

MONC**RAPA**(03)

MONOGRAFIES DE LA CÀTEDRA ROSES D'ARQUEOLOGIA
I PATRIMONI ARQUEOLÒGIC

VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES. AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

VIOLÈNCIA I CONFLICTE EN ÈPOCA TARDOANTIGA
I MEDIEVAL. UNA PERSPECTIVA ARQUEOLÒGICA

MARC BOUZAS, LLUÍS PALAHÍ (EDS.)

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CIP 904:323.26 V10

Violence and conflict in late Antiquity and the middle ages : an archaeological perspective = Violència i conflicte en època tardoantiga i medieval : una perspectiva arqueològica / Marc Bouzas, Lluís Palahí (eds.). – Girona : Universitat de Girona, Càtedra Roses d'Arqueologia i Patrimoni Arqueològic, 2025. – 1 recurs en línia (399 pàgines) : il·lustracions. – Conté: Violence et conflit au Moyen Âge : miscellanées d'histoire et d'archéologie / Valérie Serdon ... – Textos en català, anglès, francès, italià i Castellà. – Descripció del recurs: 15 setembre 2025. – (Moncrapa ; 3) ISBN 978-84-9984-716-0 (Documenta Universitaria). ISBN 978-84-8458-753-8 (Edicions UdG)

I. Bouzas Sabater, Marc, 1992- editor literari II. Palahí Grimal, Lluís, editor literari III. Contenidor de (Obra): Serdon, Valérie. Violence et conflit au Moyen Âge : miscellanées d'histoire et d'archéologie IV. Càtedra Roses d'Arqueologia i Patrimoni Arqueològic 1. Violència – Història – Fins al 1500 2. Arqueologia medieval 3. Arqueologia clàssica 4. Llibres electrònics

CIP 904:323.26 V10

Moncrapa - 03

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Equip editorial i instruccions per als autors i política editorial

/ Editorial team and instructions for authors and editorial policy:

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Tel. 972 45 82 90

ISBN Documenta Universitaria:

978-84-9984-716-0

ISBN Oficina Edicions UdG:

978-84-8458-753-8

DOI: 10.33115/b/9788499847160



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Fundació Girona
Regió de Coneixement

Universitat de Girona
Diputació de Girona
Ajuntament de Girona
Consell Social de la UdG
Cambra de Comerç

L'estudi forma part del Projecte quadriennal de recerca finançat per la Generalitat de Catalunya «Urbanisme, poblament i conflicte en època medieval i moderna. La vila de Roses com a paradigma.»



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament
de Cultura

Girona, 2025



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ÍNDEX

Violence et conflit au Moyen Âge . Miscellanées d'histoire et d'archéologie	6
Valérie Serdon	
La fortificación de época visigoda en el extremo occidental de la tarraconense. Tedeja y Cabeza San Vicente (Burgos)	21
Jose Angel Lecanda, Asier Pascual	
La fortezza bizantina di Luni e i pericoli per la navigazione nel Tirreno	39
Ettore Alfredo Bianchi, Aurora Cagnana	
El Castellón: un territorio de frontera en el valle del Esla, entre los siglos v y vi	51
José Carlos Sastre Blanco, Iñaki Martín Viso, Patricia Fuentes Melgar, Raúl Catalán Ramos	
Escaping from Piracy in Early Byzantine Italy: the case of Sant'Antonino revisited	61
Ettore A. Bianchi	
La formació de la marca. L'ocupació del territori entre les Alberes i Girona pels francs . Dades documentals i arqueològiques	72
Josep Maria Nolla	
Fortificacions medievals entre la Segarra i el Solsonès, frontera al segle x?	81
Laura de Castellet, Adrià Cubo, Pilar Giráldez, Joan Menchón, Ainhoa Pancorbo, Mariona Valldepérez, Màrius Vendrell	
Les torres exemptes del Pallars Jussà. Proposta de seriació (segles VIII-XI)	103
Ramon Martí, Adrià Cubo, M^a Mercè Viladrich	
Canvis antics accelerats per la guerra. Dels vilars altmedievals a les cases fortes en el domini dels Centelles (Osona, segles IX-XII)	122
Jaume Oliver Bruy	
Indagini archeologiche nel castello di Gioia Sannitica (Caserta): primi dati	137
Silvana Rapuano	
La Iglesia encastillada de San Miguel de Turégano (Segovia). Fortaleza del poder feudal de los obispos de Segovia	151
Luis Miguel Yuste Burgos	

La lluita entre el poder reial i els Cabrera. El cas de la destrucció de la fortalesa de Roda (l'Esquerda) a Osona	167
Imma Ollich, Maria Ocaña, Albert Pratdesaba, Antònia Díaz-Carvajal, Montserrat de Rocafiguera, Esther Travé	
El Castellvell de la Marca al segle xv, una fortificació inèdita de la guerra civil catalana	186
Jordi Gibert Rebull, Ramon Martí Castelló, Cristian Folch Iglesias	
Violència senyorial i participació pagesa. La fortificació del castell de Vilobí d'Onyar (segles XIII-XIV)	208
Elvis Mallorquí	
Disputed Mountains. Defining landscapes of conflict in the Monti Aurunci (Italy - Southern Latium)	221
Edoardo Vanni, Francesca De Pieri, Simone Zocco, Alessandra Cammisola	
La Torre de Badalona, l'escenificació d'un domini senyorial (s. XIV - XVII)	245
Júlia Miquel, Oriol Achón, Carles Díaz, Clara Forn	
Los conflictos por el agua y sus testimonios arqueológicos en la Baja Edad Media. Las fuentes abovedadas concejiles	258
Beatriz González Montes, José Avelino Gutiérrez González	
¿La cuenca de Eyrieux (Francia), un territorio medieval libre de conflictos?	275
Emilie Comes-Trinidad	
Les muralles medievals de Roses. Una necessitat defensiva i una font de conflictes polítics. Dades des de l'arqueologia	285
Lluís Palahí Grimal, Marc Bouzas, Jordi Vivo	
Violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Sardegna rurale del XIV secolo. Testimonianze archeologiche dallo scavo del villaggio medievale abbandonato di Geridu	297
Marco Milanese	
Evidències arqueològiques d'una mort violenta al Jaciment de Santa Margarida (Martorell, Baix Llobregat). La sepultura anòmala de la tomba 214 i el seu estudi	306
Esther Travé Allepuz, Pablo del Fresno Bernal, Montserrat Farreny Agràs	
Evidenze di episodi di violenza interpersonale dallo scavo dell'ospedale di passo di San Nicolao di Pietra Colice	321
Fabrizio Benente, Giada Molinari, Nico Radi	
Fractures causades per arma blanca en el jaciment de l'Esquerda. Anàlisi bioarqueològica i context històric	340
Antònia Díaz-Carvajal, Imma Ollich, Bibiana Agustí	
Fortificacions i defenses de la ciutat de Tarragona (II ac-XX dc). Comentaris sobre la seva protecció legal	352
Pilar Bravo Póvez, Joan Menchon Bes	
ABSTRACTS (català)	372
ABSTRACTS(español)	382
ABSTRACTS (english)	392

ESCAPING FROM PIRACY IN EARLY BYZANTINE ITALY: THE CASE OF SANT'ANTONINO REVISITED

Ettore A. Bianchi¹

FORTIFICATION OF THE HEIGHTS

Some remains of a singular enclosure rise on the top of a rocky hill behind the medieval chapel of Sant'Antonino, near the hamlet of Perti, in the municipality of Finale Ligure, district of Savona (Italy)² (fig. 1; fig. 2). Nowadays, scarce ruins emerge from the shady wood covering the flanks of the mountain, while, in the past, the site was surrounded by thick walls with a few towers³ (fig. 3). The integral circle included an area of around 1.2 hectares; a big size by the standards of late -antique castles in Italy (Cagnana, in «SA 2001», pp. 101-17). The curtain was made of local limestones and mortars; that is there was a lack of exotic materials, taken from distant quarries; nor were seen rows of squared and smoothed blocks, patiently put in place by very competent masons (Cagnana, in «SA 2001», pp. 205-09). By examining many sherds of industrial pottery, fragments of commercial amphorae and erratic coins left on the ground, archaeologists determined that this structure was built during the late 6th Century CE, when the country was pertinent to the Eastern Roman Empire (Gardini, Murialdo, 1994, pp. 159-82. G. Murialdo, in «SA 2001», pp. 13-24). Precisely, the finds covered the

Figure 1. The castrum of Perti in Norther Italy.

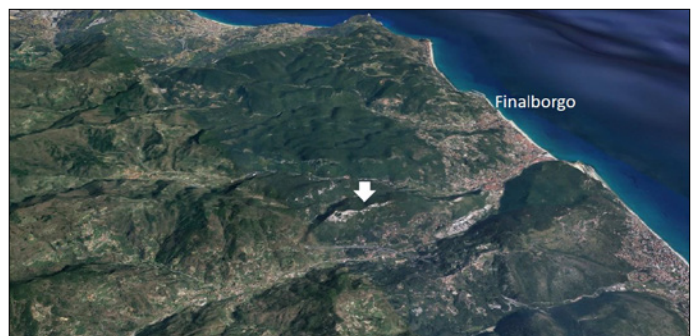


Figure 2. The castle's position not far from the coast.

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² All useful data has been collected in Mannoni, Murialdo, 2001, which, in the following notes, will be abridged with «SA 2001».

³ See Murialdo, in «SA 2001b», pp. 91-100. The only construction, whose ties to the enclosure seem still unclear, is a separate tower, with «mushroom-shaped windows»: was it a pre-existing element? Anyway, see Frondoni, Benente, in «SA 2001», pp. 145-57.

reigns of Tiberius II (578-582), Maurice (582-602), Phocas (602-610), Heraclius the Great (610-641), Constans II (641-668), Constantine IV (668-685) and Justinian II (685-711) (Dating in Arslan et alii, in «SA 2001», pp. 233-38; Murialdo, in «SA 2001d», pp. 255-96). After the end of the Heraclid Dynasty, material traces of human frequentation became increasingly thinner and almost negligible (Murialdo, in «SA 2001e», pp. 669-78). Over the last four decades, most scholars, enthusiastic for a happy and unexpected discovery, have adopted a heuristic model of Sant'Antonino as a mighty bulwark against the Lombards, fierce barbarians then wandering across the Po Valley; a bulwark which was planned, equipped and manned by the central administration of Constantinople.⁴ Well, although the archaeological record is excellent, several reasons for caution do concern the historical narrative, which cannot stand up to an impartial criticism.⁵

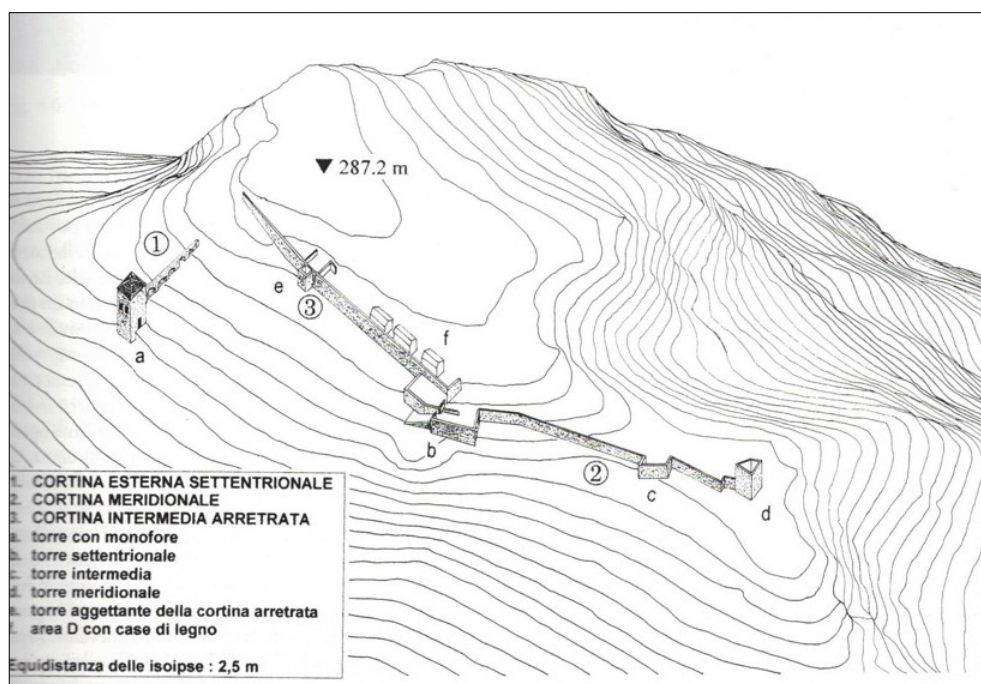


Figure 3. The integral circle ruins with walls and towers.

«THEMATIC DISTRICT» IMPOSSIBLE

Unfortunately, at the very beginning of the research, somebody claimed that the castle was the stronghold of a huge *Στρατιωτικός Θέμα*.⁶ Despite this stance, the *Θέματα*, properly speaking, started under Emperor Constans II, who hoped to save byzantine Anatolia from the breaking invasion of the Arabs; the step was taken around 660 CE, that is between 70 and 80 years after the *clausura* of Sant'Antonino got active.⁷ Moreover, the peculiarity *των Θεμάτων* was its demic composition, made up of peasant-militants, mostly with Slavonic ethnic roots: they had to offer recruits to the imperial armed forces, in exchange for public lands assigned to their respective villages (Haldon, 1993, pp. 1-67). However, the system in itself was not introduced

4 Various declinations of the same story are summarized by Murialdo, in «SA 2001g», pp. 749-96.

5 Doubts exposed in Bianchi, 2006-2007, pp. 11-25.

6 Curious comments are given in the oldest studies: see Murialdo, Bonora, 1983, pp. 301-15. Bonora et alii, 1984, pp. 215-42. Bonora et alii, 1988, pp. 335-96. Murialdo et alii, 1992, pp. 279-371.

7 The birth of the institution and its *floruit* are discussed by Treadgold, 1995, pp. 23-24, 87-186.

into the Exarchate of Italy, where the bulk of byzantine troops continued to rely on regular soldiers and professional mercenaries, up to the 8th Century CE.⁸ It is true that Constantinople created a new province in the Italian peninsula, called *Maritima Italarum*: its name is reported by a geographical treatise, published at Ravenna around the year 700 CE: there it is written that the coasts of Liguria, going from Luni to Ventimiglia, were assembled in one territory;⁹ what is remarkable is that the geographer inserts Luni, a city traditionally linked to ancient *Etruria*, within frame distinct from that of *Tuscia*.¹⁰ This artificial recombination was temporary and did not last beyond the first half of the 7th Century CE.¹¹ The objection is that the civil, military and religious capital of the aforementioned *Maritima* was the central place of Genoa;¹² not the peripheral one of Sant'Antonino, which remained forever at the level of a pre-urban settlement.¹³ Obviously, no surviving document indicates that any commander-in-chief (*Στρατηγός του Θέματος*) was assigned to this particular enclosure on the mountains, rather than to a great maritime city.

A PHANTOM FRONTIER

Nevertheless, some scholars did imagine that Sant'Antonino played a primary role on the scene of byzantine Liguria, being a fortified border-station, with a relevant military status.¹⁴ To avoid any misunderstanding, everybody will acknowledge that the current name «Finale» has nothing to do with the old and forgotten fort of Sant'Antonino.¹⁵ In the byzantine age, it was a matter of spatial coordinates, since the genuine land-border, between Romans and Lombards, runned much further North than the location of Sant'Antonino. The nearest barbarian Dukes were in power at Asti and Turin, two out-posts set 80 Km and 130 Km respectively, «as the crow flies», away from the enclosure on question. It is not enough: Sant'Antonino was kept apart from the contact-line, with the Germanic enemies, by the interposition of a deep buffer-zone. The same Latin source, mentioned above, does enlist 8 roman *civitates*, presumably held by as many imperial garrisons, engaged in preserving a vast region South of the Po river.¹⁶ Therefore, Sant'Antonino was safe behind a solid chain of byzantine castles, and it had rarely to clash with foreign raiders. To corroborate the weak theory about a proximal *Limes*, a numismatist of fame has detected some weights for coins, among the artefacts found at Sant'Antonino, supposing they were used by an inspector of the imperial customs, who held the office of checking

8 Regarding the latest developments, which took place in Southern Italy and Sicily, see Cosentino, 2008, pp. 141-47. In most border areas, under Emperor Maurice, mobile units prevailed, very conventional in style: see M. Whitby, 1995, pp. 61-124. Compare with Ravegnani, 2004, pp. 81-100.

9 The book speaks of a (...) *provincia Maritima Italarum quae dicitur Lunensis et Vigintimilii et ceterarum civitatum* (Ravennatis Anonymus, *Cosmographia*, IV, 29).

10 Northern Tuscany is enlisted just above: (...) *item provincia quae dicitur Tuscia; item provincia Maritima Italarum* (...) (Rav. Anon., *Cosm.*, IV, 29).

11 An additional latin text informs that, on year 643, the Lombards conquered the Tyrrhenian Shore as a whole: (...) *civitates vel castra Romanorum, quae fuerunt circa litora ab vera Lune usque in terra Francorum* (Anonymus, *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 6). Compare this passage with one from Paul the Deacon: (...) *Romanorum civitates* (...) *quae in Littore Maris sunt, usque ad Francorum fines* (Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV, 45).

12 The *Genava Maretema* is investigated in depth by Origone, 2000, pp. 272-89.

13 Contrast, between fortified towns and rustic castles, enounced by Zanini, 1998, pp. 208-91.

14 Historical picture drawn by N. Christie, 1990, pp. 229-71.

15 The word was used, during the Late Middle Ages, to point out the intermediate area (*regio confinalis*) between the cities of Albenga and Savona: see Murialdo, 1985, pp. 32-63.

16 Next to the *Alpes Maritimae*, (...) *est civitas quae dicitur Ororiat* (= *Auriate*, today Valloriate); *item Albis* (= *Alba Pompeia*, *Alba*), *Polencia* (= *Pollentia*, *Pollenzo*), *Pollentino* (= ?), *Agodano* (= ?), *Armesium* (= ?), *Diavia* (= *Ovadia*, *Ovada*), *Capris* (= *Caprae*, *Capriata*) (Ravennatis Anonymus, *Cosmographia*, IV, 33). See Pavoni, 1992, pp. 98, 138-140.

the import/export of commodities from neighbouring countries; as an alternative, there would have been a public money-changer, whose job was to convert different metallic species into each other (E. Arslan, in «SA 2001», pp. 239-54). All this is purely speculative: nothing precludes that the man had been, instead, a collector of direct taxes, levied from the income and property of local dwellers, or a notary, able to certify cash-payments on private transactions.¹⁷

NO POLE IN LOGISTICS

Leaving aside the notion that Sant'Antonino was the focal point of a *Θέα* or the hot spot on a land-border, the posture of a high strategic profile is still resilient. Now, the concept prevails that the fortress was an infrastructure where to accumulate military supplies in the rear of a disputed frontier; specifically, its aim would have been that of providing personnel, weapons and equipment to fellow imperial units, in body-to-body combat with the Lombards.¹⁸

Contrary to this idea of Sant'Antonino as a major communication hub no long transit-road ever passed through the steep and narrow valleys of the Pora torrent and its tributaries.¹⁹ Given this bad connectivity, it is not surprising that the remains of Sant'Antonino have little resemblance to those of a typical military camp. On one hand, inside the walled enclosure, there were no open squares, comfortable barracks and technical facilities for quick moving troops;²⁰ instead, it was plenty with modest houses, small huts, fired ovens, fences for flocks and similar spaces good for common people (fig. 4).²¹ On the other hand, the markers of military depots and stockpiles are practically intangible: the residual weapons on

the ground seem reduced to about 20 arrow-heads, a pair of javelins (De Vingo et alii, in «SA 2001», pp. 531-4), in addition to several knives (De Vingo, Fossati, in «SA 2001», pp. 541-46); lethal devices indeed, but which could have been handled both by well-trained and well-paid fighters and by dynamic hunters or volunteer defenders, mobilized only in the event of a brief siege. Moreover, the inner area of the enclosure was scattered with broken belts, combs, female ornaments, domestic instruments and so on; all objects of every-day life (De Vingo, Fossati, in «SA 2001», pp. 487-502). In other words, at first sight Sant'Antonino appears much less like a military stronghold, reserved for soldiers and mercenaries, rather than like a shelter for civilians (*refugium*), gathering many families at a war time.²²

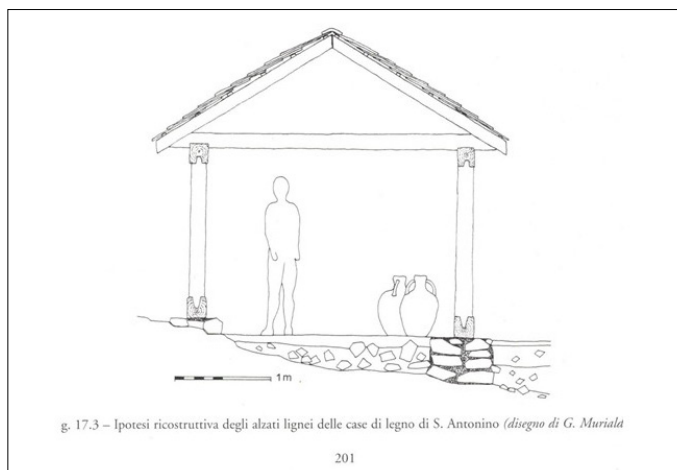


Figure 4. A house for common people.

17 Motives are formulated, in a not too different situation, by Perassi, 2000, pp. 53-69.

18 A view shared by A. Frondoni, 2004, pp. 181-96. Murialdo, in «SA 2001g», pp. 749-96. Greppi, 2008, pp. 7-60.

19 Global net-work, described at length by Cocoluto, 2004, pp. 369-417. About local traffic, see De Vingo, *ibidem*, pp. 295-322. After the Middle Ages, only sporadic travels, like that of a noble lady going to her marriage, are reported by Murialdo, in «SA 2001f», pp. 695-702.

20 These features were prescribed by current manuals on the art of war: see Mazzocchi, 1981, pp. 111-38. Compare with Zanini, 1994, pp. 173-207.

21 Characteristics made clear by A. Cagnana, in «SA 2001», pp. 119-34. Eadem, in «SA 2001», pp. 197-202.

22 The civil destination of at least some buildings is admitted, although in a shy manner, by Murialdo, in «SA 2001c», pp. 227-32.

DARK SHADOWS OVER THE SHORE

Yet, against whom was such fortress projected, if not versus the Lombards descending from the remote North? Watching a map, Sant'Antonino is not far from the Tyrrhenian Sea: the site lies 3 Km on direct line in the back of the coast, while the real path is not longer than 4 Km; these very short distances imply that the enclosure was basically oriented towards the near South, as if its promoters and users were afraid of potential assaults coming from the sea-side. Right when the hill of Sant'Antonino was more intensely frequented, a series of coastal communities, *i. e.* that of Finalpia, were evacuated by their inhabitants;²³ possibly, there was an orderly retreat to the high-lands, guided by imperial agents, wise bishops, great land-owners or associated residents.²⁴ A significant coincidence is also that a coast-guard group was deployed at the foot of Cape Varigotti, around 8 Km away from Sant'Antonino: this promontory, placed between the harbours of Albenga (*Albingaunum*) and Savona (*Saona*), is named by a Merovingian chronicler, describing the of byzantine Liguria on 643 CE.²⁵ It suggests that a senior officer, normally or very often, was in command there and controlled the routes and anchorages of the surrounding area.²⁶ Again, an acute anxiety, for perils brought by the sea, can be guessed behind the mention of Noli, a port-town near Varigotti, in the work of George from Cyprus, describing *κάστρα* and *φρούρια* of Italy, up to the late 6th Century CE.²⁷ Precisely, the greek source indicates a *Νέα Πόλις*,²⁸ from which the toponym *N(εα)πόλις* => *Νόλις* derived.²⁹ It goes without saying that Noli of Liguria should not be confused with Naples of Campania, easy to read a few lines below.³⁰ Likely, during the early byzantine age, there was a team of the imperial navy, equipped with fast war-ships, ready to intercept any approaching vessel off the Noli's bay.

A DOUBLE-FACE ENEMY

In fact, a widespread violence, a sort of «piracy» due to the Lombards, erupted over the Tyrrhenian Sea during the late 6th Century CE.³¹ It was knew and complained by Pope Gregory the Great (590-604).³² For instance, the monasteries on the

23 The ancient parish church was abandoned during the late 6th Century: see G. Murialdo *et alii*, in «SA 2001», pp. 39-64. Bulgarelli *et alii*, 2005, pp. 131-78.

24 Significant examples in J. Durliat, 1981, pp. 7-114 (*praecipue* 71-77).

25 On that year, the Lombards rushed through (...) *Albingano, Varicottis, Saona* (...) (Ps.-Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 71).

26 A medium-ranking general, *Βασίλειος Στρατηλάτης*, is positively attested by a 7th Century seal, found on the slopes of the Varigotti's promontory and now kept in the Museum of Finalborgo (confidential notice from Giovanni Murialdo).

27 The chronology of this particular section before the year 605 of this section before year 605 CE is quite reliable, whereas the original text was manipulated, truncated and adjusted many times: see Cosentino, 1996, pp. 487-99.

28 This «New Town» appears on line #537 in the text (*ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΚΥΠΡΙΟΣ, Περιγραφή του Ρωμαϊκού Κόσμου*, 537).

29 Such a linguistic evolution was accepted by Lamboglia, 1973, pp. 64-71.

30 This is what the german editor Heinrich Gelzer wrote by mistake, since he was not aware at all of Noli's existence; such a toponymic solution and other ones, although less credible, have been proposed by Conti, 1970, pp. 31-32.

31 The pursuit of the eastern Romans to their islands had focused scholarly attention since the Renaissance: *Non cessabant interea Longobardi non solum in continentis Italia, sed etiam in insulis Romanos variis iniuriis insectari*. See C. Sigoni (*Sigonius*), *De Regno Italiae*, I, Venice 1574, col. 60 B-C.

32 The Pope, after his election in Rome (September 3, 590), sent over 2000 official letters, of which, unfortunately, at least 60% are now lost: see Markus, 1997, p. 206. Therefore, each historical fact, recalled in the surviving collection of *epistulae selectae*, requires more or less clarification, according to Richards, 1984 (orig. ed. London-Boston 1980), pp. 105-286.

coasts of Corsica were under attack by predators from the sea.³³ Several churches on *litora Corsicae* were desolate because of repeated raids.³⁴ Remember that the flight of the catholic clergy from a city was frequently an effect of the occupation by the Lombards, heretics of arian faith and so opponents *Sanctae Rei Publicae*.³⁵ The barbarians took up a large strip of the same isle, making it a permanent autonomous zone, free from the oppressive byzantine administration.³⁶ Looking at the nearby Sardinia, even it suffered from the Lombardic expeditions. Not by chance, the head-quarters of the imperial army on the island were moved from the rustic centre of Fordongianus (*Forum Traiani*)³⁷ to the naval base of Porto Torres (*Turris Lybisonis*).³⁸ Nevertheless, the metropolis of Cagliari itself was assaulted and sacked by the Lombards.³⁹ The Exarch of Africa, to which Sardinia was subjected, managed to prepare a naval shield for benefit of the islanders.⁴⁰ The terror aroused by the lombardic assaults against Corsica and Sardinia also impacted elsewhere.⁴¹ The shore of Latium, at the mouths of the Tiber, was given as a vulnerable target, doomed to be destroyed.⁴² Perhaps, armed provocations by the enemies also struck the Naples' Gulf, where the military port of Miseno was hastily reinforced⁴³ and the freedom of navigation was reduced.⁴⁴ Even in the far Sicily, the representatives of the Empire were frightened by the expectation that the Lombards might land on the island.⁴⁵ Whether or not the *Maritima* was actually hit by pirates, the mere possibility could drive the civilians away from the tyrrhenian shore.⁴⁶

33 Before June 591, it was not safe to settle monasteries on the corsican shores, *pro incertitudine temporis*, unless their position was naturally protected or easy to protect at low cost (Gregorii I papae, *Reglstrum epistularum*, I, 50).

34 On August 591, Sagona had not yet emerged from a severe crisis, involving a long episcopal vacation (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, I, 76); that same month the Pope blamed the public enemies who had perpetrated crimes with ruthless ferocity (*delictis facientibus hostili ferocitate*), to the damage *Ecclesiae Ta(v)linatis*, while the prestigious seat of Aléria was also desolate (*ibidem*, I, 77). In much the same way, on 601, the Pope expressed his regret again because (...) *Aleria atque Aiacium, civitates Corsicae, diu sine episcopis esse* (*ibid.*, XI, 58).

35 On 599, the byzantine general Bagran asked the Pope to halt the *sedis vacantiam* in Osimo, a center he had just reconquered, appointing an ordinary bishop for the orthodox Christians (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, IX, 100).

36 Before 595, many Corsicans in misery wished to seek asylum, together with their families, on a portion of island, which was already in the lombardic hands: (...) *unde fit ut - derelicta Pia Res Public - possessores eiusdem insulae ad nefandissimam Langobardorum gentem cogantur effugere* (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, V, 38).

37 The powerful *Dux Sardiniae*, charged with keeping the peace across the countryside, was stationed in this town, on the banks of the Tirso river, since year 534 CE (*Codex Justiniani*, XXVII, 2).

38 On 90, the Pope voiced the protest of Marinianus, bishop of Torres, against *Theodorum Ducem*, concerning abuses and extortions of his subordinates, affecting not only quiet citizens, but also innocent clerics, friars and nuns (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, I, 59).

39 The attack was launched by surprise in August or September 599. In October, the Pope showed his dismay at what (...) *in Sardinia hostes nostri fuerint operati* (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, IX, 11); then, he put much pressure on Januarius, the Archbishop of Cagliari, to take care, among his competences, of the military defenses of Sardinia, so that the provincial people would not be shocked one more time (*ibidem*, IX, 196).

40 On 600, the Pope praised Innocentius, Prefect to the Praetorium of Africa, on which Sardinia and Corsica depended, because of his commitment to preparing battle-ships (*studium in praeparandis drumonibus*), in order to repel the those of the Lombards (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, X, 16).

41 Since 595, the Pope had written that (...) *et diversae insulae et loca alia sunt procul dubio peritura* (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, V, 34); the emphasis here should be placed on the words «other places», but which ones?

42 On the subsequent 596, fearing the worst, the Pope reiterated that (...) *iam et partes istae et diversae insulae in gravi sunt periculo positae* (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, VI, 63).

43 On 598, the Pope urged the byzantine top-general Maurentius to complete without delay the restauration of the ancient docks located under Cape Miseno, because the work advanced too slowly (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, IX, 66; 122).

44 On 599, the high risk of colliding with lombardic marauders of Naples compelled the local authorities to limit the movement of vessels from and to the port-city (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, IX, 160).

45 On 601, the sicilian bishops were praying God so that the (...) *barbaricae crudelitatis incursus* (...) would not get there (Greg. I, *Reg. ep.*, XI, 31).

46 It is worth noting that, in the past, the castle of Sant'Antonino was seen like a protective resort for people who struggled to escape from a deadly threat, affecting the shores of Liguria; a threat due to the muslim pirates, from the 8th to the 10th Century CE: see Lamboglia, Silla, 1978, pp. 70-72.

SUPPORTERS OF THE BARBARIANS

Still to be explored is the inclination of the Lombards towards naval warfare. The germanic tribes, by rule, had valuable mounted armies on the fields but limited combat capabilities over the seas.⁴⁷ In that environment, not only brave warriors on board were needed, but also strong rowers, speedy sailors and clever pilots were wished, together with industrious carpenters, pitchers, metallurgists, rope-makers and assistants on the docks.⁴⁸ In this regard, the Lombards themselves had no sea-faring practice at the moment they broke into the Italian peninsula, in year 569 CE.⁴⁹ Such a deficit was probably not filled until an influential leader, Farwald, took the stage.⁵⁰ Around 580 CE, he could pick up a minimum of advisors and instructors in maritime navigation.⁵¹ Soon after, the elected King Authari (584-590) warned he could now expand his realm outside the mainland;⁵² a bit later, the successor Agilulf (591-616) boasted of his craftsmen, on duty in the royal arsenals;⁵³ in the meantime, our piratic wave arose over the Tyrrhenian Sea. Maybe that the aid of «roman collaborators» with the foreign invaders had changed the games.⁵⁴ Best friends of the Lombards in Italy were rustic slaves and indebted tenants, willing to run away from their squalid work-places,⁵⁵ as well as rejoicing at the massacre of their class enemies, the landlords;⁵⁶ the small farmers too, exhausted by the burden of taxes, very often joined the Lombards;⁵⁷ deprived of rents and no longer fed by the fiscal revenues, the urban system collapsed;⁵⁸ many towns were deserted by its population;⁵⁹ elsewhere, discontent among the poorest citizens increased,⁶⁰ entire urban centres

47 The «terrestrial» attitudes of Alboin's followers are taken for granted by Delogu, 1990, pp. 111-68.

48 Without a *modus vivendi* with such professionals, met somewhere in North Africa, the notorious «Vandal thalassocracy» of the 5th Century CE would never have existed: see Cameron, 2000, pp. 553-59. Further elaboration by Kasperski, 2015, pp. 201-42.

49 This is shown by a famous anecdote, about the death and burial of *Beati Cerbonii Episcopo* on year 573 CE: we learn that the wild Duke Gummarith wanted to capture the Saint's followers, travelling from the beach of *Populonia* to the nearby Isle of Elba, but, short of means, he failed to reach them (*Gregorius Magnus, Dialogi de vita et miraculis Patrum Italicorum*, III, 11: 4-6).

50 He was the first Duke of Spoleto, in Central Italy, but aspired to the monarchy, in competition with lots of rivals. The political governance of all Lombards was difficult to be centralized: see Jarnut, 1995, pp. 39-44.

51 On 576 or shortly after, Farwald was successful in occupying Classe, the main port of byzantine Ravenna (*Paul. Diac., Hist. Lang.*, III, 13); he did stay there for 7-8 consecutive years, up to 584 (*ibidem*, III, 19). It was a span of time large enough for him to become aware of any problem and advantage inherent military fleets.

52 Around 585, rumours spread that Authari, having fought his way to the Strait of Messina, saw a singular column emerging from the waters; he spurred his horse and touched the enigmatic monument with his spear, declaring, as a threat, that (...) *usque hic erint Langobardorum fines* (*Paul. Diac., Hist. Lang.*, III, 32).

53 Just before the year 600, Agilulf vowed to transfer a staff of skilled ship-builders (*artifices ad naves faciendas*) to the Avars, his allies (*Paul. Diac., Hist. Lang.*, IV, 20).

54 Label taken from a prominent historian of the British Marxist school: Thompson, 1980, pp. 71-88.

55 In Apulia, because of the oppressed *servi et coloni* fleeing the country, (...) *hostibus datur illud occasio pervadendi* (*Greg. I, Reg. ep.*, IX, 205). Everywhere in Italy (...) *desolata ab hominibus praedia atque, ab omni cultore destituta, in solitudine vacat terra: nullus hanc possessor inhabitat; occupaverunt bestiae loca quae prius multitudo hominum tenebat* (*Greg. M., Dial.*, III, 38).

56 King Clepho, who reigned from 572 to 574, killed the Roman aristocrats: (...) *multos Romanorum viros potentes alios gladiis extinxit, alios ab Italia exturbavit*; even more so, after him, (...) *multi nobilium Romanorum ob cupiditatem interfecti sunt* (*Paul. Diac., Hist. Lang.*, II, 31-32).

57 Around 595, the tax-payers of Corsica were ruined to the point that some of them, in order to survive, sold their children on the slave market and others preferred to flee *ad nefandissimam Langobardorum gentem* (*Greg. I, Reg. ep.*, V, 38). On 597, the Pope appreciated a certain Anastasius, a Byzantine officer sensitive to the rights of the Corsicans, and judged an absurdity that, due to the relentless grip of imperial bureaucracy, (...) *adiumentum hostibus praebeatur* (*ibidem*, VII, 3). In Sardinia, as well as in the nearby Corsica, the Eastern Roman government did hateful acts, which undermined the people's trust in the establishment (*ibid.*, XIV, 2).

58 The economic and social process, which finally led the peasantry to a sort of «Golden Age», was very complex one: see Wickham, 1983, pp. 109-50; more generally, *Idem, Framing the Early Middle Ages*, Oxford 2005, pp. 383-588.

59 The barbarians' fury left behind apocalyptic scenes: (...) *nam depopolatae urbes, eversa castra, concrematae ecclesiae, destructa sunt monasteria virorum atque feminarum* (*Greg. M., Dial.*, III, 38); so, crowds of frightened refugees sought hospice within the walls of Rome: (...) *de tota pene Italia, Langobardorum gladiis metuentes, plurimi undique ad Romanam urbem confluerant* (*Paul. Diac., Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni*, 16).

60 Many domestic servants of noblemen, clients of municipal councillors, dissident priests and monks became defectors: (...) *diversorum enim nobilium servi, multarum ecclesiarum clerici, diversorum monasteriorum monachi, multorum iudicum homines saepe se hostibus tradiderunt* (*Greg. I, Reg. ep.*, X, 5).

did welcome the barbarian as «liberators»;⁶¹ it happened several times.⁶² Likewise, nothing prevented the *humiliores* of one or more port-cities from opening the doors to the Lombards and from helping them with ships, crews and so on.

THE PISAN PARTNERSHIP REVEALED

Clearly, such an organic cooperation, between external and internal enemies of the roman order, was a big challenge, which only a big coastal community, out of the imperial control, could have performed. Among the cities over-looking the Tyrrhenian Sea, the biggest of all was Pisa, located at the mouth of the Arno river. Multiple port compounds were available,⁶³ and a suburban arsenal was in function;⁶⁴ that way, there was no shortage of ships at hand during the Late Antiquity. However, no «Pisa» appears in the list of George from Cyprus, in part written before 584 CE,⁶⁵ while the byzantine naval bases of Luni, Portovenere and Elba are correctly mentioned;⁶⁶ this allows to suspect that Pisa itself was no longer connected to Constantinople, as early as the same year 584. The suspicion is corroborated by another missive, sent from Gregory the Great to the Exarch of Ravenna in the year 603 CE.⁶⁷ The Pope tried a diplomatic agreement with the turbulent Pisans; yet they refused any peace and went on raiding the Thyrrenian Sea.⁶⁸ Here, three aspects of the gregorian message must be enlightened.⁶⁹ First, the failed mediation occurred *in absentia* of any religious, administrative and military authority; like if Pisa had a collective body without a definite head.⁷⁰ Second, the frustrating behaviour of the Pisans is reported as one example, among many, of betrayal from below. In fact, the previous sections of the letter blast both some obstinate schismatic⁷¹ and a rebel or usurper named Ocilian.⁷² Third, despite complaining a tenacious sedition of Pisa to benefit of the Lombards, the Pope does

61 On year 592, for instance, the inhabitants of Sovana were in talks with Ariulf, Duke of Spoleto; therefore, the byzantine officers had to take painful but necessary counter-measures (Greg. I., Reg. ep., II, 33). During long some sieges, the sheer threat of starvation convinced the besieged Romans to surrender: (...) *multitudo castrorum se tradidisset Langobardis, ut temperare possent inopiam famis* (Anonymus, Liber Pontificalis, 63).

62 This betrayal by the common people was perhaps the genuine kind of «malicious invitation», which led to the sudden establishment of 30-35 germanic Dukies in as many cities of Italy: see Borri, 2016, pp. 46-51.

63 The most important of whom were *Portus Pisanus*, *Pisae Fluvius* and *Fossae Papirianae*. See Mosca, 2004, pp. 311-32.

64 The productive plants dated back to the 2nd Century CE and was re-lived on during the first half of the 6th Century. See Cosentino, 2004, pp. 347-56.

65 The name *Πίζα* is not contemplated in any form, like, consistently, neither Lucca (*Λούκα*) nor Chiusi (*Κλύσιον*), two capitals of the Lombards in Northern Tuscany, can be recognized.

66 A *Λούνη* can be perfectly read (*ΓΕΩΓΡ. ΚΥΠΡ.*, Περιγραφή, 534), while *Κάστρον Βενέρης* (*ibidem*, 624) and *Κάστρον Ἰλβας* (*ibid.*, 552) deserve a little more caution.

67 Opening words: *Gregorius Smaragdo Patricio et Exarcho*. (...) (Greg. I., Reg. ep., XIII, 34).

68 Text: *Ad Pisanos autem hominem nostrum dudum, qualem debuimus et quomodo debuimus, transmisimus. Sed obtinere nihil potuit. Unde et drumones eorum iam parati ad egrediendum nuntiati sunt* (*ibidem*).

69 To tell the truth, the allusion is too cursory and less satisfactory than one would desire; anyway, nobody will be wrong assuming that more explicit information, about the Pisans, was reported in other papal letters, now lost.

70 The conciliatory attempt did not involve any diligent shepherd of the church, any commission of local magnates, any senior officer in command, since no *Antistes Pisanæ Ecclesiæ*, *Pisanus Vir Honestus* or *Tribunus Militum Pisae* is mentioned.

71 The dispute concerned «Three Chapters» on theology, respected by many Christians in Northern Italy and Histria; so, the movement was an indicator of a mass-disaffection towards the Empire: see Cuscito, 1992, pp. 367-407.

72 The statement (...) *ad Accillanem epistulas misimus* (...) closely resembles the letter Gregory wrote, on 599, to (...) *Ocillani tribuno Ydrontino* (...) (Greg. I., Reg. ep., IX, 205). Almost certainly, the same serviceman, *Accillanes* = *Ocillanus* = *Ocilianus*, once had been commander of a byzantine unit, stationed in Otranto (Lecce).

not evoke any barbarian master of the city.⁷³ It is reasonable to assume that the free Pisans negotiated an alliance directly with Farwald, before 584 CE, and then with Authari. Probably, from this pact, the extensive piracy came out, which caused *refugia*, like that of Sant'Antonino in byzantine Liguria, to be installed.

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73 No *Dux Pisae* nor any *Dux Lucae* was implicated in the talks; the impression is that Pisa, prior to the Gregory's intervention, was an autonomous political entity, which had never been seized or subdued by any germanic conqueror, unlike other byzantine cities of Italy.

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