and Mesopotamia increased — it may already have been doing so in the 5th c. — while Umayyad conquests spread east as well as west. But it was against the Byzantine empire, from Carthage to the Bosphorus, that the most obsessive and expensive Arab efforts were directed. Naval warfare is very costly in men, material, and organisation,¹⁰⁸ and the fleets of Islam say much both for the continuing wealth and skilled manpower of Egypt and Syria, and for the perceived lure and threat of Byzantium. We should note both the likely rôle of Italian merchants in supplying ship-timber and metals to the infidel, and evidence for continuing trade between Arab Syria and the Byzantine empire in the 7th c.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the long and difficult conquest of North Africa, and the successful naval resistance which Byzantium offered, suggest that our current scholarship and archaeology may be underrating the resources of the Christian empire.¹¹⁰ Only when it became clear that Damascus could not take Constantinople did the Abbasids shift the Arab power-centre east into Mesopotamia.¹¹¹ And Baghdad and Samarra, for all their glory and their far-flung

¹⁰⁵ On the strategy of Constans II see J. B. Bury, "The naval policy of the Roman empire in relation to the western provinces, 7th to 9th centuries," in *Centenario della nascita di M. Amari* (Palermo 1910) II, 21-34, 24f. Pirenne 153-66 is still valuable.

¹⁰⁶ P. Brown, *Society and the holy in late antiquity* (London 1982) 171ff.

¹⁰⁷ "The Mediterranean and the dilemma of the Roman empire in late antiquity," *J. Mediterranean Studies* 1 (1986) 13-62; cf. also his remarks in *The defence of the Roman and Byzantine East*, eds. P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (Oxford 1986).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carm.* 5.441-48, Procop., *Wars* 3.6.1f, John Lydus, *De Mag.* 3. 43f, on the cost of efforts against the Vandals.

¹⁰⁹ Citarella (supra n. 76); M. Mango (supra n. 40). On Byzantine naval power in general, see H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer* (Paris 1966). On the difficulties of the Umayyads with naval supplies, see A. R. Lewis, *Naval power and trade in the Mediterranean, A. D. 500-1100* (Princeton 1951) 72-76. Frend (supra n.55) 387 notes that Tunisian seaport towns were still flourishing in the 8th-9th c. For what it is worth, the wreck percentage off S. W. Turkey seems to rise markedly in 450-650, but may fall thereafter. Wrecks off Israel suggest much continuing maritime activity from the late Roman through into the Arab period. See Parker (supra n. 96, fig. 5 — his final period, 650-1500, unfortunately, is so long as to be almost useless for comparative purposes); D. Barag, "Survey of pottery from the sea," *IEJ* 13 (1963) 13-19.

¹¹⁰ For a less pessimistic view, contrasting with, for example, C. Foss and C. Mango, see J. Russell (supra n. 48).

¹¹¹ It is interesting to note that the continuity of amphora production in Arab Mediterranean territories may have ended about this time; in Byzantine territories, it survived at least up to the 12th c.; see P. Arthur, "Amphorae

trade (on which Hodges and Whitehouse lay justifiable stress), seem to have been founded on a crumbling basis: throughout the Fertile Crescent, agriculture (or at least the state's revenue therefrom) was in ever more rapid decline.¹¹²

In 717, the Arabs besieged Constantinople for the last time. In the later 8th c., the city started a slow upward climb in wealth and population, which ultimately stimulated the provinces; the cities of Campania were entering on a new era of power and prosperity;¹¹³ while in Francia, the Carolingian renaissance of culture and political authority was well under way. The trading settlements of the northern seas, as Hodges and Whitehouse stress, were growing rapidly, to cover many hectares. This nearly simultaneous revival, east and west, north and south, in the fortunes of Christendom suggests that we should not look only to the northern connection for the foundations of Charlemagne's power. A more widespread rise in population and production seems at least a possible explanation, although both the phenomenon and its causes would still be mysterious.¹¹⁴ Certainly, the explanation of Hodges and Whitehouse — an influx of Abbasid silver to western Europe via the Baltic — gives little help. It explains neither the character of the society that could demand and use the silver, nor how the silver was paid for. Also, it is chronologically and numismatically dubious. The silver production of Khorasan was at its most extensive only between c. 870 and 1030; it is not easy to date Scandinavian *dirhem* hoards to years before 800; and the Franks, in any case, may have been coining silver from their own mines. Indeed, the flow of the metal seems, if anything, to have been from Francia to the Baltic rather than the reverse.¹¹⁵

Should we, though, still see northern to northwestern Europe as the dominant zone in this recovery? Byzantium, for all its new growth, was gradually yielding the central Mediterranean to the Franks and Arabs, and the Franks were northern-based. Aachen was Charlemagne's chosen capital, and even the early Merovingians had operated from Paris and Soissons, Rheims and Metz, rather than Toulouse and Arles. Their military and diplomatic involvement with the North Sea area and its hinterlands had been intense.¹¹⁶ Was Mediterranean revival, as Hodges and Whitehouse claim, "on a modest scale compared with the North Sea and the Baltic"? And which was the more important in the making of mediaeval Europe: Italy, or, as Pirenne thought, Carolingian Gaul?

As yet, the archaeological evidence for the two regions is hardly comparable — in itself a significant fact, which underlines the enduring character of Mediterranean towns compared with mushrooms like Dorestad and Quentovic. Italian charters, however, and the growing evidence for new urban foundations, suggest almost an explosion of prosperity in the 8th c.. As Ward-Perkins has pointed out, this is highlighted in 829 by the fortune of the merchant doge Giustiniano Partecipazio, worth at least 86,400 *solidi*.¹¹⁷ I find it hard to imagine an alderman of Hamwih commanding this wealth. Aachen can hardly be compared to Rome, Constantinople, or even Ravenna; nor yet can these mercantile shanty towns of the northern new world, however large in area, be compared to a city like Verona, with its surviving aqueducts and Roman monuments, its stone-built houses, and its proud memories of an ancient past.

The point can be illustrated in another way, by the political preoccupations of the Carolingians. In the early 8th c., they waged repeated wars for the control of Provence, Aquitania and Septimania. Only Louis

and the Byzantine world," in *Recherches sur les amphores grecques*, eds. J.-Y. Empereur and Y. Garlan (Paris 1986), 655-59, 658f.

112 See Ashtor, Adams, Sodini *et al.* (supra n. 44).

113 C. Mango, *Byzantium* (supra n.15) 80f, *Le développement* (supra n.4) 56, 61, Angold (supra n.9) 6f; Citarella (supra n. 76); C. Wickham (supra n.33) 149f.

114 Cf. G. Duby, *The early development of the European economy* (London 1974) 70ff on Frankish and Slavonic Europe; *ibid.* 5-12 on a possible link with improving climate.

115 Cf. B. Ward-Perkins, reviewing Hodges and Whitehouse, *EHR* 101 (1986) 466f; J. W. Allan, *Persian metal technology 700-1300 A. D.* (London 1979) 6f, 14; P. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings* (London 1982) 34, 123-26 and in *Society and trade in the Baltic during the Viking age* (Acta Visbyensia 7, Visby 1983) 165-70; E. James, *The Franks* (Oxford 1988) 198f; S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs Frisiens du haut moyen Age* (Lille 1983) I, 61-66.

116 See I. Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alsingsås 1983).

117 "Towns of northern Italy" (supra n.5); cf. Wickham (supra n.33) 84-92.

II took up permanent residence in Italy; but, from 755 onwards, the peninsula probably absorbed far more of their energies than did the Danes, Wends or Anglo-Saxons, though not, perhaps, the Saxons or Frisians. Not since Theodebert I had Francia been so persistently involved with the south. The civilised Lombard Paul the Deacon, disdainfully refusing a diplomatic mission to the halls of Sigfred of Denmark, seems symptomatic.¹¹⁸ Of course, this is due at least as much to the claims of the Papacy as to Italian wealth; yet those claims display the abiding and growing influence of urban and Mediterranean-based Christianity on the rustic lords of the Frankish *villae*. We should note their use of missionaries, recruited in the north but in touch with Rome, to advance their influence in Frisia and Saxony.¹¹⁹ From Ethelbert to St. Olaf the kings of the northern world danced to a southern tune.

Where do these considerations leave Pirenne? Measured in terms of urban life, and its associated politics, religion, and economics, the collapse of the Roman world seems less marked, and even slower than he supposed — in many regions a transformation without the need for resurrection. The coming of Islam seems less catastrophic, only the final stage in a process of fragmentation which forced the ancient cities to renew themselves as religious and mercantile transmitters. They now passed the stuff of civilisation, tangible and intangible, across new boundaries of politics and culture, and across the ancient limits between Romania and *barbaricum*, between town and country.¹²⁰

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Postscript

From April 17 to 24, 1989, a conference was held at the University of Sheffield with the theme "Fifth Century Gaul: a Crisis of Identity?". The papers read included:

B. Hitchner, "Meridional Gaul, trade, and the Mediterranean economy in late antiquity";

S. Loseby, "Order and chaos in the fifth-century urban landscape";

H. Sivan, "City and countryside in fifth-century Gaul: the example of Bordeaux";

R. Van Dam, "The Pirenne thesis and fifth-century Gaul".

The proceedings are due to be published by Routledge.

¹¹⁸ Cf. G. Jones, *History of the Vikings*² (Oxford 1984) 98.

¹¹⁹ See J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford 1983) ch. 9.

¹²⁰ I must thank Marlia Mango, Chris Wickham and Richard Burgess for their advice on this article; they are not, of course, responsible for its views or errors.