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"The Navigators". Mediterranean Cities and Urban Spaces in the Passage from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages (ca. 600 – ca. 850 CE)*

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to reassess urban trajectories in the Mediterranean during the passage from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. This will be done by focusing on the sites of Amorium, Gortyn, Eleutherna, and Comacchio, places which transcend both the terrestrial and maritime, and the political and military frontiers of the Byzantine empire and the Umayyad Caliphate. Archaeology and material culture will be used – in a comparative perspective – to dissect urban bodies in terms of use of space and function of spatial relationship. This is in order to document the construction of urban models, structures, and infrastructures, which, although often stemming from diverse centralized political and administrative policies, nevertheless accommodated common, cross-cultural developments, including the creation of commercial and artisanal facilities, construction or restoration of religious buildings as foci of settlement, and resilience of local elites as a catalyst of patronage and levels of demand.

Particular attention will be given to the role of public spaces as the frame of reference. Indeed, such spaces will be used to show how artistic and architectural displays operated, cultural assumptions could be (re-) discussed, and different types of buildings coexisted.

In this respect, the paper will also explore the continuous importance of civic infrastructures and religious buildings as pillars of a yet coherent urban fabric, representatives of the power and wealth of local city-oriented elites, and conveyors of political, artistic, and spatial symbolism, as mutually recognized and experienced by the communities frequenting seventh-to-ninth century eastern Mediterranean urban spaces.

Keywords: city, Byzantium, urbanism, spatiality, regionalism

In this contribution, I propose to examine the unfolding of urban trajectories in the Byzantine Mediterranean during the passage from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. I would like, in fact, to stress that my title takes its cue from

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a movie directed by Ken Loach in 2001[1]. The movie follows the lives of five English rail workers as they experience the Thatcherian privatization of British Railways, which broke up into separate companies that must tender with the lowest bidder for getting jobs. Indeed, the film takes its name from the navigators (or better, the 'navvies'), the manual laborers that built Britain's rail system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, Loach clearly refers to the political and economic building block of post-War English society (the working class), which has to cope with or better "navigate through" the devastating effects of the neo-liberal "age of change". The former comradery, political solidarity, and past socio-economic rights gave way to the galloping corporatization of profits as the fierce competition between former friends became the tragic rule of the day (until one of the workers was killed in an accident caused by profit-driven lack of security procedures)[2].

I decided to adopt Loach's cinematic metaphor to reassess the transformations experienced by the Byzantine cities – as one of the main political, social, and economic building blocks of the empire – roughly in the centuries spanning between Phocas (602–610) and Basil I (868–886)[3]. This was an age of political, administrative, and cultural change for an empire that would not die[4]. According to recent historiography, this change led to the emergence of Orthodox Byzantium and the creation of a Greek-speaking "Romanland" whose culture was predicated upon a Christian-Roman identity[5]. Moreover, it interspersed with the transformation of the basic pattern of Mediterranean exchange (in particular, after the 500 in its western half and 700 in its eastern one)[6].

Although this did not entail that a Pirennian divide fell on the Mediterranean, it nevertheless ushered in the establishment of two – rather self-sufficient – complex inter-regional exchange networks, which lasted well into the twelfth century. The larger Caliphal one centered on the southern and eastern coastlines of the Mediterranean, and the less complex Byzantine one, revolved around the Aegean and Thyrrenian basins (with an offshoot in the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean)[7]. Such a systemic change partially stemmed from the demographic consequences of the so-called Justinianic Plague (whose intermittent waves lasted into the eighth century)[8] as well as the existential threats the empire had to

[1] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0279977/ [17 V 2023].

[2] J. Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*, London 2019, p. 393–457.

[3] L. Zavagno, *Cities in Transition. Urbanism in Byzantium between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (AD 500–900)*, Oxford 2009 [= BAR, 2023], p. 1–31.

[4] J. Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die. The Paradox of Eastern Roman Survival 640–740*, Cambridge Massachusetts 2016.

[5] M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium 600–1025*, London 1995; A. Kaldellis, *Romanland. Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, London 2019.

[6] C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800*, Oxford 2005, p. 708–774.

[7] Idem, *The Donkey and the Boat. Reinterpreting the Mediterranean Economy, 950–1180*, Oxford 2023.

[8] P. Sarris, *Viewpoint New Approaches to the 'Plague of Justinian'*, PP 254.1, 2022, p. 315–346 with further and detailed bibliography.

face for less than forty years in the first half of the seventh century. First, the "last great war of Antiquity" (with the Persian Sassanid), and the subsequent arrival of the Army of the Caliph (occurring a few decades after the Avar-Slavic invasions in the Balkans). The latter led to catastrophic territorial losses (followed by a forfeiture to two/thirds of the fiscal income)[9] and a military retrenchment behind an Arab-Byzantine frontier that crisscrossed the south-eastern Anatolian plateau[10]. Finally, scholars have also recently started weighing in the environmental, especially climatic, disruptions on a Mediterranean scale and beyond as investigated through palynological, biological, and geological proxy data for the period here under scrutiny[11].

Often, the abovementioned changes were labeled as a collapse of the imperial edifice; in fact, a historiographic re-assessment of the so-called Byzantine Dark Ages has highlighted that collapse is a rather ambiguous term[12]. It is worthwhile to draw attention to the lack of documentary evidence, but it is critical to stress the growing body of archaeology and material culture, which have shed new light on the economy of the period, the role and transformation of the Byzantine elites, the systems of patronage as well as social life at rural and above all urban level[13]. Indeed, and with regard to urbanism and urban landscape, the Late Roman mosaic of cities that carpeted the floor of the imperial socio-political and economic edifice went through a dramatic transition[14].

In this sense, the trajectories of urbanism in both Byzantine and Islamic exchange networks have often been characterized by the long debate on the social, political, economic, as well as urbanistic and architectural nature of the passage from Classical polis to Medieval city[15]. For the Islamic world, the argument has concerned the transition from "*polis* to *Madina*" as recently reassessed in terms of a smooth transition largely independent from (and not generated by) the Islamic

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[9] A. Laiou, C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, Oxford 2007 [= CMT], p. 38–42.

[10] H. Kennedy, J. Haldon, *The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands*, [in:] *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. H. Kennedy, Burlington 2006, p. 79–116; A. Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier. Interaction and Exchange among Christian and Muslim Communities*, London 2015; idem, *The Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers: An Introduction*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers. From the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea*, ed. idem, Louisville 2019, p. 3–29.

[11] J. Haldon et al., *The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia: Integrating Science, History, and Archaeology*, JIH 45.2, 2014, p. 113–161.

[12] It is not by chance that during *Colloquia Ceranea V* John Haldon has advocated for a dismissive use of the term collapse for indeed it misrepresents chronology and complexity to change (as well as the perceptions of changes within the society at large).

[13] M. Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages*, London–New York 2016, p. 187–194.

[14] E. Zanini, *Coming to the End: Early Byzantine Cities after the mid-6th Century*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Belgrade, 22–27 August 2016). Plenary Papers*, ed. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, Belgrade 2016, p. 127–143.

[15] F. Curta, *Postcards from Maurilia or the Historiography of the Dark-age Cities of Byzantium*, EJPCA 6, 2016, p. 89–110.

conquest and not related to the religious change from Christianity to Islam[16]; for Byzantium, the focus has been traditionally on the famous juxtaposition between "continuists" (stressing that cities did survive physically after Late Antiquity) and "discontinuists" arguing for a total collapse of the antique urban organization and of social and economic life in the period under scrutiny[17]. Indeed, this juxtaposition (which I will return to later) must be regarded as simply unproductive to any serious efforts to analyze the causes and effects of the transition of cities in terms of social structures, planning, and urban fabric[18]. After all, as Martinez Jiménez concludes, what we often regard as *the slow decline of Roman towns was a process of transformation away from classical monumentality; so, what truly changed Roman towns into Christian (and Muslim) Medieval ones were [not periods of crisis] but those of stability and urban renewal (like the* […] *Umayyad ones*)[19].

Moreover, as the Byzantine exchange network was regarded as mainly centered around Constantinople, historiographical attention has been drawn to the trajectories of urban sites dotting the so-called Byzantine heartland (the Aegean and the Anatolian peninsula)[20]. In other words, the survival of Byzantine urbanism has often been identified with an evolutionary pattern based – on the one hand – on a sort of creative, cultural, and social imperative of Constantinopolitan life (regarded as the ideal and only City)[21]. In this light, other urban (provincial) sites were examined only as a makeshift reflection of the "City's" one and revealed themselves in terms of imperial patronage or/and as centers of state administration, military machinery, and ecclesiastical hierarchies with defense as the main consideration in any urban definition[22].

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[16] G. AVNI, *"From Polis to Madina" Revisited – Urban Change in Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine*, JRAS 21.3, 2011, p. 301–329. See also A. WALMSLEY, *Early Islamic Syria. An Archaeological Assessment*, London 2007, p. 72–90. Moreover, Fanny Bessard has also recently stressed the importance of imperial elites' patronage in the changes experienced by the topography and economic functionalities of early Islamic cities for *industries and marketplaces became increasingly significant sources of revenue for the authorities, which no longer derived their wealth solely from landownership* (see F. BESSARD, *Caliphs and Merchants. Cities and Economies of Power in the Near East (700–950)*, Oxford 2020 [= OSB], p. 58–59).

[17] See on this debate L. ZAVAGNO, *The Byzantine City from Heraclius to the Fourth Crusade, 610–1204. Urban Life after Antiquity*, London–New York 2021 [= NABHC], p. 38–81.

[18] H.W. DEY, *The Afterlife of the Roman City. Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2015.

[19] J. MARTINEZ JIMÉNEZ, *Crisis or Crises? The End of Roman Towns in Iberia, between the Late Roman and the Early Umayyad Period*, [in:] *Though Times. The Archeology of Crisis and Recovery. Proceedings of the Graduate Archaeology at Oxford Conferences in 2012 and 2011*, ed. E.M. VAN DER WILT, J. MARTINEZ JIMÉNEZ, with help from G. PETRUCCIOLI, Oxford 2013, p. 86.

[20] C. WICKHAM, *Framing…*, p. 29–31.

[21] N. TSIVIKIS, *Moving beyond the Invisible Cities of Byzantium*, EJPCA 10, 2020, p. 330–331.

[22] J. HOWARD JOHNSTON, *Authority and Control in the Interior of Asia Minor, Seventh-Ninth Centuries*, [in:] *Authority and Control in the Countryside. From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6th–10th Century)*, ed. A. DELATTRE, M. LEGENDRE, P. SIJPESTEJIN, Leiden 2019 [= LSIS, 9],

In my opinion, and as partially hinted at already, such an analytical approach is deceptive as it simply accepts that Byzantine urbanism was in a state of constant crisis from the late sixth century onwards[23]; furthermore, it dangerously bows towards the idea that, as Dey remarks: *there existed a single Byzantine paradigm that captured the variety of urban contexts that prevailed across the same geographical sweep in the seven and eighth century [and even beyond]*[24]. This is not to deny the importance of the so-called "thematic capitals" or the impact of the changes at an imperial level in a sort of ideological redefinition of the nature of urbanism post-Late antiquity[25]. Rather I would like to propose a more regionally based approach which should allow us to deal with the manifold realities of Byzantine urbanism on a Mediterranean geographical (and human) scale[26]. As Tsivikis concludes: *[only] in this way, we come face to face with the vast range of issues that the historical and archaeological record presents to the researcher of Byzantine urbanism*[27].

In this regard, I would like to drive one last preliminary proviso home. Indeed, it seems to me that Byzantine historiography has preferred not to think of urban change and interaction in real terms. For instance, the juxtaposition between "continuists and discontinuists" I have already referred to has been trying to encapsulate urban developments into a single abstract form or model if only partially considering the reality on the ground (the regional and subregional incarnations of the urban) or, even more importantly, the different scales of abstractions[28]. The latter include the individual level (that is, the level of the inhabitants of the single city made visible by an archaeology of the people as opposed to that of monuments)[29], the particularity of the circumstances (place and time), generalities (some characteristics which urban sites might have in common, like the presence of church buildings), the configuration of the elites (at local, imperial, and ecclesiastical level), and finally, the organization of element of urbanism on a human scale. As Ollman states:

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p. 128–171; R. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture. The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands*, Oxford 2019 [= OSHC], p. 333–352.

[23] C. Bouras, *Aspects of the Byzantine City. Eighth to Fifteenth Century*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. Laiou, Washington D.C. 2002, p. 501.

[24] H.W. Dey, *The Afterlife…*, p. 127. On the definition and urbanism in "thematic capitals" see infra and N. Tsivikis, *Byzantine Medieval Cities: Amorion and the Middle Byzantine Provincial Capitals*, Berlin (forthcoming).

[25] R. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture…*, p. 347. See also the all-encompassing and detailed analysis of the evolution of public spaces and infrastructures of the Late Antique city in L. Lavan, *Public Space in the Late Antique City*, vol. I–II, Leiden 2021 [= LAA, 5].

[26] S. Loseby, *Mediterranean Cities*, [in:] *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Rosseau, London 2009, p. 139–155.

[27] N. Tsivikis, *Moving beyond…*, p. 332.

[28] B. Ollman, *Dance in Dialectic. Steps in Marx's Method*, Urbana–Chicago 2003, p. 60–63.

[29] E. Zanini, *Appunti per una "archeologia del pane" nel Mediterraneo tardo antico*, [in:] *La Civilità del Pane. Storia, tecniche e simboli dal Mediterraneo all'Atlantico Atti del convegno internazionale di studio (Brescia, 1–6 dicembre 2014)*, ed. G. Archetti, Spoleto 2015, p. 373–375.

> in these abstractions, certain spatial and temporal boundaries and connections stand out, just as others are obscure and even invisible, making what is in practice inseparable appear separate, and the historically specific features of things disappear behind their more general forms[30].

There is no space here to fully explore the abovementioned connections and examine how these "real abstractions" posited the creation of ideological ones; nevertheless, upon focusing on a limited number of short key studies (Amorium, Comacchio, Gortyn, and Eleutherna). I will use archaeology and material culture to dissect urban bodies in comparative terms. This is in order to document the construction of urban models, structures, and infrastructures, which stemmed from diverse political and administrative policies. Particular attention will also be given to the role of fortifications as a frame of reference for public political life[31]. Defensive structures were not used not simply to stress the military importance of urban sites but also to show how architectural display operated as cultural assumptions could be (re-) discussed[32].

In this respect, a view from the so-called insular and coastal "periphery" of the empire will help us to offset the pervasive role played by the thematic capitals of the heartland, allowing us to see how coherent urban fabric could operate, be recognized, and experienced by the communities frequenting the seventh-to-ninth century regional spaces belonging to a Byzantine *koine*[33]. The latter has been defined as encompassing liminal coastal spaces as well as insular communities, promoting social contact and cultural interchange as its archaeology and material indicators (in particular ceramics) suggest a certain common cultural unity, fluid socio-political identities, and peculiar administrative practices[34]. In fact, I will focus not only on a "thematic capital" located in the Anatolian part of the heartland (Amorium, the see of the *strategōs* of the Anatolikon) but also on Comacchio, Gortyn, and Eleutherna, three cities of the abovementioned *koine*.

My choice of sites is first and foremost expedient for at least three of the abovementioned sites we have good archaeology and extensive publication of

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[30] B. Ollman, *Dance in Dialectic*…, p. 62.

[31] N. Bakirtzis, *The Practice, Perception and Experience of Byzantine Fortification*, [in:] *The Byzantine World*, ed. P. Stephenson, London–New York 2010, p. 352–376.

[32] Idem, *The Visual Language of Fortification Façades: the Walls of Thessaloniki*, M&P 9, 2005, p. 15–32.

[33] M. Veikou, *Mediterranean Byzantine Ports and Harbors in the Complex Interplay between Environment and Society. Spatial, Socio-Economic and Cultural Considerations Based on Archeological Evidence from Greece, Cyprus and Asia Minor*, [in:] *Harbours and Maritime Networks as Complex Adaptive Systems*, ed. J. Preiser-Kapeller, F. Daim, Mainz 2015, p. 51; P. Delogu, *Questioni di Mare e di Costa*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro. Luoghi di scambio nell'Alto Medioevo europeo e mediterraneo Atti del Seminario Internazionale Comacchio, 27–29 marzo 2009*, ed. S. Gelichi, R. Hodges, Turnhout 2012, p. 459–466.

[34] A. Vionis, *Bridging the Early Medieval 'Ceramic Gap' in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean (7th–9th c.): Local and Global Phenomena*, HEROM.JHRMC 9, 2020, p. 291–397.

the material culture yielded over excavation campaigns which have been conducted for several years; this not to imply that other urban and urban-like settlements have not been the focus of detailed investigations (one can think for instance of Corinth and Ephesos as well as Butrint and Syracuse)[35]. However, the current selection of urban centers allows us to bracket off the supposed predominant role of fortifications for it pairs sites where militarization was only one of the characters in the development of the Byzantine urban fabric[36]. In this respect, the four key studies embodies different trajectories of urban resilience: a Late Antique city (without a Classical past) which successfully rippled through the military confrontation between Byzantines and Arabs on the Anatolian plateau (Amorium); a small "new settlement" economically active sprouting at the fringe of the imperial territories (Comacchio); finally, two cities (Gortyn and Eleutherna) whose fate did not hinge on a military confrontation along the maritime frontier but rather stemmed from the reorientation of the urban settlement pattern on one of the most important islands of the empire like Crete. Indeed, since three of my key studies were located on insular (or coastal) spatial nodes of commercial, non-commercial, religious, and cultural interactions, they show how provincial urbanism could navigate through the changes to the Byzantine political and administrative structures in a different way from a "thematic capital"[37].

As a result, it will also be shown how the cities of the Byzantine *koine* could act as catalysts of socio-cultural, political, and economic interactions across the frontiers of a politically and economically fragmented Mediterranean[38]. Indeed, as will be seen, these urban sites were true "navigators" in an age of change (and crisis), for it was not simply their functional role within the imperial political and military superstructure to determine their fate. In fact, the look from a coastal-insular imperial edge will help us to better grasp the importance of their different geo-strategic positioning across regional and interregional shipping routes. This should help us to countermand the historiographical narrative of the survival of the "urban fittest" and reject a "biological" (and teleological) model of urbanism (birth, growth, and death as reflecting foundation, life, and decline of an urban entity)[39]. Rather, I will propose a view of cities as spaces where various lifecycles alternated as responses to the transformation of geo-political structures

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[35] See M. Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages…*, p. 81–122 with further and detailed bibliography.

[36] J. Haldon, *The End of Rome? The Transformation of the Eastern Empire in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE*, [in:] *The Roman Empire in Context. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. J.P. Arnason, K. Raaflaub, Oxford 2011, p. 209–210.

[37] On the rather elusive and debated concept of Byzantine thematic capitals see N. Tsivikis, *Byzantine Medieval Cities…* (forthcoming).

[38] P. Arthur, *From Italy to the Aegean and back – Notes on the Archaeology of Byzantine Maritime Trade*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 337–352.

[39] S. Gelichi, *The Northern Adriatic Area between the Eighth and the Ninth Century. New Landscapes, New Cities*, [in:] *Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic. Spheres of Maritime Power and Influence ca. 700–1453*, ed. M. Skoblar, Cambridge 2021, p. 117.

of political and military power; such responses had different regional and subregional tones and will allow us to fully grasp the change and interaction at the level of real abstractions.

> Instead of one unified idea of what should constitute an urban community, diverging strategies can be recognized as [for instance], when rebuilding after a catastrophic event, urban palimpsests could be created from anew or, alternatively, the local population could prefer to retrace the original text[40].

With all these provisos in mind, I would like to now begin with Amorium. More than forty years of urban archaeology have shown that the city was more than a simple military bulwark. Nor was it where religious and administrative authorities hastily sheltered behind walls in the face of the raids conducted by the Arabs across the Anatolian frontier[41]. One cannot simply assert that Amorium benefitted from its position across the main military highway connecting Constantinople to the frontier during its development in the shadow of its own fortified Upper City from the mid-seventh century onwards[42]. In fact, a large bathhouse complex (in use until the late eighth century), the resilience of the Late Antique street grid, artisanal installations (with two different phases of occupation predicating upon the local agricultural surplus), evidence of locally-made pottery, and the presence of at least four churches (one of which was the seat of the local bishop) all point to a rather dense and cohesive urban landscape as the city was continuously frequented until the Arab sack of the city in 838 CE[43]. Urban fabric, city infrastructures, and built environment were encased by the extensive fifth-sixth century Lower City walls as Amorium's double-fortified urban cores could serve as a model for the development of other Byzantine "thematic capitals" like Corinth, Ankara, or Amastris[44].

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[40] I. Jacobs, *Looking in Two Directions: Urban (Re)building in Sixth-century Asia Minor*, [in:] *Cities as Palimpsests? Responses to Antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism*, ed. E. Key Fowden, S. Çağaptay, E. Zychowicz-Coghill, L. Blanke, Oxford 2022, p. 261.

[41] Z. Demirel-Gökalp, N. Tsivikis, *Understanding Urban Transformation in Amorium from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, [in:] *Proceedings of the Plenary Sessions. XXIV International Byzantine Congress, Venice–Padua 22–27 August, 2022*, ed. E. Fiori, M. Trizio, Venice 2022, p. 325–345; K. Belke, M. Restle, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. IV, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, Wien 1984, p. 71–83.

[42] K. Belke, *Transport and Communication*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia. From the End of Late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks*, ed. P. Niewhöhner, Oxford 2017, p. 30–32.

[43] F. Curta, *Postcards from Maurilia…*, p. 100; C. Lightfoot, M. Lightfoot, *Amorium. An Archaeological Guide*, Istanbul 2007, p. 48–59.

[44] C. Lightfoot, *Amorium*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia…*, p. 333–341; N. Tsivikis, *Amorium and the Ever-Changing Urban Space: From Early Byzantine Provincial City to Middle Provincial Capital*, [in:] *Space and Communities in Byzantine Anatolia. Papers from the Fifth International Sevgi Gönül Symposium*, ed. N. Kontogiannis, T. Uyar, Istanbul 2021, p. 200–201.

If it is clear that the army acted as a stimulus for the local economy and it established a secure and fortified presence in the so-called Upper City, it can hardly be stated that the Byzantine high command withdrew from the site completely on the lookout for an unassailable setting uphill[45]. In fact, the Byzantine state also had a central role in planning and executing the complex Lower fortification system (as further restored in the late seventh/early eighth century)[46]. In this light, John Haldon has recently added nuance to the concept of the provincial military (or better thematic) capital after the collapse of the Eastern provinces in the seventh century[47]. So, Amorium should be regarded as an exception to a seventh-to--eighth-century pattern of configuration of urban life in Anatolia, recently described by Philippe Niewhöner as a largely deurbanized plateau[48]. Indeed, on the one hand, Amorium was a relatively minor center in the Hellenistic and Roman times (as nearby Pessinous was way more important well into the sixth century)[49]; on the other hand, the city took off in the seventh century due to its strategic and central (to Anatolian land-routes) position, but also despite the fact that it was not naturally defended, had no man-made water-supply infrastructures, and lacked Late Antique fortifications. More important, its countryside seems to have remained relatively unaffected by the seasonal Arab raids. Archaeology and material culture (as partially mentioned) point to an urban market supplied by local farmers as well as artisanal workshops processing local crops and manufacturing local amphorae for its transportation[50]; last but not least, one should also point to the Amorium's countryside – rich in water sources and host to a variety of (undefended) religious sites like Germia, where a church and a sanctuary dedicated to Saint Michael was uninterruptedly frequented by pilgrims for the entire Dark Ages[51].

> [It was only] after the tragic sack of 838 that the rise of a militarized provincial elite paired with the construction or remodeling of defensive installations around the principle of a central heavily-defended fortress of a more-or-less entirely military nature; a fortress that differed functionally from the upper city of the period before this[52].

Nevertheless, it is clear that Amorium fulfilled a function as an administrative base behind the frontier for the state and its military apparatus and as integral to

[45] C. Lightfoot, *The Survival of Cities in Byzantine Anatolia. The Case of Amorium*, B 68.1, 1998, p. 65.
[46] N. Tsivikis, *Amorium and the Ever-Changing…*, p. 201.
[47] J. Haldon, *What Was a Provincial Military Capital?*, [in:] *Byzantine Medieval Cities…* (forthcoming).
[48] P. Niewhöhner, *Urbanism*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia…*, p. 39–40.
[49] N. Tsivikis, *Amorium and the Ever-Changing…*, p. 192.
[50] C. Lightfoot, *Business as Usual? Archaeological evidence for Byzantine Commercial Enterprise at Amorium in the Seventh to Eleventh Centuries*, [in:] *Trade and Markets in Byzantium*, ed. C. Morrisson, Washington D.C. 2012 [= DOBSC], p. 177–191.
[51] P. Niewhöhner, *Germia*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia…*, p. 345–346.
[52] J. Haldon, *What Was a Provincial…* (forthcoming).

the Church institution. It is not by chance that the city offers an example of uninterrupted use of religious edifices and buildings as landmarks of resilient urban space[53]. An urban space which could be defined as Byzantine medieval and regarded as a distinctive notional and analytical category, in dialogue but also in occasional opposition with its Greco-Roman past[54]. In fact, if we move away from Anatolia and focus our attention on the so-called northern Adriatic crescent, we are confronted with urban functions and landscapes which did not hinge on the military and administrative reorganization of the Byzantine state[55].

Built on a set of mounds surrounded by canals and marshes, Comacchio was located at the intersection of the fluvial, lagoon, and maritime routes linking the Po valley with the Adriatic (and the Mediterranean)[56]. Comacchio thrived at the interface between the Carolingian and the Byzantine political spheres of influence (and exchange/shipping networks). The rise of Comacchio mirrored the fall of Ravenna as the capital of the Byzantine exarchate in 751[57]. If Ravenna had maintained its central and ruling position in the Byzantine possessions in Italy, neither Comacchio nor (later) Venice might have existed or survived[58]. Indeed, although *magistri militum* are documented in the settlement (betraying a clear Byzantine political and ideological influence), its ruling class was generically described as *habitatores* in a diplomatic treaty with the Lombards dated to 715 (or 730) and *de facto* legislated their own conduct[59]. In fact, Comacchio developed (at least partially) urban functions framed by a vital economy based upon the trade relationship between the Western and Byzantine worlds[60]. The "Comacchiese" landscape

[53] N. Tsivikis, *Amorium and the Ever-Changing…*, p. 207; see in particular, E. Ivison, *Kirche und Religiöses Leben im Byzantinische Amorium*, [in:] *Byzanz. Das Ròmerreich im Mittelalter*, vol. II.1, ed. F. Daim, J. Drauschke, Mainz 2010 [= MRGZ, 84], p. 309–343; E. Ivison, *Amorium in the Byzantine Dark Ages (Seventh to Ninth Centuries)*, [in:] *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlements in Europe and Byzantium*, vol. II, *Byzantium, Pliska and the Balkans*, ed. J. Henning, Berlin 2007, p. 25–59.

[54] N. Tsivikis, *Amorium and the Ever-Changing…*, p. 215.

[55] M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD 300–900*, Cambridge Massachusetts 2001, p. 361–369.

[56] S. Gelichi et al., *Castrum igne combussit. Comacchio fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, ArM 33, 2006, p. 77–80.

[57] J. Herrin, *Ravenna. Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe*, Princeton 2020, p. 317–341; V. West-Harling, *Rome, Ravenna and Venice, 750–1000. Byzantine Heritage, Imperial Present, and the Construction of City Identity*, Oxford 2020, p. 26–27, 101–102.

[58] C. Wickham, *Comacchio and the Central Mediterranean*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 507.

[59] S. Gelichi et al., *Castrum igne combussit…*, p. 75–77 (but he erroneously dates it to 740), and S. Gelichi, *Comacchio: A Liminal Community in a Nodal Point during the Early Middle Ages*, [in:] *Venice and its Neighbors from the 8th to 11th Century. Through Renovation and Continuity*, ed. S. Gelichi, S. Gasparri, Leiden 2017 [= MMe, 111], p. 142–143. On origins of the treaty (so-called Liutprand's Capitulary) see also S. Gelichi, *Lupicinus presbiter. Una breve nota sulle istituzioni ecclesiastiche comacchiesi delle origini*, [in:] *Ricerca come incontro. Archeologi, paleografi e storici per Paolo Delogu*, ed. G. Barone, A. Esposito, C. Frova, Rome 2013, p. 41–60.

[60] R. Hodges, *Adriatic Sea Trade in an European Perspective*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 229.

and socio-political fabric remind us of the so-called north European emporia: a polyfocal ("city of islands") unfortified settlement accessible mainly by waterways, revolving around wooden structures (docks and quays) and characterized by large quantities of concentrated moveable wealth (with lack of important religious centers), specialized craft production, and above all, as McCormick concludes: *a convergent seasonal ecology of the three activities of salt making, shipping, and selling, [that] imposed a specialization of labor*[61].

Ceramic evidence points to a good degree of local production as paired with imports like globular amphorae[62]. Indeed, it is not by chance that this typology of vessels has been identified as the main marker of the Byzantine *koine*, for they also paired with painted wares, ovoidal amphorae, and chafing dishes circulating throughout the Mediterranean as produced in various workshops (located in Cyprus as well as Crete, southern Anatolia, Cherson, and southern Italy)[63]. Globular amphorae point to what Vroom describes as *an intra-regional long-distance or cabotage movement* […] *as well as an active interregional exchange between shipping zones (with overlapping networks of production and distribution)*[64]. Easy to handle during loading and unloading, often in simply equipped harbors (like the wooden docks of Comacchio), globular amphorae were manufactured between the seventh and the tenth century across the territories of the *koine* (with different types, styles, and morphology) and circulated extensively within the Byzantine exchange network[65].

So Comacchio shows how a cityscape and built environment similar to those of contemporary northern European *emporia* could function in the Mediterranean, as ceramic evidence shows us that it tapped into the northern Adriatic exchange system, bridging into Lombard and later Carolingian economic spheres[66].

If we move now to the eastern Mediterranean and to the island of Crete and the transformation of its urban settlement pattern, we are yet confronted by yet an "unreal abstraction". This has to do with the idea that the seventh and eighth-century Arab raids hitting the Aegean (and Eastern Mediterranean at large) caused an abandonment of coastal sites and a sort of run to the hill on the part of the local inhabitants[67]; the demographic retrenchment has been, in this respect, linked to

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[61] M. McCormick, *Comparing and Connecting: Comacchio and the Early Medieval Trading Towns*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 501.

[62] S. Gelichi, *Comacchio: A Liminal Community…*, p. 153–159.

[63] J. Vroom, *Ceramics*, [in:] *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia…*, p. 177–186.

[64] Idem, *From One Coast to Another: Early Medieval Ceramics in the Southern Adriatic Region*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 391.

[65] C. Negrelli, *Towards a Definition of Early Medieval Pottery: Amphorae and Other Vessels in the Northern Adriatic between the 7th and the 8th Centuries*, [in:] *Da un mare all'altro…*, p. 207–219.

[66] A. Augenti, *Città e Porti dall'Antichità al Medioevo*, Roma 2010, p. 152–157.

[67] C. Tsigonaki, A. Sarris, *Recapturing the Dynamics of the Early Byzantine Settlements in Crete: Old Problems – New Interpretations through an Interdisciplinary Approach*, Unpublished Conference Paper LAC 2014, p. 1–11, http://lac2014proceedings.nl/article/view/29/5 [1 V 2023].

the appearance of fortifications as erected in Cretan urban sites like Gortyn (the main political and religious center of the island on the southern-central Mesaoria plain) and Eleutherna (on the central mountain range)[68].

In the case of Gortyn, one of the better-excavated sites for the period under examination, a portion of the city (the acropolis) was enclosed by a new set of walls; nevertheless, as it will be seen, Gortyn preserved a multifunctional image with different foci of settlement (both inside and outside the wall). A comparison with the but also well-excavated walls of Eleutherna allows us to reassess the impact of the fortifications as they did not simply entail the shrinking of the city and subsequent decline of the urban space, but rather the separation of controlled areas within the city[69].

Through the study of the fortifications of other coastal sites (like Matala), the issue of the abandonment of the cities of Crete in the seventh century is placed on a new footing [for] strong similarities of the masonry style, building technique and general forms with Gortyn and Eleutherna postpone them to the seventh or beginning of the eighth century[70].

Here it is also important to stress that – as partially mentioned above – the role and significance of fortifications as part of any urban landscape transcend the rather obvious issues of defense and protection[71]. As Bakirtzis has cogently shown in the case of urban settlements like Serres, Kavala, and above all, Thessaloniki, fortifications as a tool to control and protect strategic urban sites, were experienced on a daily basis and therefore became a vital part of local urban culture for their visual and theoretical image came to denote self-assurance and civic pride[72]. Moreover, their building technique and inclusion of *spolia* did not betray a lack of resources and hasty construction (pragmatism); rather, *spolia* were markers of a deliberate process of dialogue with a city's past (mnemonic), pursued through a careful selection (aesthetic) of those best pieces (antiquarianism) showcased and positioned in a way to exalt particular sections or areas of the city[73].

[68] A similar model of urban retrenchment from the coast has been proposed for Cyprus (see L. Zavagno, *Cyprus and its Sisters. Reassessing the Role of Large Islands at the End of the Long Late Antiquity (ca. 600 – ca. 800)*, [in:] *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity. History and Archaeology between the Sixth and the Eighth Centuries*, ed. I. Jacobs, P. Panaydes, Oxford 2023, p. 89–90.

[69] C. Tsigonaki, *Les Villes Crétoises aux VII^e et VIII^e siècles: l'apport des recherches archéologiques à Eleutherna*, ASAAMIO 85, Serie III, 7, 2007, p. 296–297.

[70] C. Tsigonaki, A. Sarris, *Recapturing…*, p. 6–7.

[71] C. Tsigonaki, *Crete. A Border at the Sea. Defensive Works and Landscape-Midscape Changes, Seventh–Eighth Centuries A.D.*, [in:] *Change and Resilience. The Occupation of Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity*, ed. M. Cau Ontiveros, C. Mas Florit, Providence 2019, p. 165–168.

[72] N. Bakirtzis, *The Practice, Perception…*, p. 368.

[73] On the use and importance of spolia with relation to urban space and spatial politics see H. Saradi, *The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence*, IJCT 3.4, 1997, p. 395–423; M. Veikou, *Spatial Control and Formation of Public Space*, [in:] *Space*

This intertwined with the abovementioned issue of controlling the movement of people as often inscriptions embedded on walls (together with apotropaic crosses and even Christian "icons") indicates important passages (like city gates) to and from certain areas of the city. In other words, one should be careful and avoid equating the erection of fortifications as a sign of demographic decline, shrinking of the urban landscape, and/or abandonment of parts of former urban spaces[74].

In this sense, the case of Gortyn is exemplary. Indeed, the coronation of the acropolis with a new ring of walls reminds us of the Upper City of Amorium[75]; however, contrary to the Anatolian city and its lack of substantial Greek and Roman urban landscape and fabric, the Gortynian urban space retained large parts of its "Classical" monumentality (for instance, the orthogonal road–network). It coexisted with artisanal workshops and commercial activities (as documented in the so-called Byzantine Houses) encroaching onto the public space and pointing to the considerable social and economic vitality of the ecclesiastical and administrative elites[76].

Sigillographic evidence points to the presence of fiscal and military officials and possibly a concentration of the administrative and political function on the fortified acropolis in a similar way as in Eleutherna[77]. As Tsigonaki states: *the wall of Eleutherna is an integral part of the district it protected. Archaeological evidence* […] *indicates that a monumental church, the buildings around it, and the wall belong to the same building program dated to the seventh century*[78]. However, in Gortyn, lead seals dated to the eighth century also point to the presence of the main ecclesiastical and governmental authorities: in particular, the Cretan *archontes*[79]. *Archontes* (a rather general term, indicating non-thematic military and political leaders in charge of the local government) coexisted with several military officials as found in other areas of the Byzantine *koine* as administering urban sites (like Palermo), archipelagos (like Malta or the Balearics), large islands

and Communities…, p. 477–499 and I. Jevtic, S. Yalman, *Spolia Reincarnated. Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, Istanbul 2021.

[74] C. Tsigonaki, *Crete. A Border at the Sea…*, p. 180; S. Gallimore, *The Transformation of Crete in Late Antiquity. Sixth–Tenth Centuries CE*, [in:] *Archaeology of the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Castrorao Barba, D. Tanasi, R. Micicchè, Gainesville 2023, p. 55.

[75] R. Perna, *L'Acropoli di Gortina. La Tavola "A" della carta archeologica delle città di Gortina*, Macerata 2012.

[76] F. Curta, *Postcards from Maurilia…*, p. 96–98; E. Zanini, *Macro-Economy, Micro-Ecology, and the Fate of Urbanized Landscape in Late Antique and Early Byzantine Crete*, [in:] *Change and Resilience…*, p. 156–158.

[77] D. Tzougarakis, *Byzantine Lead Seals from Crete*, SBS 2, 1990, p. 137–152.

[78] C. Tsigonaki, *Crete. A Border at the Sea…*, p. 172–175.

[79] S. Cosentino, I. Baldini, E. Lippolis, G. Marsili, E. Sgarzi, *Gortina, Mitropolis e il suo Episcopato nel VII e nell'VIII secolo. Ricerche Preliminari*, ASAAMIO 90, Serie III, 12, 2012, p. 245–246.

(like Cyprus, Sardinia (in the ninth century) and, indeed, Crete) as well as military outposts (like Butrint)[80].

The presence and importance of the *archontes* and members of the local bureaucratic machinery as well as army officials paired with the ecclesiastical authorities. In this sense, we should be reminded that Gortyn remained an important pilgrimage site as well as the seat of the Cretan archbishopric based in the large basilica of Mitropolis[81]. But Mitropolis was only one of several ecclesiastical *foci* of the city, as shown by the presence of urban monasteries (in the area of the former Praetorium), churches like the Basilica of Mavropapa, and several *diakoniai*[82]. One of these is indeed mentioned in the Life of the Cretan Archbishop Andreas (who lived in the first half of the ninth century)[83]. He seems to have sponsored a large spate of building activity focusing on the systematic restoration or erection of churches, including the construction of a large complex including a hospital and a church dedicated to the *Theotokos Blachernitissa* (possibly the modern church of Ayos Titos) with clear reference to the homonymous church in Constantinople[84].

Indeed, Gortyn presents us with a polyfocal urban topography and an urban landscape, which seemed to have maintained its coherence in terms of fabric and morphology well into the eighth century[85]. In Gortyn, urban life seems to have "overflowed" the ring of seventh-century walls crowning the acropolis and developed throughout "islands" of socio-political patronage, elite and sub-elite residence, and artisanal and commercial activities which characterized its early medieval phase[86]. My reference to water is deliberate here, for in Gortyn we can document the restoration of the local water system in the sixth century[87]; by following the infrastructures that satisfied one of the most basic needs of the urban population, it is indeed possible to weave its structural elements (mainly aqueducts) into the city regarded as a "complex organism"[88]. The importance of water, and its structures are indicators of population levels, density, and occupation of the urban landscape as well as markers of the political status and power of new

[80] S. Cosentino, *A Longer Antiquity? Cyprus, Insularity and the Economic Transition*, CCEC 43, 2013, p. 101–103.

[81] S. Cosentino, I. Baldini, E. Lippolis, G. Marsili, E. Sgarzi, *Gortina, Mitropolis…*, p. 274.

[82] C. Tsigonaki, *Gortyn, Eleutherna, and their Neighbourhoods. The Politics of Transformation (Fourth to Early Ninth Centuries)*, [in:] *The Byzantine Neighbourhood. Urban Space and Political Action*, ed. F. Kondyli, B. Anderson, London 2022 [= BBOS], p. 183–184.

[83] M.-F. Auzépy, *La carrière d'André de Crète*, BZ 88, 1995, p. 1–12.

[84] C. Tsigonaki, *Crete. A Border at the Sea…*, p. 168–174.

[85] S. Cosentino, *From Gortyn to Heraklion? A Note on Cretan Urbanism during the 8th Century*, BΣυμ 29, 2019, p. 73–89.

[86] S. Cosentino, I. Baldini, E. Lippolis, G. Marsili, E. Sgarzi, *Gortina, Mitropolis…*, p. 290–291.

[87] E. Giorgi, *Archeologia dell'acqua a Gortina di Creta in età protobizantina*, Oxford 2017; C. Tsigonaki, *Gortyn, Eleutherna…*, p. 180–184.

[88] E. Giorgi, *Archeologia…*, p. 7.

"powerful" individuals (*potentiores*); they presided over the management and location of the distributive outlets which in Gortyn also bespoke of a multifocal settlement pattern developing from the seventh century although within an impoverished and scattered urban fabric[89].

Local, imperial, and ecclesiastical elites presided upon the resilience of the local economy by underpinning levels of demand and supply of local markets. Archaeology has shed light on an artisanal quarter (so-called Byzantine houses, which remained in use until the second half of the seventh century) and a large residential building (whose roof collapsed in the eighth century) whose material culture proved it was inhabited by individuals of high status[90]. Indeed, locally made globular amphorae (manufactured in other coastal sites of the islands like Pseira) and painted wares (and coarse wares) have been yielded in Gortynian production facilities (whereas a local production of amphorae has been documented in some Eleutherna workshops, where also a first attempt was made to manufacture glazed pottery during the early eighth century)[91]. It is also worth noticing that excavations in Gortyn have also yielded eighth-century Constantinopolitan Glazed White Wares as well as Egyptian Red Slip Wares that paired with Levantine ceramics and North African amphorae documented in other areas of Crete. These all point to *connections with regions under Arab control [for] political issues that define Byzantine Arab relations for much of this period did not necessarily stifle economic connectivity*[92].

If Eleutherna seems to have survived (probably due to the continuous importance of its local bishop), Gortyn faded away as an urban center in the second half of the eighth century[93]. This had little to do with the consequences of the Arab incursions but rather owed to a clear re-orientation of the Cretan settlement pattern. In this respect, the northern coast of the island seems to have gained increased relevance in political, military, and commercial terms. It is not by chance that Herakelion went through a process of important re-functionalization of the urban fabric, demographic strengthening, and institutionalization (in secular and religious terms) starting from the mid-eighth century on[94]. Indeed, as Randazzo summarizes: *the case of redefinition of Cretan urbanism was part of a broader state-sponsored*

[89] E. Zanini, *Coming to the End…*, p. 130–131.

[90] Idem, *Macro-Economy…*, p. 157.

[91] N. Poulou, *Production and Consumption in Crete from the mid-7th to the 10th Century AD: The Archaeological Evidence*, [in:] *Feeding the Byzantine City. The Archaeology of Consumption in the Eastern Mediterranean (ca. 500–1500)*, ed. J. Vroom, Turnhout 2023 [= MPMMA, 5], p. 115; idem, *Digging in the Dark: The Islands of the Aegean and Crete from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, Late Sixth through Ninth Centuries CE*, [in:] *Archaeology of the Mediterranean…*, p. 34–39.

[92] S. Gallimore, *The Transformation…*, p. 61; J. Vroom, *Production, Exchange and Consumption of Ceramics in the Byzantine Mediterranean (ca. 7th–15th Centuries)*, [in:] *Feeding the Byzantine City…*, p. 285.

[93] C. Tsigonaki, *Gortyn*, *Eleutherna…*, p. 198.

[94] S. Cosentino, *From Gortyn to Heraklion*?…, p. 81–83.

process aimed at enhancing the relationships between the northern coast of Crete and [the Aegean exchange network as revolving around] Constantinople[95].

To conclude, in this paper, I have tried to outline regional trajectories of urbanism in and beyond the Byzantine Mediterranean. In fact, only one of the sites, Amorium, could be regarded as fully integral to the renewing political, military, and administrative structures characterizing the Byzantine heartland (and Sicily). Instead, Comacchio was a semi-independent commercial hub, while Gortyn (and Eleutherna) remained foreign to the full militarization of Byzantine Anatolia, the Aegean, and Sicily along "thematic" lines (as Crete like other insular and coastal areas of the Byzantine *koine* was ruled by *archontes*). Gortyn, and in particular Comacchio, presided upon zones of economic contact and cultural interaction as part of an insular and coastal Byzantine *koine* (although less archaeologically documented in Crete than in the northern Adriatic). This should allow us to go beyond the historiographical issue of continuity and discontinuity of Byzantine urbanism I have repeatedly referred to. We should rather acknowledge the diverse types of the post-Roman Mediterranean city as diminished in size and population, less aesthetically impressive, and organically planned, but still resilient in terms of urban functions and economies of scale.

Indeed, I have tried to stress the distinctive origins and development of different Byzantine cities: a land-locked (but well-connected) site central to the new configuration of the Byzantine political, military, and territorial structures of governance vis-à-vis some insular and coastal sites differently benefitting from their position along Byzantine Mediterranean borderlands. I have focused first on an Anatolian urban settlement with no Classical past like Amorium, stemming from the administrative reorganization of the empire from the late seventh century onward; second, I have examined a newly founded, doubly liminal site like Comacchio, whose predominant economic function was *de facto* rooted in its strategic position on the cusp of the Carolingian and Byzantine economic systems; and finally, I have presented two insular key-studies like Gortyn, the capital of Byzantine Crete, and Eleutherna, a smaller urban center, and a bishopric, as both experienced a slow loss of political and military importance in the course of the eighth century (to the advantage of the settlements dotting the northern coast of Crete).

On the one hand, Amorium's urban resilience in demographic, infrastructural, and economic terms exceeded the double-walled core and revealed an unsuspectedly (until a few years ago) dense and vital urban landscape. On the other hand, better archaeology has shed light on a newly built settlement like Comacchio, which should be regarded as a gateway community tapped into the economic

[95] M. Randazzo, *Knossos and Heraklion in the Byzantine-Islamic Transition (Late 7th – mid-10th Century). An Archaeological Perspective into Shifting Patterns of Settlement Ruralisation and Urbanisation on Medieval Crete*, JGA 5, 2019, p. 455.

vitality of the Adriatic network of the exchange; it was characterized by an emporia-like urban fabric and highly functional plan (city-of-islands). Lastly, Gortyn has helped us to fully reassess the role of fortifications, not only were they erected in the main religious and administrative center of the island but also in other Cretan urban centers (like Eleutherna). Indeed, contrary to Comacchio and similar to Amorium, Gortyn, and Eleutherna also boasted defensive enceintes that protected and promoted the main administrative and religious urban foci as others nevertheless thrived outside the walled area. The diversity of Amorium, Comacchio, and Gortyn (and Eleutherna) in terms of appearance and built urban landscape encourages us to resist the temptation of identifying a one-size-fits-all model of urbanism and acknowledge and analyze its different, regional, and sub-regional forms of development. As more archaeological light is shed on these cities, one realizes how, contrary to Loach's "navvies", Byzantine urban life between the seventh and the ninth century did not simply hinge on an "abstract" and desperate competition for the few resources available; rather, it was the variety of local solutions and the ability to promote adaptive patterns of urban change (as predicated upon the ebbs and flows of Mediterranean politics) which reflected the 'real' Byzantine city as diversified in its outlook and planning but nevertheless cohesive, "communal" and coherent in the passage from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.

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