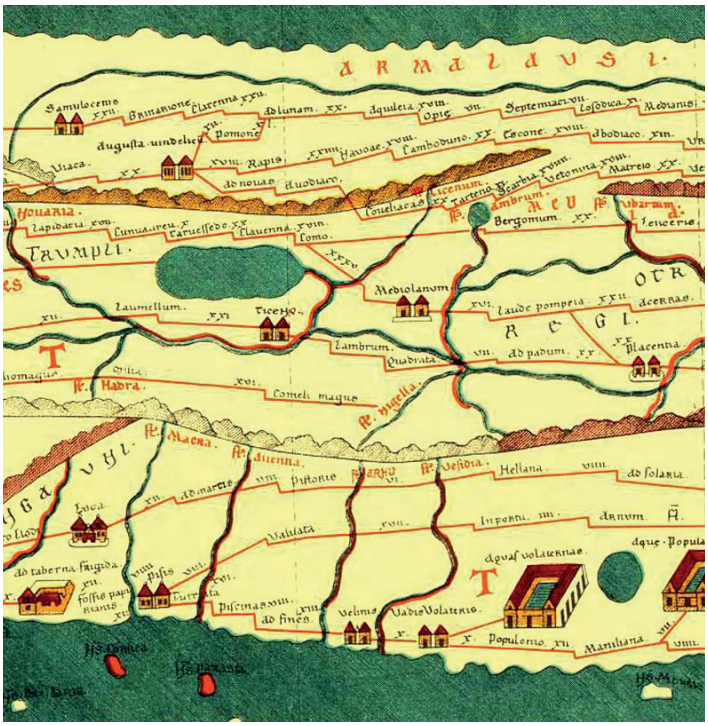
UN PONTE TRA IL MEDITERRANEO E IL NORD EUROPA: LA LOMBARDIA NEL PRIMO MILLENNIO

A CURA DI GIULIANA ALBINI E LAURA MECELLA



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Milan, Genoa and the Alps: early medieval exchanges across a region

di Ross Balzaretti

in *Un ponte tra il Mediterraneo e il Nord Europa: la Lombardia nel primo millennio*

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Milan, Genoa and the Alps: early medieval exchanges across a region

Ross Balzaretti
University of Nottingham
ross.balzaretti@nottingham.ac.uk

1. *Milan's centrality*

Milan was conceived as the centre of the world by the many local authors who wrote about their city in the medieval period. Most shameless perhaps was Bonvesin de la Riva, writing a famous description of his home city in 1288, who explained that «among all the regions of the earth, universal fame extols, distinguishes and places first Lombardy for its location, its density of towns and inhabitants, its beauty and its fertile plain. And among the cities of Lombardy, it distinguishes Milan as the rose or lily among flowers…»[1]. This was not a new sentiment. Three centuries earlier around the year 1000, a similarly effusive picture of the city was painted by the anonymous author of the *De situ civitatis Mediolani*, who stated that Milan was «the most fecund mother of Italy» no less. However in contrast to Bonvesin, he did not situate Milan within Lombardy but as a part of the province of Liguria[2]. In the 730s some three centuries back once again, the author of the *Versum de Mediolano civitate* acclaimed Milan as «the queen of cities and mother of this country»[3]. We might of course expect local writers to put Milan on a pillar in this way but did others view the city like this? Was it a place

[1] DEAN, *The Towns of Italy in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 11.

[2] ANONYMI MEDIOLANENSIS Libellus 14-21.

[3] Versum de Mediolano civitate, p. 146, l. 23; GAMBERINI, *Il* Versum de Mediolano civitate, p. 150; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 139. The title is in the sole surviving manuscript.

which attracted visitors from north and south? Did it connect the Alps and the Mediterranean? When and how? What did that mean for its society and culture?

In getting to grips with these questions here I will draw on two of my books. In my most recent monograph (*The Lands of Saint Ambrose. Monks and Society in Early Medieval Milan*), I argued that the charters preserved by the monastic community of Sant'Ambrogio show us how the very many micro-connections which the presence of the monastery encouraged across a large area led to the formation of a considerable hinterland which was a fundamental reason for Milan's sustained importance as a settlement in the early medieval period. I will therefore pick out for discussion in the central section of this chapter some of the best examples of sites where the local and the extra-local collided. Before doing that, I consider how the Carolingian conquest of the Lombard kingdom, which caused the foundation of a monastery dedicated to Ambrose just outside Milan's walls, changed Milanese society by forcing it to engage more meaningfully with the world north of the Alps[4]. The need to assimilate invaders was for sure not unique to Milan but the Milanese example does provide good evidence for those complex processes and their consequences. These two sections are framed by discussions of Milan's connections with the Mediterranean before the Carolingians arrived and during their rule, to try to assess the extent to which the Mediterranean can be regarded as 'Milan's sea' throughout this period, and by a comparison of the ports of Comacchio and Genoa[5]. For these parts of the chapter I will draw on my book *Dark Age Liguria*, a study of that region over a long time period in which one of the main arguments was that the interior of Liguria was more important to its history than has been commonly supposed. Nevertheless, the role of Genoa as a port remains crucial to the region's history, and possibly to that of Milan too, despite being very poorly evidenced at the present time.

2. *Milan and the Mediterranean before the year 800*

Various earlier medieval writers taking their cue from Roman geographical texts placed Milan firmly in Liguria, not Lombardy[6]. When Augustus first instituted the

[4] For cultural exchanges based on the written word see the chapter by Michele Baitieri in this volume and his doctoral thesis, BAITIERI, *Politics and documentary culture*, which focuses on bishops.

[5] GELICHI - BELTRAME, *I porti nel Mediterraneo tardo-antico*, emphasize the widespread use of wood in port structures and a reduction in their size compared with earlier in the Roman period; LUCIANO, *Porti e approdi fluviali in Italia peninsulare*, is useful and deals with Comacchio (69-70) as well as Rome, Naples, Classe and some riverine ports. More research is needed however, especially for Genoa.

[6] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 140-141, referencing Procopius and Paul the Deacon.

north Italian provinces *c*. 7 B.C. Liguria had been designated *Regio IX*. At that time Milan was not in Liguria, being instead the capital of *Transpadana* (*Regio XI*). That region bordered Liguria to the south, *Venetia et Istria* (*Regio X*) to the east, *Raetia* to the north and the various Alpine provinces in the west (*Alpes Cottiae* etc.). Two later modifications were made to this arrangement. Under Diocletian at the end of the third century a new province of *Aemilia et Liguria* was created which combined the two earlier regions into a larger unit. In the late fourth century under Theodosius I this single unit was divided further into two, *Aemilia* and *Liguria*, with the latter now having Milan as its capital. This was significant for several reasons. It meant in the longer term that Genoa became part of the archdiocese of Milan. It also, potentially, encouraged economic links with the Ligurian coast, meaning that those who lived in late Roman Milan could access the Mediterranean, presuming that the means to do so existed. These considerations – institutional and conceptual – are important starting points for any examination of the role that Milan might have had as a bridge between the Mediterranean and northern Europe. However, whatever that role was it cannot be said for the reasons just given that these connections aided the development of the identity of Lombardy at that time[7].

It is a fact of geography that Milan is much closer to Genoa than to Venice and is closer still to the Alps and the valleys which in the right seasons provide access to and from northern Europe. Far from any sea, visitors to the city have long felt it and this part of Lombardy in general to be more northern than southern. However, for much of the Roman period for those travelling from north of the Alps to the Mediterranean Sea (or vice versa) a route via Milan was possible, as a consideration of some maps will demonstrate. The famous Peutinger map, a highly complex text often regarded as a practical guide for Roman travellers or administrators which was perhaps produced *c*. 300 AD, includes a section covering northern Italy between Aosta and Piacenza[8]. It shows the Alps, Milan and the Mediterranean within the same image making it possible for a Roman who saw it to imagine the three areas together and to envisage how to get from one to the other. However, it has been convincingly argued that the Peutinger map was made «to convey certain general impressions about Rome's power» rather than for practical use on the ground[9], meaning we must dismiss it as a practical guide[10].

[7] Lombardy does not seem to have had a particularly strong early medieval identity even while the *Longobardi* were ruling what is sometimes known as *Longobardia maior*.

[8] It was used to advertise the conference on which this volume is based. Viewable online: https://onb.digital/search/119733 and https://onb.digital/search/119732.

[9] TALBERT, *Rome's World*, p. 108. The possibility that the map was a Carolingian production is dismissed *ibidem*, p. 135.

[10] DELANO-SMITH, *Milieus of Mobility*, p. 16.

Turning to a modern map, the *Barrington Atlas* which is based on all known written and much archaeological evidence, provides a snapshot of what was known on the ground about Roman Milan and its region twenty years ago[11]. Map 39 shows very clearly that Milan was well-connected to northern Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. For most of the Roman period the city was connected locally by a network of roads to other important towns in *Regio XI* including Como, Bergamo, Brescia, Piacenza, Pavia and Novara[12]. One of these routes, the Como road, could have been used by travellers coming from *Raetia* to Milan by road[13]. From Milan they could then have continued via *Ticinum* (Pavia), across the Po, to Casteggio, Tortona and then via *Libarna* (Serravalle Scrivia) along the *via Postumia* to Genoa and the sea[14]. This route was pretty direct. Whether this was still possible after the middle of the fifth century is not at all clear, in the absence of much sustained archaeological analysis. But it was certainly possible for Roman travellers, as surviving itineraries and maps suggest.

Milan was the largest single settlement in the area encompassed by the modern region of Lombardy throughout the medieval period[15], and as such it was certainly a place where people with political power or those who sought it wanted to be. Although recent scholarship has modified the idea of 'consumer cities' with a more multi-faceted approach to Roman urbanism[16], Milan must have been a significant centre of consumption[17]. It was at the centre of a large plain, surrounded by centuriated landscapes suitable for agriculture, and supplies might also have arrived in the city via Genoa or the Po delta. Local agrarian production will have been important to sustaining the city[18], providing fresh products[19]. Milan's political dominance over the region was massively increased when Diocletian made it capital of the Western Roman Empire in preference to Rome in 286 AD[20]. The city then served as the residence of his co-emperor Maximian from 286 to 305 and the place from where he launched

[11] PEARCE - TOZZI, *Map 39*: Mediolanum.

[12] FRANCESCHELLI - DALL'AGLIO, *Entre voies de terre et voies d'eau*.

[13] Chur, the main settlement in *Raetia*, had once been part of the archdiocese of Milan (BIELMANN, *A Christianisation of Switzerland?*, p. 155).

[14] CERA, *La via Postumia da Genova a Cremona*.

[15] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 8-9.

[16] MATTINGLY, *Beyond belief?*.

[17] The pithy summary of pre-industrial cities in CRONE, *Pre-Industrial Societies*, pp. 16-18, remains a good starting point.

[18] GREY, *Constructing communities*, pp. 15-19 for recent debates about the late Roman countryside.

[19] GOODSON, *Garden Cities in Early Medieval Italy*.

[20] *Milano capitale*; CHRISTIE, *Milan as Imperial Capital*.

campaigns against invaders in the Rhineland area. Ambrose was bishop between 374 and 397 when the city was at its height and a major centre of Christian practice, as evidenced by a series of large basilicas built at that time including the one intended for Ambrose's own burial (Sant'Ambrogio). Milan lost its role as capital in 402 when the city was under siege by the Goths and the political centre moved once again to Ravenna, where it more or less remained until the eighth century. Milan never regained its former level of political importance and it was neighbouring Pavia, which had been a relatively small Roman town, that in subsequent centuries replaced Milan as the capital of the Lombard and Carolingian kingdoms and later the Kingdom of Italy[21]. Court life was often based here but Milan, although politically eclipsed, continued to be important.

The political history of this part of the world in the early Middle Ages is often seen as one dominated by invaders, who mostly arrived from north of the Alps[22]. During the fifth and sixth centuries Goths and Lombards settled in Milan, while Franks also attacked the city at various times without settling[23]. The Ligurian coast was still part of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century, which meant that connectedness between it and the metropolitan centre at Milan after the city had been conquered by Lombard forces *c*. 570, was weakened[24]. Once Lombard power encompassed Liguria in the 640s, at least in name, then it might be the case that connections between Milan and Genoa were restored, but positive evidence is lacking[25]. I will emphasise here that the wider political context at any given moment was always important in determining what sorts of exchanges were possible.

A key example of the importance of political change is provided by Paul the Deacon's account in *Historia Langobardorum* (II 25) that Archbishop Honoratus fled to Genoa as a result of the Lombard arrival in Milan on 3 September 569[26]. Paul simply says «Archbishop Honoratus abandoned Milan and fled to the city of Genoa» («Honoratus vero archiepiscopus Mediolanum deserens, ad Genuensem urbem confugit»). He does not say that Honoratus fled with his clergy, as often stated in the literature, and there is no direct evidence for that. Nor did Paul say why Genoa was chosen but presumably that was because it represented the

[21] *Musei civici di Pavia*; MAJOCCHI, *Sviluppo e affermazione*.

[22] BULLOUGH, *Italy and Her Invaders*; ARNALDI, *L'Italia e i suoi invasori*.

[23] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 123-125.

[24] *Ibidem*, pp. 132-133; ID., *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 90-97.

[25] ID., *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 45, 134.

[26] ID., *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 68, 92; ID., *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 132-133. Paul was writing in the 780s and as usual he does not provide a source for his remark. Many scholars believe that the lost history of Secundus of Trent was his source here.

most easily reachable place still under secure Byzantine control, a place of safety[27]. We do not know which route between the two places he may have taken but it would seem that the *via Postumia* via *Libarna* was the most direct one (see above). The journey along the *via Postumia* was however a long one to make on foot or on horseback. The first part across the Po flatlands would have been arduous as much of this area is likely to have been marshy in this period[28]. The Ligurian stage would have been physically harder still once the Apennines were reached at *Libarna* (abandoned by this date), the start of the subsequent climb up the Scrivia valley[29]. It is therefore difficult to imagine the bishop returning to Milan with much frequency, even had any compromise been reached with Alboin (d. 572). After the death of Albion there was a period of political uncertainty with first Cleph and then the dukes ruling the kingdom. That ended in 584 when Authari became king (d. 590). He resided at Milan with his family, including the queen Theodelinda[30]. After his death Theodelinda married Agilulf (d. 616). Milan was in effect the court centre throughout this time but still the Milanese bishops remained in Genoa, as the correspondence of Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century – quite close in time to these events – suggests. Gregory implies that their church was split with some clergy remaining in Milan, presumably compromising with the Lombard rulers[31]. For example, when Deusdedit was elected bishop from among the Milanese clergy in the year 600 he «set out for Genoa», implying residence at Milan. This situation appears to have persisted until king Rothari conquered Genoa and the Ligurian coast in the 640s, after which the Milanese bishop is generally believed to have returned to Milan for good[32].

We know little about Lombard court culture in Milan, but it was possible for letters to pass between Pope Gregory and the royal couple and for the pope to send gifts to them, including a remarkable gold gospel cover. These are likely to have arrived in Milan by road directly from Rome rather than by sea via Genoa

[27] ID., *Dark Age Liguria*, p. 54. Byzantine presence in Genoa is still poorly documented. I am grateful to my PhD student Alessandro Carabia (University of Birmingham), who is writing his thesis on Byzantine Liguria, for discussion about this issue.

[28] PANATO, *Environment, society and economy*, deals with transportation issues over land and by water at this period.

[29] CERA, *La via Postumia da Genova a Cremona*, pp. 61-62.

[30] FILIPOVÁ, *On the origins of the Monza collection of Holy Land* ampullae, discusses the possibility that Theodelinda send emissaries to Rome and the Holy Land to acquire contact relics, demonstrating possible long-distance links.

[31] BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 90-96; ID., *Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 133-134.

[32] ID., *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 45-50. Archaeological evidence does not at the present time give much support to the idea that Rothari conquered a series of coastal settlements, as recorded by the Burgundian chronicler Fredegar (and later Paul the Deacon).

but, although there is little direct evidence of sixth-century economic exchanges between Genoa and Milan, I suppose we could say this sort of evidence means that they were possible[33]. Liguria is more poorly evidenced still in the seventh and early eighth centuries with the exception of the activities of the monastery of Saint Peter at Bobbio, founded by Columbanus in the early seventh century[34], after an encounter with the Lombard king Agilulf at his court in Milan where the monk had preached against local Arians, presumably the remnants of the clergy who stayed on when the Lombards arrived[35]. This monastery certainly developed its economic power in the Ligurian Apennines from the eighth century, in large part due to a gift made by Charlemagne in 774.

3. *Carolingian Milan and the shift northward*

The Carolingian conquest of the kingdom of Italy began in 773 and continued for two years until all resistance was quashed[36]. The first of Charlemagne's Italian gifts after his initial capture of Pavia was to Guinibaldus, abbot of Bobbio, issued at Pavia on 5 June 774[37]. The king gave woodland and an estate at *Montelungo* (perhaps Ruino, near Pavia) as well as *Alpe Adra* (probably located near the Ligurian coast around the Passo di Bracco inland from Moneglia)[38]. Although the text we have is a twelfth-century copy not an original and may well be interpolated precisely where these estates are recorded, *Alpe Adra* had definitely been acquired by the early ninth century as is demonstrated by a diploma of confirmation, surviving an original single sheet, issued on 22 August 843 by Lothar I, Charles's grandson. The abbey's agricultural interests in coastal Liguria were further developed quite soon after this and by 862 there is firm evidence of monastic produce being sold at the market in Genoa[39]. Products which could only have arrived

[33] Gregory through his correspondence also knew about what was happening in Genoa and other parts of Liguria, including Luni: *ibidem*, pp. 68-72, 92-95.

[34] *Codice Diplomatico Longobardo*, doc. 1, 24 July 613; RICHTER, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 13-17; ZIRONI, *Il monastero longobardo*, pp. 9-11; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 117, 128.

[35] RICHTER, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 17-18, 26; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 117, 128.

[36] NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 119-148, 159-160.

[37] RICHTER, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 97-100; BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, p. 115. COLLINS, *Charlemagne*, pp. 61-62 rightly questions the authenticity of the details of this document (v. NELSON, *King and Emperor*, p. 144).

[38] The identification of both places is not certain.

[39] BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, p. 99.

from elsewhere by sea, especially citrons, were being purchased there at the same time, presumably for the monks back in distant Bobbio. In Genoa, the Bobbio community had control over the church of San Pietro alla Porta (now San Pietro in Banchi) adjacent to the *Porto antico* itself[40]. To this site local produce – chestnuts, oil and wine – was being brought annually by six tenants «who work the vines». This is as striking as the exotic purchases because oil and wine is much harder to produce in Bobbio (272 m a.s.l. but the surroundings are much higher) than closer to the Mediterranean; these products also needed to be brought inland from elsewhere, in this instance somewhere relatively near to Genoa. This interest in the Ligurian coast was a pattern of economic development possible for the community at Bobbio as it was politically well-connected by this time attracting monks from north of the Alps[41]. This may mean that it is possible that other sizeable monasteries based further inland, including Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, could have developed similar Mediterranean links, for which contemporary documentation has not survived[42]. The Sant'Ambrogio monks also needed oil and wine for their liturgical celebrations and while local wine was quite readily to be found, local oil was not and had to be grown in other places (around the pre-Alpine lakes) or perhaps imported from sunnier climes in the south.

Charlemagne also favoured the most important Frankish monasteries with Italian lands and exemptions in the same period. On 16 July 774 while still at Pavia Charlemagne granted lands in the Eastern Alps and a hospice in Pavia to the monastery of Saint Martin at Tours[43]. Saint Martin himself also had connections with Milan; as Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus the biographer of Ambrose and Gregory of Tours all noted he had founded a monastic community there[44]. On 14 March 775 in Quierzy, the king issued two charters to Fulrad, abbot of Saint Denis one of which granted immunity on monastic lands in 'Longobardia' and the Valtellina[45], and the other gave «exemption from tolls for the monastery's

[40] MCCORMICK, *Origins of the Early European Economy*, pp. 633-636; RICHTER, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 137-139; BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 99-100, 115-119.

[41] ZIRONI, *Il monastero longobardo*, pp. 90-112.

[42] PAVONI, *Liguria medievale*, pp. 104-105, 144-145, has argued that the metropolitan see of Milan owned coastal properties in eastern Liguria. Although this opinion has some merit the evidence he relies upon is entirely post-950 AD.

[43] PIPPINI, CARLOMANNI, CAROLI MAGNI Diplomata, n. 81; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 185; NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 144-146 is essential for the wider context.

[44] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 114, 125.

[45] PIPPINI, CARLOMANNI, CAROLI MAGNI Diplomata, n. 94, translated into English by LOYN - PERCIVAL, *Reign of Charlemagne*, pp. 144-145; BALZARETTI, *Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 395; NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 157-159. Fulrad had extensive lands in the borderlands of Alsace-Alemannia (INNES, *State and Society*, pp. 28-29).

agents trading *in Francia et Italia*»[46], clear evidence of economic as well as political exchanges between north and south being facilitated as a direct result of the Frankish conquest of the Lombard kingdom[47].

Charlemagne returned to this part of Italy with queen Hildegard and their children just after Easter in 781. This time the family stopped at Milan itself while returning north from an important visit to Rome where Pope Hadrian had baptised Carloman and so created lifelong spiritual bonds with the royal couple. On their way to Rome they had spent Christmas at Pavia but now on their way back across the Alps they took a detour north from the usual route via Vercelli, Ivrea and Aosta (the *via Francigena*), to visit Milan. There, their newly born daughter Gisela was baptised by Archbishop Thomas most probably in the great font at Santa Tecla, where Ambrose had baptised Augustine[48]. The spiritual relationship this set up between king, queen, their child and the bishop may have been personal but clearly the presence in the city of such a powerful ruler had long term consequences[49], as we shall see. It is indeed possible that Charlemagne was in a sense a pilgrim on this occasion, given his interests in the work of Augustine of Hippo[50], who had lived in the city for a while and his likely interest in the work of Ambrose of Milan, who is of course buried there and whose shrine he surely sought out[51].

It seems very likely that Charles and Thomas discussed the foundation of a new monastic community next to the old basilica of Sant'Ambrogio. That monastery was eventually founded around 789 by Thomas's successor Peter, a Frank, with the king's support, as spelled out in a diploma issued in April 790[52]. Peter was a friend of the king's closest advisor Alcuin[53], who had himself been to Italy,

[46] PIPPINI, CARLOMANNI, CAROLI MAGNI Diplomata, n. 93, translated into English by LOYN - PERCIVAL, *Reign of Charlemagne*, p. 143. This charter is very precise on the extent of the trading being done on behalf of Saint Denis.

[47] NELSON, *King and Emperor*, p. 525 note 24.

[48] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 178-180; NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 181-186.

[49] These included a significant bequest in the emperor's will to the see of Milan (EINHARDI Vita Karoli Magni 33), one of the 21 metropolitans in Charlemagne's kingdom.

[50] «He was fond of the books of Saint Augustine, particularly the one called the *City of God*» (EINHARDI Vita Karoli Magni 24); NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 203, 484.

[51] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 178-179, speculates that an account of the city churches which pilgrims should visit in Milan – the so-called *Itinerarium Salisburgense* associated with Archbishop Arn of Salzburg – could conceivably have been made for this royal visit instead.

[52] ID., *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 180-184.

[53] BULLOUGH, *Alcuin*, pp. 450-451; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 183. Alcuin commented that «Mediolana olim civitas imperialis sancto Ambrosio gaudet defensore» (*ibidem*, p. 96 note 45).

including Pavia, as had a significant number of English visitors if the famous testimony of Saint Boniface is to be believed[54]. These people travelled on the celebrated *via Francigena*, one of the main pilgrim routes in Europe, which in this region proceeded from Vercelli via Mortara and Pavia to Piacenza and then continued south[55]. It did not pass through Milan and this may be why relatively few English visitors to Milan were recorded at this time[56]. Yet we have just seen that Charlemagne took a detour from that route to visit the city in 781 and later when the grave of Ambrose and the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius was remodelled by Archbishop Angilbert II in the 830s, it was designed with pilgrims in mind[57]. That shrine was covered by an altar with a truly remarkable cover (*paliotto d'oro*), the magnificence of which seems to evidence very high-level, even royal, patronage[58]. Therefore, the least that can be said is that Milan and the surrounding area was definitely known north of the Alps, in part because of its saints, both martyrs and confessors.

Charlemagne was also involved in another much more famous exchange between south and north later in his reign: the journey of 'Charlemagne's elephant' Abul Abaz from Baghdad to Aachen. This is recorded in the *Royal Frankish Annals* for 801-802 and was reprised by Einhard (Vita Karoli Magni 16) and much elaborated later still by Notker (Gesta Karoli Magni II 8-9)[59]. The emperor was staying at Pavia when he was told that two envoys, one Persian the other Saracen, of the 'king of the Persians' (Harun al-Raschid, Abbasid Caliph) and the African Emir Abraham/Aaron (ruler in Egypt at Fustat) had arrived at Pisa, presumably by ship[60]. These men were subsequently presented to Charlemagne between Vercelli and Ivrea (on the *via Francigena*), where the latter was once again heading on his way back to Francia. It turns out that Charles had sent envoys and gifts to the Persian king in 799. One of those envoys 'the Jew Isaac' had returned with valuable gifts. Charles sent his long-serving chancellor Ercanbald «into Liguria to

[54] Boniface visited Liutprand, the Lombard king at Pavia in 739 on his way back from his third visit to Rome.

[55] STOPANI, *Vie Romee*; ANDENNA, *Navigare da Bellinzona a Milano*.

[56] MATTHEWS, *The Road to Rome*, does not have an entry for Milan in the index. When Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury, travelled to Rome in 990 his recorded route was the *Francigena*: ORTENBERG, *Archbishop Sigeric's Journey*.

[57] LÖX, *L'*architectus sapiens *Ambrogio*, pp. 68-69, 80, who suggests that this may have already been the case in the sixth century.

[58] See *L'altare d'oro*.

[59] Annales regni Francorum, pp. 112-117, trans. KING, *Charlemagne*, pp. 94-95; EINHARDI Vita Karoli Magni, trans. GANZ, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, p. 29; NOTKER, Gesta Karoli Magni, trans. GANZ, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, pp. 92-97.

[60] HOURANI, *History of the Arab Peoples*, Map 3 at pp. 464-465.

prepare a fleet to transport the elephant and the other things which he [Isaac] had brought with him» («in Liguriam ad classem parandem, qua elefans et ea, quae cum eo deferebantur, subverentur»). The new emperor continued to Ivrea from where, having celebrated the feast of John the Baptist, he returned to Francia. Isaac returned from Africa in October with the elephant and «entered Portovenere; and because he could not cross the Alps on account of the snow he wintered at Vercelli»[61]. Presumably 'the fleet' organised by Ercanbald took the elephant by sea from Portovenere to Genoa and then they went by the *Postumia* to Tortona, and then to Vercelli. This transaction, which was in most respects a political one, also evidences the continuation of elite exchanges of luxuries across the Mediterranean and beyond[62]. This is certainly an example of an extended connection from the eastern world via the coast of eastern Liguria to the cold north. Although this specific transaction did not directly involve Milan, that it was possible to travel from Pisa to Portovenere and on to Vercelli suggests that similar exchanges involving Milan might well have been possible, as it could have been no more difficult to continue on the *Postumia* from Tortona across the plain to Milan as on the *Francigena* to Vercelli, and thus to the north of Europe (in this instance Aachen) via the alternative Rhaetian route.

The years which followed the death of Charlemagne in 814 saw a steady influx of foreigners to Milan, many of these because of the civil wars which were taking place in the Frankish heartlands. A succession of Carolingian kings developed links with this monastic community and the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio where Ambrose's body lay[63]. Diplomas granting land and immunity were issued by Lothar I in 835, Louis II in 873 and Charles the Fat in 880. Louis II was buried there in 875, although as the result of a daring move by Archbishop Anspert. Some their elite followers settled locally, particularly in the period of civil war in the reign of Louis the Pious[64]. These incoming aristocrats also patronised the monastery[65], endowing it in some instances with estates back home, north of the Alps. A good example is that of Weltruda who in 823 gave ten *mansi* in Italy and Alemannia to her husband Ernost, one of Charlemagne's vassals and perhaps di-

[61] Annales regni Francorum, p. 116, trans. KING, *Charlemagne*, p. 94; BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, p. 98; NELSON, *King and Emperor*, pp. 337, 389; HACK, *Abul Abaz*, pp. 22-32. The elephant lived on until 810.

[62] HAOUR, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics*, pp. 89-103 is very instructive on trade networks between the Sahel, the Mediterranean and Northwestern Europe.

[63] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 186-230.

[64] *Ibidem*, pp. 195-200.

[65] CASTAGNETTI, *La società milanese*, pp. 23-100; ID., *Transalpini e vassalli*.

rectly involved in the conquest of Lombard Italy[66]. We can conclude that there is plenty of evidence for visitors from the north and that much of their activity in Milan – at least as recorded in charters – was centred on endowing the main churches and their officials, including bishops and abbots.

Detailed prosopographical studies using ninth-century charter records and contemporary diplomata and annals, have revealed the origin of many of these invaders to be Alemannia and Rhaetia (much of modern Switzerland and parts of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria)[67]. This is hardly surprising given that several alpine valleys north of Milan were connected to the Po plain, including the Valtellina[68]. Some of these people turn up in Milanese charter documentation, especially during periods of political strife north of the Alps, especially the arrival of Lothar, son of Louis the Pious, with this followers in this part of Italy[69]. Some seem to have settled locally while others did not stay very long and some must have soon returned north. Alongside these, we can presume that pilgrims on their way to Rome and other holy destinations (including Milan itself) and merchants trading goods may have helped to connect Milan with the Frankish world. Connections onward to the Mediterranean are rather harder to document as we shall see.

Hitherto, this chapter has mostly been a tale of possibilities underpinned by patchy evidence where that has survived. The next section deals entirely with Milan and its hinterland, where there is much more reliable evidence, thanks to the survival of hundreds of charters preserved by the monks of Sant'Ambrogio.

4. *The monastery of Sant'Ambrogio and the development of Milan's hinterland*

Milan's status as a political capital was long over by the eighth century. Yet, a residual sense of what that meant by then can be seen in the *Versum de Mediolano civitate*, a praise poem conventionally dated to *c*. 739 AD[70]. The anonymous author extolled the virtues of the city, including its impressive buildings, chiefly the church of San Lorenzo, a relic of imperial times, and its cornucopia of saints who defended the inhabitants[71]. Most of the poem's 72 lines praise the city's figu-

[66] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 354-355.

[67] HLAWITSCHKA, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern und Burgunder*; DEPREUX, *Prosopographie*.

[68] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 393-419.

[69] SCREEN, *Lothar I in Italy*.

[70] Versum de Mediolano civitate, pp. 89-91 (transcription), pp. 145-147 (text), pp. 149-150 (Italian translation).

[71] Fifteen in total, including Ambrose.

rative centrality, both for the Lombard king Liutprand, its many dead saints, pilgrims (*peregrini*, l. 48), and «the bishops of Italy who travelled to Milan to be instructed in the correct ways of the church» («venientes presules Ausoniae iuxta normam instrountur senotali canone», v. 9)[72]. If matters ecclesiastical were the real interest of the author, the poet also remarked on Milan's fecundity, something less often commented on by scholars[73]. It was the «queen of cities and mother of this land» («haec est urbium regina, mater adque patrie», v. 8) and (v. 17) was «filled with grain of different varieties» («generumque diversorum referta seminibus») and «abundant wines» («vini copia»)[74]. In doing so the poet noticed that his city had an economic alongside a spiritual function: Milan was intimately connected to the land, perhaps for him as a direct result of intercession by its many holy men[75].

The power of attraction which this poem's author attributed to the city was also possessed by the Benedictine monastery at Sant'Ambrogio which represented the aspiration of the most famous of Carolingian rulers to make his mark on the city of Ambrose and Augustine. It certainly developed into a significant institution with extensive land holdings around Milan, to the south towards Pavia, the east towards Bergamo and especially north to the lakes and beyond[76]. While it did not have as widespread and substantial a landed patrimony as the royal nunnery of Santa Giulia at Brescia, the Bobbio monastery or the major monasteries north of the Alps, and while there is less evidence of fraternal relationships between its monks and those north of the Alps (as documented in the confraternity books for Brescia and elsewhere)[77], it was the essential institution in developing the power of the city over the surrounding countryside in the course of the ninth century, and that once again made Milan the central place in this region for those from outside it.

[72] Versum de Mediolano civitate, p. 146, ll. 26-27.

[73] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 139-140.

[74] Versum de Mediolano civitate, p. 146, l. 23; p. 147, ll. 50-51.

[75] Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, Ms. XC (85), ff. 25-27 discussed Versum de Mediolano civitate, p. 3. The text of this well-known poem is not in fact preserved at Milan as might have been expected but instead at Verona, in a Carolingian period manuscript (perhaps written just after 871) which also preserves the *Versus* of Verona. Pighi like most scholars suggested that the author was a Milanese cleric and the manuscript has usually been attributed to Monza but MEERSSEMAN, *Il codice XC*, attributed it to Verona. Monza seems more likely given the Ambrosian liturgical contents. The contents of this manuscript are listed at https://www.mirabileweb.it/manuscript/verona-biblioteca-capitolare-xc-(85)-manuscript/980.

[76] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 514 (Map 13).

[77] *Ibidem*, pp. 198, 203, 433.

From the early ninth century references to renders in leases do indeed show that the monastery's many properties were «filled with grain of different varieties» and «abundant wines». Grains included rye, barley and millet, and wine was a normal requirement in such arrangements[78]. The most extensive list of grains however is found in a lease (*libellus*) made by Sant'Ambrogio in May 897 with a man living in Bozzolo between Parma and Mantua, 100 km away[79]. He had to return annually renders of rye, common soft wheat (*seligine*)[80], barley (*ordeo*), millet (*milio*) and flax (*linum*) to the monastery's *dispentium* (storage site) at Cavenago near Milan[81]. His farm also had a wine press (*torclum*) specifically owned by the monastery. The document recording this transaction was witnessed by two Milanese merchants Lantzarus and Marinus, who may have been involved in some way with the transport (and perhaps the sale) of the produce[82]. It is likely that this distant property was acquired by Sant'Ambrogio via an earlier transaction with a local institution or person, most probably the monastery of San Silvestro in Nonantola, which dominated that area[83]. The interaction of individual and institution/s in this example is typical of numerous micro-relations delineated in the hundreds of Sant'Ambrogio charters and the text is good evidence of Rosa Congost's view that the social relationships that cohere around property and its transfer are more important than the strictly legal aspects of transactions[84]. The document shows us that connections at the level of elites, in this case two monastic communities, often determined precisely where institutions acquired land. It is reasonable to presume that institutions from north of the Alps with properties in this region (Saint Martin of Tours, Saint Denis, and

[78] *Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 42 (March 809), *segale* and *panigo* as annual renders in Saronno; *ibidem*, doc. 61a (before June 835), *segale* at Limonta; Codex Diplomaticus Langobardiae, doc. 182 (853), *vicia et lino* from property near Lodi; *Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 90 (853) *segale* and *legumina* near Monza; Codex Diplomaticus Langobardiae, doc. 186 (854) *segale* and *panicum* near Como; *Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 104 (861) *segale* and *panicum* near Cologno. For wine, BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 507-511.

[79] MONTANARI, *L'alimentazione contadina*, pp. 146, 483 (for the identification as Bozzolo).

[80] BOUGARD, *Adalhard de Corbie entre Nonantola et Brescia*, p. 58 note 28.

[81] *Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 162 (May 897) discussed by BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 481-482, 513. The *dispentium* was *in ripa fluvio Adua*.

[82] For local markets, *ibidem*, pp. 520-522 and RAPONE, *Il mercato nel regno d'Italia*. *Negotiatores* feature regularly as witnesses in the Milanese charters.

[83] ANDREOLLI, *Terre monastiche*. I have not found any reference to the Milanese monastery within the surviving charters from Nonantola or in work about that monastery in this period *exempli gratia* MANARINI, *Politiche regie e conflitti nell'Emilia orientale* or BOUGARD, *Adalhard de Corbie entre Nonantola et Brescia*.

[84] CONGOST, *Property Rights and Historical Analysis*, p. 106.

also Reichenau) also engaged in such micro-exchanges, although most probably profiting from money rents rather than agricultural produce given the huge distances involved. Churches and lay landlords (whose actions although significantly less well documented are observable in around 20% of texts) collected such renders into central places (*curtes* or *dispentia*) to be consumed locally or to be sold further afield at markets[85].

A good example of such an estate is Cavenago, situated north east of Milan on the road to Bergamo and not far from the River Adda, the major artery marking the boundary between the dioceses of Milan and Bergamo[86]. It was to here that the produce from distant Bozzolo was brought. On 3 December 873 Archbishop Anspert went to the estate at Cavenago to take formal possession of it by *vestitura*. He had earlier bought it from three local lay people[87]. On 26 February 876 Charles the Bald granted 40 hectares at Cavenago and nearby Ornago to Anspert, which implies that some of the estate had been part of the royal fisc. A few days before Anspert had presided over the election of Charles as King of Italy in a great assembly at Pavia, which Count Alberic of Milan also attended[88]. In April, Anspert took formal possession of these lands too. The political situation was extremely tense as a result of the death of Louis II in August 875, who had been buried in the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio. In a will made on 11 November 879 Anspert bequeathed both properties at Cavenago to the monks at Sant'Ambrogio for a *xenodochium* and they retained it for many centuries[89]. The intervention of the ruler from north of the Alps to facilitate the passage of land at Cavenago from an individual to an institution is typical of many such interventions during the Carolingian period. These evidently helped to bind north and south of the Alps into a functioning political system, based on royal and episcopal patronage. This is yet more evident when we remember that Cavenago was on the banks of the River Adda, a large river which has its source in the Rhaetian Alps and is navigable through the Valtellina all the way to the area around Cavenago. Cavenago was therefore one of those places that potentially connected Milan economically to that part of the Alps.

[85] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 508-519.

[86] There is a possibility that the Cavenago referred to was not Cavenago di Brianza but Cavenago d'Adda, south of Lodi. However, the connection of Cavenago and Ornago in a later document, confirms that it was the Brianza village.

[87] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 208, 212-214.

[88] NELSON, *Charles the Bald*, p. 242.

[89] *Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 138; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 208 with references.

It was no coincidence that further upstream on the Adda there was another of Sant'Ambrogio's estates, Capiate. This is at the southern end of Lake Como, and also on a land route to the north via the Valtellina[90]. Its history can be traced back further than Cavenago, as it appears that the Lombard magnate Rotpert may have owned property here in 742[91]. Later, an estate (*curtis*) here was donated to Sant'Ambrogio at the request of Archbishop Angilbert II by Lothar I in May 835. Two *casales* with their *mancipia* were confirmed by Charles the Fat on 21 March 880 and reconfirmed on 30 March pointing out that the place was 'in the county of Milan'. Excavations have uncovered part of a late Roman watchtower and it is possible that some of the church of San Nazarius dates from the ninth century[92]. It is likely that Capiate was a specialised site for the collection of produce, and it might have been so over a long period, unsurprising given its strategic position near where the Adda leaves the Lecco branch of Lake Como.

The histories of Bozzolo, Cavenago and Capiate, micro as they are, demonstrate that single sites must be studied in detail and set in the wider macro context, in this case of interaction north and south of the Alps. The patronage of successive Carolingian kings and their followers proceeded in parallel with the active management of property by the abbots and their agents with a view to maximising production, including for sale. The resulting eco-system led to the formation of a sizeable hinterland around Milan in the early medieval period. During the ninth century this world looked north more than it looked south, as is shown by other charter collections as well, notably Santa Giulia di Brescia. The loss of the Milanese archiepiscopal archive (and those of many other local churches) does however mean that this may not be the whole picture, and it is certainly possible that the Milanese bishops had several centuries earlier held land outside of this region down south, definitely in Sicily and perhaps near Genoa too.

By the middle of the ninth century the monks of Sant'Ambrogio were led by a number of go-ahead abbots, notably Peter II who «doubled the fields» («conduplicavit agros») as his epitaph put it in 899[93]. He developed the monastic property portfolio (to employ a modern concept) via intricate networks of alliance with 'friends' and the support of such allies at royal courts and in local courts when monastic activities were contested. Processes of property acquisition were in essence social in nature because it was necessary to convince particular

[90] CARMINATI - MARIANI, *The Court and Land of Capiate*.
[91] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 517-518.
[92] CARMINATI - MARIANI, *The Court and Land of Capiate*, pp. 117-118.
[93] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 77-78.

families or even individuals to accept monastic 'ownership' of village property which had been part of family patrimonies, perhaps for centuries past in some instances. The villages of Campione, Cologno, Gnignano, Limonta, Inzago and Dubino were comparatively well-documented because they were valuable productive sites[94]. They may have been atypical sites although documents from other places indicate monastic activity in many other villages for which only one or two charters survive or where the only evidence of monastic presence is in the boundary clause of charters made for others. The Bozzolo charter discussed earlier is one example. Others include Saronno, Isola, Concorezzo, Novate Milanese, and sites in the Lodigiano[95].

A single surviving charter once again documents yet another exchange which is thought-provoking in the absence of further evidence. This one records a connection between Simplicianus, a Milanese merchant, and abbot Theodoricus of Nonantola, an important monastic community around 170 km south east of Milan in the eastern Po plain, considerably further away than Sant'Ambrogio's Bozzolo farm but in the same region. In October 885 Simplicianus and the abbot agreed that the former would each year in March bring produce and a small money rent to the abbey's Milanese estate from their properties which he rented about 12 km north of the centre of Milan[96]. Simplicianus and his sons leased quite a large mixed farm of around 8.5 hectares, interestingly farmed by the widow Augustina, and this would revert to Nonantola when Simplicianus and his sons had died. They also had another smaller mixed farm which had been acquired from the monastery in an earlier exchange, which they could keep after the present contract ended and presumably pass on to their heirs. Nothing else is known of Simplicianus.

It is likely that Simplicianus, with his Milanese saint's name, in fact lived as a merchant (*negotiator*) in Milan and made his living there. He appears to have been a middle-man who did not work the land himself – the tenant at Bozzolo certainly did for the charter says *ad manus nostras laborare* – but rather seems in some way to have managed the farm for the abbey which is perhaps not what usually comes to mind when we see the word *negotiator* in a charter. The scribe recorded some landscape detail for the area where these farms once were: wood-

[94] *Ibidem*, pp. 299-473.

[95] *Ibidem*, pp. 487-502.

[96] Codex Diplomaticus Langobardiae, doc. 333; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 255. Simplicianus may have witnessed a sale between two laymen in 876 (*Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 133).

land made up less than half the total and there is reference to plough land (*terra arabilis*), as is the case with estates of Sant'Ambrogio in this very area. This probably implies the production of wheat, perhaps in a specialized way as there was a collection of such grain-producing estates north and south of the city[97]. The arrangement is presented by the charter as the initiative of Simplicianus, whose motivations are described as spiritual, *pro anima* for his soul and those of his sons. From Nonantola's point of view the object was to support the monks, *in sumptum fratrum monasterio*. This arrangement concerning property so far from Nonantola makes clear the social and economic pull of Milan for the Nonantola monks perhaps as much as the spiritual attraction of their community for our Milanese merchant family. In this sense Nonantola could be deemed part of the macro-system which supported Milan, its hinterland, as the result of what I have termed micro-exchanges, such as this.

The connection of a single merchant with Nonantola shows how unique face-to-face exchanges helped to form a hinterland around Milan and that this hinterland extended a long way beyond the city, its county and diocese, by the late ninth century, right down the Po valley. The charter recording this relationship was drafted at Nonantola and hints in other Milanese charters suggest that by 885 Nonantola already had interests in Milan[98]. Nonantola's Milanese estate was somewhere in the city centre, most probably near San Satiro and adjacent to Sant'Ambrogio's property there which had formerly belonged to Archbishop Anspert, and goods were brought there perhaps for transport to the monastery or more probably for sale at the Milanese market (*mercatum*), significantly the only formal market documented south of the lakes within Milan's hinterland. Had this charter not survived, we would know none of this.

Micro-analysis of charters tends to privilege the sociability of property dealing over strictly 'economic' issues in the more modern sense of that word. The picture of careful monastic exploitation presented by the documents should not ex-

[97] BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 503-504.

[98] Bishop Garibald of Bergamo specified in his will of 870 (*Il Museo Diplomatico*, doc. 120; BALZARETTI, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 455-456) that if either the archbishop of Milan or the abbot of Sant'Ambrogio put any pressure on his nephew Gundelasius whom he had just appointed custodian of his new *xenodochium* in Inzago – on the border between Milan and the Bergamo diocese – control of that institution would as a result pass to Nonantola rather than a Milanese institution. It is possible also that Archbishop Anspert of Milan had obtained some houses in the city near to his own foundation of San Satiro from Nonantola before September 879, although the document concerned is problematic. Bishops were clearly important as mediators in exchanges, but their activities are relatively poorly documented before the eleventh century here.

clude interesting questions about the level of 'rationality' demonstrated by abbots in the course of building up monastic holdings – why one land parcel was preferred over another for example – and whether the 'economic' was conceivable at all as an autonomous sphere at this time[99]. It does seem likely that a true land market where transactions took place between parties entirely unknown to each other for no reason other than profit did not exist in Milan until a significantly later period, as is shown by the recent PhD thesis of James Norrie[100]. This means that actual face-to-face connections were essential to successful transactions and that middle men such as Simplicianus had pivotal roles in linking producers and consumers, as Violante argued nearly 70 years ago.

5. *Comacchio and Genoa*

In this final section a brief comparison between Comacchio and Genoa will be made to raise the possibility that the port at Genoa may have operated in similar ways to that at Comacchio. Excavations at Comacchio in the Po delta have the potential to transform our understanding of exchange across both the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas, largely due to the discovery of port structures and warehouses, mostly made of wood at Villaggio San Francesco. Publication began in the mid-2000s and the process of synthesis is ongoing, much of it carried out by Sauro Gelichi and his team[101]. Products from the south of Italy and further afield in the eastern Mediterranean arrived here, probably by trade as evidenced by ceramics[102]. Importantly, a locally-produced type of flat-bottomed unglazed ware apparently made specifically for river transportation is generally found in eighth and ninth-century deposits with globular *amphorae*. Very recently, with reference to plant ash glass, it has been argued that «Comacchio was not only a place for receiving and redistributing long-distance goods such as oil, wine, and spices but it might have become a crucial nodal point to import fresh glass directly from the primary production sites in the Levant»[103]. Its relationship with Venice is cur-

[99] GANZ, *The ideology of sharing*; TONEATTO, *Élites et rationalité économique*; NEWHAUSER, *The early history of greed*, pp. 116-121.

[100] NORRIE, *Land and cult*.

[101] GELICHI, *Comacchio: A Liminal Community*, with a summary by BERTINI - HENDERSON - CHENERY, *Seventh to eleventh century CE glass*, pp. 2-3.

[102] NEGRELLI, *Towards a definition of early medieval pottery*.

[103] BERTINI - HENDERSON - CHENERY, *Seventh to eleventh century CE glass*, p. 18.

rently being investigated, including the role of the Carolingians in this region[104]. Relatively little has been written so far about the extent to which these excavations evidence exchange across the length of the Po valley and whether Comacchio and Milan therefore might be seen as part of the same economic system[105], as Nonantola and Sant'Ambrogio were. This issue is at the heart of an old argument of course, made by Violante in 1953 in the opening chapter of *La società milanese*, where he dealt with long-distance trade along the Po as far inland as Milan[106]. In the absence of much archaeology, he focused on the so-called Comacchio pact which records Liutprand, the most powerful Lombard king, validating the 'commercial' activities of the men of Byzantine Comacchio early in his reign[107]. This document was made to serve Violante's greater vision that this trading network was exploited by Milanese merchants and local elites who moved from the countryside into the city, thus developing an urban, if pre-communal, society[108]. This was, in fact, stretching a point as the Comacchio pact dates to the early 700s and the charters he most frequently cited in his discussion to at least a century and a half later. The pact, as Chris Wickham has since suggested, also evidences a 'weak' economic system given what was being traded (salt, fish sauce)[109].

In the light of recent archaeology, we can refine older views of «how long-distance trade caused urban growth» (to put it very crudely) by looking in more depth at local production as done earlier in this chapter. It seems more likely that it was the «accumulation of very local phenomena» (Horden and Purcell), as represented for Milan in the Sant'Ambrogio charters, which encouraged urban

[104] *Venice and its Neighbors from the 8th to 11th Century.* For more on 'lagoon history', GELICHI, *Costruire territori/costruire identità.*

[105] An exception is ID., *Local and Interregional Exchanges*; LUCIANO, *Porti e approdi fluviali*, discusses the Roman Po 'system' (pp. 34-35) and its early medieval successor (pp. 73-74), with more general remarks about early medieval Italian ports (pp. 84-86, 95-97). VACCARO, *Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries AD*, using recent archaeological evidence, argues for the economic vibrancy of Byzantine Sicily which, if true, could have important ramifications for our understanding of Byzantine Genoa if trading links with Sicily were still being maintained. The distribution map of Sicilian coinage (p. 48) is instructive: finds at Sant'Antonino di Perti and Luni for example.

[106] VIOLANTE, *La società milanese*, pp. 3-49.

[107] BALZARETTI, *Cities, Emporia and Monasteries* (English translation of the *pactum* at pp. 219-220); MONTANARI, *Alimentazione e cultura*, pp. 147-163. Sewn boats found in this area and possibly dating to the seventh century are discussed by BELTRAME, *A New View*, pp. 412-417 at 414.

[108] HODGES, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 8-11 on this type of individual as 'agents of economic change'.

[109] WICKHAM, *Framing*, p. 733.

life[110]. For example, trade (or at least exchange) in soapstone (*pietra ollare*) around the Po valley as documented archaeologically may help us understand how the dispersed hinterland of Milan *could* have connected with the bigger economic system represented by the Po plain and whether such connections might allow the whole Po plain to be deemed in effect as the hinterland of Milan, by far its largest settlement. We can then set alongside this micro-historical approach to village productivity Michael McCormick's reassessment of trade and exchange within the Mediterranean in terms of communication, including a thought-provoking interpretation of the excavations at Comacchio in which he has suggested that the Po valley did indeed constitute a complex trading system subject to significant seasonal variation which caused *specialised* labour and production to develop across the region as a whole[111]. The point about seasonality is important in any understanding of how societies with limited technological ability to respond to the vagaries of weather, including these ones where the management of water resources for transport was complex and continuous and where roads would usually have been impassable in winter at higher altitudes, making travel from north to south difficult for much of the year. Does this mean that trading as well as agriculture is properly seen as a seasonal activity?

What shows up in archaeological contexts is also vital for how we understand early medieval economies because it is likely that for many sites the residues of agricultural specialisation are hard to find. This is how the charter evidence can help, for example through analysis of cereal, oil, wine and chestnut production[112]. As we saw above, the monastery of Bobbio traded these very products in the market in Genoa as well as bought luxuries (citrus, fish sauce) which had been already been traded across the Mediterranean. It is perhaps too early to say in the absence of archaeological contexts for such trade inland whether a meaningful connection between rural hinterlands (the Milanese) and long-distance trade through coastal ports (Comacchio) can be demonstrated for this region or not[113]. The full range of different and often opposed approaches will all need consideration in addressing such a question[114]. Other connections with the east of the pen-

[110] GELICHI, *Comacchio: A Liminal Community*.

[111] MCCORMICK, *Comparing and connecting*; DEVROEY, *Huile et vin.*

[112] As pioneered by Vito Fumagalli and the Bologna school in the 1970s, *exempli gratia* MONTANARI, *L'alimentazione contadina*.

[113] HORDEN - PURCELL, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 117.

[114] For example, HAOUR, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics*, pp. 89-92; HODGES, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 11-17; MORELAND, *Concepts of the Early Medieval Economy*, pp. 78-91; CURTA, *Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving*; MCCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 1-24;

insula, for example with Ravenna, could also do with greater attention[115], as could the substitution of Ravenna by Venice as the dominant Adriatic force in the eighth and ninth centuries[116].

I would suggest that if the evidence for the connection of Comacchio and Milan is still ambiguous at this point in time, it is even more so for connections with the Mediterranean. This is not because of the innate improbability of those connections but because of inadequate evidence. We cannot, for instance, understand in sufficient detail how a regional economy linking Milan and Genoa might have worked in the time of Archbishop Honoratus for lack of charters like those which have survived for late sixth-century Ravenna, but it is likely that it did work to some degree otherwise Honoratus might have been better off fleeing elsewhere. Nevertheless, because Milan is much nearer to Genoa than to Comacchio we have already seen that connections to the Ligurian coast from the north did exist in the early Middle Ages. The history of Genoa is, however, woefully documented by comparison with Milan[117]. Its port was important, although the lack of published archaeological work on *Porto antico* in Genoa means that it is difficult to know to what extent trade with the rest of the Mediterranean was happening at a given point in time[118]. It does seem to have been operational in the Carolingian period for in 806 the *Royal Frankish Annals* reported that Hadumar, count of Genoa, was killed while assisting in an attack on Corsica by king Pippin's fleet in an attempt to expel Arab attackers[119]. This event clearly shows that the power of the Carolingian state could reach the Ligurian coast as well as Milan. Later, the monks of Bobbio had interests here too as has been seen. Horden and Purcell's concept of 'dispersed hinterland' allowed them to envisage urban histories as part of their ecological approach to the Mediterranean past[120]. It is their arguments about the connectedness of ecological systems that will help the histories of early medieval cities to be rethought[121], giving us license to break away from the traditional view

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WICKHAM, *Framing*, pp. 535-550; ID., *Rethinking the Structure*, pp. 27-28; and the important article by CANTINI, *Produzioni ceramiche ed economie*.

[115] For example, COSENTINO, *Social instability and economic decline*, p. 141 (property of the Gothic aristocrat Gudila) and HERRIN, *Ravenna*, p. 196 (a Milanese official witnessing a Ravenna charter *c*. 600) which highlight what the existence of charter texts for Milan in that period might mean for my argument.

[116] *Ibidem*, p. 385.

[117] PAVONI, *Liguria medievale*, pp. 161-163; BALZARETTI, *Dark Age Liguria*, pp. 81-109.

[118] MURIALDO, *La Liguria altomedievale*, pp. 19-20, 29-30.

[119] KING, *Charlemagne*, p. 97, the only reference to Genoa in Carolingian annals.

[120] HORDEN - PURCELL, *Corrupting Sea*, pp. 115-122, 560-561; PURCELL, *The Boundless Sea of Unlikeness?*; and the essays collected in HORDEN - PURCELL, *Boundless Sea*.

[121] ID., *Corrupting Sea*, p. 121.

that 'real' cities including exceptional ones like Milan could alone be sustained by extended networks of long-distance trade[122]. I think it can reasonably be suggested that Milan and Genoa were part of a dispersed hinterland which operated at a regional level at some points in their early medieval histories and that this extended hinterland could in turn be linked with the north as the result of political activity and its sanctioning of economic practices which are documented within monastic charter collections as well as contemporary annals and other historical writing. It is unlucky that charters do not survive for Genoa until the early tenth century with the result that we know nothing for its hinterland of the relationships they evidence so well for Milan before then. Genoa is no Comacchio in the current state of knowledge, but it might have been.

6. *Conclusion*

Milan and this part of Lombardy are often regarded as more northern than southern. This simplistic view is challenged for the early medieval period by a range of evidence that north and south were, at times, brought into contact in Milan, especially for much of the period before the Carolingian conquest of the Lombard kingdom in the 770s when there is no doubt that Milan was actively linked to the Mediterranean Sea. With the advent of Carolingian rule, despite the western Mediterranean being incorporated within that Empire, there was an inevitable shift northward in the city's history. Even that may have increased the amount of traffic between south and north, as demand for exotic products by Charlemagne and by the monastery at Bobbio shows. Crucial to this power shift was the monastery of Sant'Ambrogio, whose charter collection evidences its control over a sizeable and carefully articulated patrimony, in part due to patronage by elite northerners. Carolingian interest in Venice and the delta region means that the Adriatic must be added to the mix and it may even, by the ninth century, have replaced the Mediterranean as the place where exchanges with 'the south' happened. Given a lack of evidence, caution is advised in the case of the port at Genoa, which may have continued to be active.

When seen in the light of the recent global turn in the study of the Middle Ages[123], what I have suggested here may seem like small beer. The distance be-

[122] HODGES, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 3-8 (his model), 8-17 (challenges to it, including 'the production model').

[123] MOORE, *A Global Middle Ages?*; *The Global Middle Ages*; KEENE, *Towards a Global Middle Ages*; BLAN, *Charlemagne's peaches*.

tween northern Europe and the Mediterranean is after all not so great when viewed on the global scale. However, for the people I have mentioned these distances were immense, albeit more for some than for others[124]. The world view of Charlemagne encompassed Constantinople, Rome and finally «the whole universe in three circles, drawn with delicacy and skill», each represented on silver and golden tables which he bequeathed in his will[125]. As we have seen, he met envoys from Persia and Egypt while travelling in northern Italy and his punishing itinerary over several decades familiarized him with the huge landmass of his empire. The worldview of the hundreds of peasants recorded in the Sant'Ambrogio charters was evidently nothing like that and yet the two worlds, large and small, were intimately connected within an ecosystem which encompassed north and south. Milan may not have been the centre of the world (where is?) and yet the geographical position of *Langobardia* between the Alps and the Apennines with their numerous valleys did permit some of its people to access the northern Frankish lands and the old southern world of the Mediterranean; and perhaps beyond[126].

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[124] ZELLER *et al.*, *Neighbours and Strangers*, pp. 209-221.

[125] EINHARDI Vita Karoli Magni 33, trans. GANZ, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, p. 43.

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TITLE

Milan, Genoa and the Alps: early medieval exchanges across a region

Milano, Genova e le Alpi: scambi regionali in età altomedievale

ABSTRACT

In this contribution I consider how Milan and its inhabitants were connected both north and south in the early medieval period. I focus on exchanges understood as giving and receiving, buying and selling, leasing and renting, but also encompassing the more general sense of cultural interchange. All such exchanges certainly helped to connect one place (or region) to another both physically and conceptually. As the connectedness of Milan to its hinterland was one of the main themes of my recent book *The Lands of Saint Ambrose* (2019) I deal with that in the second part of this chapter, as the formation of a large hinterland was a fundamental part of Milan's importance as a settlement in the early medieval period. One question I address throughout, is whether there were any significant connections between those who lived in the city and those who visited it from elsewhere, especially, given the theme of this conference, from north of the Alps. Another aspect of the same question though is how or if the Mediterranean was connected to the north via Milan.

In questo contributo considero come Milano e i suoi abitanti fossero collegati sia a nord che a sud nel primo periodo medievale. Mi concentro sugli scambi intesi come dare e ricevere, comprare, vendere ed affittare, ma includendo anche il senso più generale di interscambio culturale. Tutti questi scambi hanno certamente contribuito a collegare un luogo (o regione) all'altro sia fisicamente che

concettualmente. Poiché la connessione di Milano con il suo territorio è uno dei temi principali del mio recente libro *The Lands of Saint Ambrose* (2019), ne tratterò nella seconda parte di questo discorso, poiché penso che la formazione di un grande territorio sia stata una parte fondamentale dell'importanza di Milano come insediamento nel primo periodo medievale. Una domanda a cui cercherò di rispondere è se esistessero collegamenti significativi tra coloro che vivevano in città e coloro che la visitavano giungendo da altre parti, in particolare, dato il tema di questo convegno, dal nord delle Alpi. Un altro aspetto della stessa domanda però è come, o se, il Mediterraneo, specialmente la città di Genova, fosse collegato al Nord via Milano.

KEYWORDS

Milan, Hinterland, Saint Ambrose, Alps, Mediterranean

Milano, territorio, Sant'Ambrogio, Alpi, Mediterraneo