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Maritime Exchange between Italy and Gaul in Late Antiquity and its Mediterranean Contexts

Simon Loseby, University of Sheffield

Abstract *Maritime exchange between Italy and Gaul in late Antiquity*
This paper looks at traffic across the northern Tyrrhenian Sea in late antiquity first from the perspective of travel and communications, and then in more detail at the movement of goods. Although maritime links between Italy and Gaul remained routine from c. 400-c. 700, textual and archaeological evidence for the shipment of Italian merchandise to Gaul, or vice versa, remains quite scarce. Such traffic can, however, be set within the wider context of the involvement of the two regions in the interregional Mediterranean exchange-system. This allows us to consider how far the shipment of goods from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean to Gaul may have been mediated through Italian ports, and to explore some of the different ways in which these same imports have often been perceived within the historiography of Merovingian Gaul and Byzantine Italy.

Keywords: Maritime Exchange; Late antique Gaul; Late antique Italy
Parole chiave: Scambio marittimo; Tarda antichità in Gallia; Tarda antichità in Italia

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Maritime Exchange between Italy and Gaul in Late Antiquity and its Mediterranean Contexts

Simon Loseby

On 17 April 418, the Emperor Honorius issued from Ravenna a 'most salutary' ordinance embracing the suggestion of Agricola, the praetorian prefect of Gaul, that the Council of the Seven Provinces, a recent innovation which had swiftly fallen into desuetude 'either because of the indifference of the times or the neglect of the usurpers', be revived[1]. Unsurprisingly, the imperial chancery preferred not to dwell on these recent miseries, choosing instead to concentrate its rhetorical firepower on extolling the manifold qualities of Arles, the city in which the council was annually to meet, which is dignified here as *Constantina urbs*, and had been the capital of the Gallic prefecture since the late 390s[2]:

For such is the convenience of the site, such the wealth of its traffic, such the number of travellers at that place that whatever is produced anywhere is more readily exchanged there... Already, indeed, it is naturally the case that the descent of the Rhône and the ascent of the Tyrrhenian Sea make neighbouring and almost coterminous the one which flows past and the other which flows around. Since, therefore, all the best that the earth has to offer maintains this city, anything produced in each part of it is brought to it by sail, oar, cart, land, sea, river: how should one not believe the great benefit to our Gaul when we order that an assembly be held in that city in which such great opportunity for traffic and trading is made manifest by some divine gift[3].

[1] *Ep. Arel.* 8: «interpolatum vel incuria temporum vel desidia tyrannorum». It has become conventional to call this document the *Constitutio saluberrima*, though its opening adjective in fact refers to the wisdom of Agricola's suggestion: «saluberrima magnificentiae tuae suggestione».

[2] The transfer of the prefecture from Trier to Arles is more likely to have occurred shortly after 395 than in 407: see most recently Mathisen 2013.

[3] *Ep. Arel.* 8: the style hardly lends itself to literal translation, but the thrust is clear.

Given that the decree was announcing what was essentially a political decision, designed to reassure the local *possessores* of the restoration of regional order (and perhaps to curb their anxieties at the imminent concession of part of Aquitania to the Goths), its prolonged emphasis on the role played by Arles in mediating commercial relations between Gaul, the Mediterranean, and the Arab and Assyrian lands beyond appears somewhat superfluous[4]. Perhaps the drafters of the constitution were taking the opportunity to draw attention from more immediate concerns by offering their own, particularly grandiloquent variation on an established late antique theme. A few decades earlier Ausonius had similarly stressed the role of the Rhône in bringing the trade of the Roman world to Arles[5]. At much the same time, the author of the *Expositio totius mundi* succinctly summed Gaul up from his Levantine perspective as a province where, thanks to the imperial presence, one could get everything, albeit at a price. He encapsulated this by reference to two cities, the imperial capital at Trier, somewhat confusingly described as 'mediterranean' (in the literal sense of being in the midst of the land), and its helpmeet Arles, 'situated by the sea', which 'receives the merchandise of the whole world and sends it on to the aforesaid city'[6]. Even before Arles reached the peak of its political importance in the early fifth century, the idea of its significance as a hub of interregional exchange and communications was already firmly implanted in the minds of contemporaries around the Mediterranean.

None of these sources make specific reference to Italian trade in their praise of Arles: Ausonius and the *Expositio* couch their praise of its traffic in global terms, and although the imperial constitution picks out five regions as illustrations of the varied sources of the imports to be found there, Italy is not among them[7]. The authors of these texts also focus primarily on

[4] For the historical context, see Matthews 1975, p. 329-51.

[5] Auson., *Ordo nob. urb.*, 73-80; cfr. *Ordo nob. urb.*, 124-8, for the arrival of cargoes from 'the whole world' at the port of Narbonne.

[6] *Expos. Mundi* 58: «Post Pannoniam Gallia provincia, quae, cum maxima sit et imperatorem semper egeat, hunc ex se habet. Sed propter maioris praesentiam, omnia in multitudine abundat, sed plurimi pretii. Ciuitatem autem maximam dicunt habere quae uocatur Triueris, ubi et habitare dominus dicitur, et est mediterranea. Similiter autem habet alteram ciuitatem in omnibus ei adiuuantem, quae est super mare, quam dicunt Arelatum, quae ab omni mundo negotia accipiens praedictae ciuitati emittit».

[7] The regions highlighted are Oriens, Arabia, Assyria, Africa, and Hispania: «quidquid

the utility of Arles and the Rhône in funnelling seaborne imports into Gaul rather than as an outlet for Gallic exports across the Mediterranean. The problems of isolating Italian traffic amid the wider maritime influx of commodities into late antique Gaul, and of identifying the goods which might conceivably have been flowing in the opposite direction from Gaul to Italy will recur throughout this paper. Back in the late republican and early imperial period, trade across the Ligurian Sea had run decidedly hot, first as Italian merchants looked to exploit emerging Gallic markets in tandem with the expansion of Roman power, and then when Gallic wares proved appealing to consumers around the western Mediterranean, and particularly at Rome[8]. By late antiquity, however, those days were long gone. In contrast with widely-distributed commodities such as Baetican oil, African pottery, or Palestinian wine, traffic in Italian and Gallic foodstuffs and pottery had since the third century been largely confined within regional exchange-circuits rather than enjoying wider circulation around the Mediterranean. The disintegration of the western empire did nothing to change this, as we shall see. While our textual sources for maritime communications between Gaul and Italy are sufficiently rich and consistent to indicate the existence of regular seaborne traffic between the two regions between the fifth and seventh centuries, regardless of seismic political shifts, it is therefore more challenging to specify the nature of these exchanges, let alone the evolution of their volume and significance over time.

Although these difficulties cannot be wholly circumvented, the question of the character and scale of exchange between Gaul and Italy in late antiquity presents an interesting problem not only in its own right, in counterpoint to the various other forms of political and cultural contact considered in this volume, but also methodologically. It brings out the persistent limitations in our understanding of the role in interregional Mediterranean exchange played by those regions that did not export ceramic material on a significant scale, in effect forcing us to fall back on the more evanescent indications provided by the written sources. These texts are at their most informative about aspects of the route, and our exploration of maritime traffic between Gaul and Italy can logically begin there. We will find ourselves in less well-charted waters in considering what can be said

enim dives Oriens, quidquid ordoratus Arabs, quidquid delicatus Assyrius, quod Africa fertilis, quod speciosa Hyspania...».

[8] Tchernia 1983, 2016, ch. 18; Woolf 1998, p. 169-205; Laubenheimer 2001.

of the shipment of Italian merchandise to Gaul (and vice versa), but we can at least look to situate such traffic within the better-known context of the late antique Mediterranean exchange-system as a whole. In particular, with the aid of shipwreck evidence, and of an assortment of textual vignettes that hint at the vitality of the maritime route, we can consider the role that Italian ports might have played in mediating the movement of goods from other regions of the Mediterranean to Gaul, and the potential significance of this traffic, particularly from the Gallic perspective.

Setting sail

The route across the northern Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Seas between Italy and Gaul can lay claim to being one of the best-documented of late antiquity, both by a comparative abundance of incidental references to maritime communications between the two regions, and, less happily, by the evidence of the shipwrecks that mark unsuccessful attempts to negotiate its dangers. Two very different textual sources even dedicate themselves to delineating it, wholly or in part, in highly specific detail. One is a composite nautical itinerary preserved within the collection known as the *Itinerarium Maritimarum*, which sets out the coastal route from Rome's harbour at Portus to Arles in its entirety. This itinerary, plausibly dated to the decades around 500, lists in sequence 58 halts along the coasts of Tuscany, Liguria, and Provence, variously categorised as ports, landings, rivers, beaches, and, in the case of Lérins, islands[9]. We leap from pithy prose to ekphrastic poetry with the second source, the *De Reditu Suo*, in which Rutilius Namatianus purports to take the reader with him on his return voyage to his native Gaul from Rome's harbour at Portus in the autumn of 417. In its extant state, however, the poem gets only as far as the dazzling cliffs of Luni (the twenty-sixth of the stops listed in the *Maritime Itinerary*) before breaking off, having covered around a third of the distance given by the cumulative (if slightly erratic) mileages of the *Itinerary*. Two further fragments afford us a fleeting glimpse of what looks like Liguria, but sadly we never see the southern Gallic coast through Rutilius' eyes,

[9] Uggeri 2002 puts the compilation of the text between 511 and 535, when the Ostrogoths controlled both Provence and Italy; Arnaud 2004 emphasises the composite and dynamic character of the text in placing it within a wider fifth- or sixth-century date bracket.

nor reach the poet's ultimate destination, whether that was Narbonne, Marseille, or most probably Arles.

Rutilius' recreation of his voyage is sufficiently meticulous to lend it a verisimilitude that has encouraged numerous efforts to treat it as some sort of ship's log, but his narrative is too artfully varied in its progress, too providential in its opportunities, and too infeasible in some of its details for it to be treated as a work of documentary realism rather than considered artifice[10]. Nor is trade one of the themes that crosses the poet's literary horizon, and even if a *mercator* and some shipwrecks make tantalising appearances at the end of the first fragment, these impenetrable references could as easily be metaphorical as literal[11]. Similarly, Rutilius' nods to the iron mines of Elba and to salt-pans near Vada show no concern for the exchange of these commodities, but serve instead as vehicles for scientific digression, intertextual allusion, and the recurring leitmotif of change over time, while the poet's recognition of Pisa's reputation for its merchandise and maritime wealth is as perfunctory as it is enthusiastic[12]. But the poet's powers of description do vividly implicate the reader in his journey, offering a series of insights into the maritime route which, hazardous as it would be to trust them in every particular, take us as close as we can hope to get to the experience of sailing across the 'blue Etruscan Sea' in late antiquity[13]. Admittedly, unlike most late antique voyagers between Italy and Gaul, Rutilius did not have to find a berth on a trade ship. He travelled in a bespoke convoy of *parvae cymbae*, light and manoeuvrable craft that could be propelled by sail or oar, draw up on beaches and in river-mouths as well as in formal harbours, and were well-adapted, as he explicitly emphasises, to finding shelter from the vagaries of autumn wind and weather among the numerous crevices along the shore[14]. Even so, some of the navigational parameters he describes would have applied

[10] Pryor 1989 offers a particularly considered example of the ship's log approach, but the perils of taking Rutilius too literally are sardonically brought out by Paschoud 1978.

[11] Rut. Namat., frag. A, 17, 20, the context of which is irretrievable.

[12] Rut. Namat., 1, 350-368 (Elba's iron, perhaps to be taken seriously, as McCormick 2001, p. 46, but also inspired by Virgil), 1, 475-491 (salt-pans, with theme of cyclical renewal), 1, 531-532 (the maritime wealth of Pisa). For full commentary on these and other passages, see Fo 1992, Woolf - Lancel - Soler 2007.

[13] «caerula ... Etrusca»: Rut. Namat., 2, 30.

[14] Rut. Namat., 1, 219-222.

equally to commercial traffic, and can set a course for us to follow in considering various aspects of the voyage.

We might start with Rutilius' decision to go by sea at all, which was not so obvious as to be left unexplained. The alternative was the land route around the coast along the via Aurelia, but this, we are told, was in a state of disrepair; the recent Gothic depredations had led to the desertion of the countryside, leaving the roads flooded, the bridges down, and the passes blocked[15]. Such hyperbole was no doubt in keeping with some of the poet's wider purposes, but the sea journey did have the obvious advantage, at least in principle, of being far quicker. Around two decades earlier, a certain Martinianus, charged with taking a letter from a friend of Sulpicius Severus to Paulinus of Nola, had felt little appetite for the tedious footslogging of the land route, and opted instead for the 'leisurely nausea of the waves' by taking ship from Narbonne[16]. Modern calculations suggest that in normal circumstances this could have shaved weeks off the journey time, but, as we shall see, Martinianus' trip proved anything but relaxed; his misfortunes epitomise how the vast savings in time and effort promised by the maritime route were offset by the increased risks. For commercial traffic between Italy and Gaul, of course, there was no real choice to be made. The transport of goods by sea was not only much cheaper, but offered easy access to the natural axes of communication into the interior of Gaul that were seen by ancient writers as providential in their arrangement, compared with which the land routes through the Alps were always far better suited to the movement of armies, or low-volume, high-value items, than to the conveyance of merchandise on any substantial scale[17]. Rutilius' concerns about the land route were, moreover, a harbinger of things to come. For much of the sixth and seventh centuries, during which landward communications were repeatedly disrupted by warfare and political instability, travel by sea became the default option for the vast majority of documented journeys between Gaul and Italy[18].

[15] Rut. Namat., 1, 37-42.

[16] Paul. Nol., *Carm.*, 24, 23-26: «sed longa secum spatia terrarum putans/vertit viae sententiam/et otiosam fluctuandi nauseam/pedum labori praetulit». For Martinianus' voyage, see Rougé 1986.

[17] Strabo, 4, 1, 14.

[18] Claude 1985, p. 134-44, McCormick 2001, p. 77-81, for the dominance of the maritime route for travel between north-western Europe and Italy until the later seventh

Rutilius' decision to go by sea must, nevertheless, have been complicated by the season. The timing of his voyage in late October and November has long caused some consternation among historians because it slips well into the period of *mare clausum*, between 11 November and 10 March, when the Mediterranean supposedly became too dangerous for shipping, and maritime traffic went into hibernation[19]. Even a seasoned traveller such as the ex-soldier Victor, a veteran of five trips between Gaul and Italy as the regular courier of communications between Severus and Paulinus, was forced to abandon his latest journey to *Primuliacum* in autumn 405 and retrace his steps to Nola 'since winter shut down sailing and fear the roads'[20]. Rutilius would soon be echoing Victor's anxieties about the land route, but his voyage shows the sea was never fully closed. Indeed, sailings between Rome and southern Gaul could conceivably go on all year round, as demonstrated by fifth- and sixth-century papal correspondence. Gregory the Great's *Register* preserves 63 letters to recipients in Gaul between 591 and 602, which judging from their dates and references to their bearers appear to have been sent in sixteen batches, more or less evenly distributed across the months between April and November (fig. 1)[21]. The letters despatched between 417 and 557 by various of Gregory's predecessors to the bishops of Arles and others in Gaul that have come down to us in the collection known as the *Epistulae Arelatenses* are even more indiscriminate in their month of writing, extending the potential communications window throughout the year (fig. 2). Although some of the correspondence sent 'out of season' could have been conveyed overland for all or part of the route, in some cases political considerations made this impossible; Pelagius I, for example, certainly sent letters to Sapaudus of

century. For a recent overview of eastern goods in Merovingian Gaul, including items that could readily have been transported overland, see Drauschke 2019.

[19] Carcopino 1928 went so far as to suggest that Rutilius' poem broke off at Luni because his journey was halted there by the winter closure of the sea but, quite apart from literary considerations, this notion foundered on the discovery of the fragments that confirm his onward voyage.

[20] Paul. Nol., *Ep.* 43, 1: «cum hiems navigationem et itinera metus clauderet». For his other trips, see PCBE IV,1, Victor 9. It remains unclear whether Victor preferred to travel by sea or by land.

[21] For Gregory's communications with regions of the western Mediterranean other than Gaul and Sicily, compare Contu 2002, which similarly shows that winter contacts, though rare, were possible.

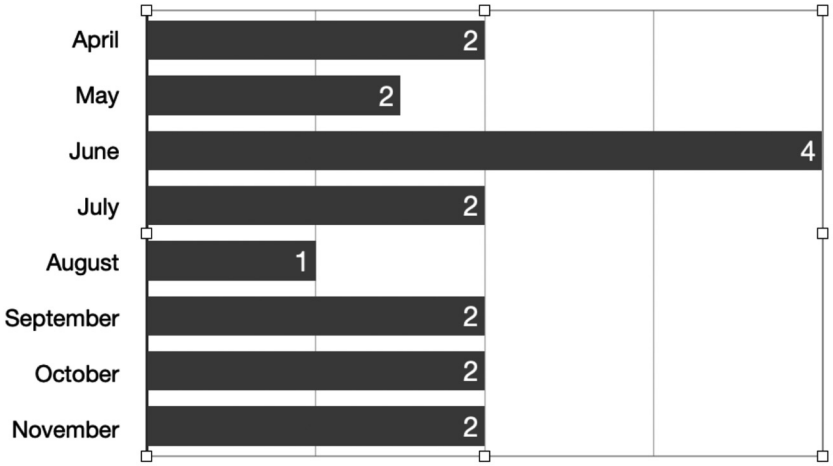

Fig. 1: Letters of Pope Gregory I to recipients in Gaul by month of dispatch, 591-602 (batches of letters sent at the same time counted as one)

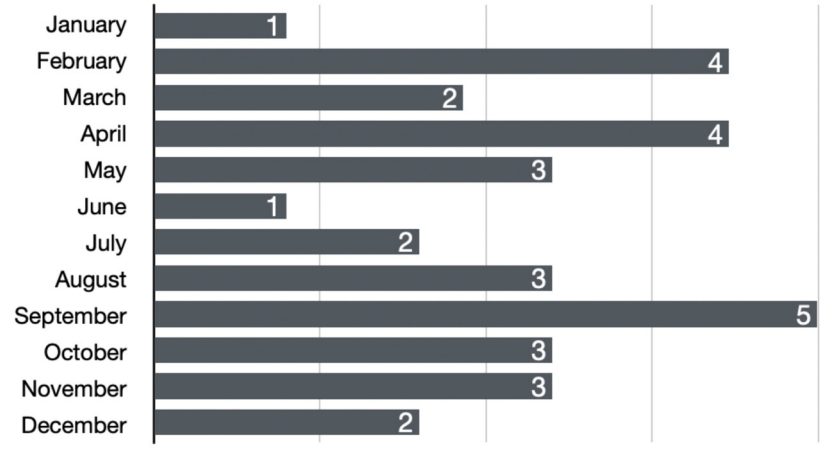

Fig. 2: Papal letters to Gallic recipients in *Epistulae Arelatenses* by month of despatch, 417-557 (batches of letters sent at the same date counted as one)

Arles in December 556 by sea, and hoped for a rapid response by the same means[22]. While it has lately been demonstrated how the winter season was no necessary barrier to Mediterranean communications between the seventh and tenth centuries, this was no novelty, at least not between Italy and Gaul[23]. In the absence of a papal fleet, moreover, the couriers of these letters were presumably reliant, like most travellers, on ships that were sailing from Rome to Gaul, even in the depths of winter, for primarily commercial motives[24]. Although cargo ships no doubt preferred to ply the 'summer waves', as Rutilius says, it is now thought unlikely that the Mediterranean was entirely closed to shipping at any time of year, and certainly not in this quadrant[25]. Even so, the increased dangers presumably meant that sailing outside the normal window was not undertaken without good reason, whether by traders in pursuit of commercial advantage, or by travellers in response to personal or political imperatives, and with all parties keeping a particularly watchful eye on the weather[26]. Outside high season we can also reasonably assume that vessels of all types will, like those of Rutilius and his crew, have been more dependent on short hops between ports to minimise risk and reassess conditions, accepting some delays as necessary, and probably inevitable.

The manoeuvrability of Rutilius' *cymbae* combined with the risky season to ensure he exploited the full variety of landings available along the Tuscan coast. This gave him the opportunity to evoke a hierarchy of possibilities akin to those listed in the *Maritime Itinerary*, elevating its prosaic categories into a series of memorable vignettes. Working up from *plagia*

[22] Pel. I, *Ep.* 4, 4-6, dated 14 Dec 556, to which Sapaudus replied by 3 Feb 557 (*Ep.* 5, 8-9).

[23] McCormick 2001, p. 453, charts late seventh- to late tenth-century Mediterranean communications by month to prove winter sailing, but mistakenly contends that this was something new at p. 79-81.

[24] Greg. I, *Ep.* 1, 70, implies the lack of a papal fleet; Pel. I, *Ep.* 9, of 557, was explicitly conveyed to Sapaudus by an Italian *negotiator* heading for Gaul.

[25] «aestivos ... fluctus»: Rut. Namat., 1, 221. For recent highlighting of the potential for ancient and early medieval sailing outside the high season, see Arnaud 2005, p. 26-8; Beresford 2013; Horden - Purcell 2000, p. 137-43; McCormick 2001, p. 444-68.

[26] Rutilius' own reasons for hurrying back so late in the year are usually linked with either the Gothic settlement or the re-establishment of the Council of the Seven Provinces – or both; the chronology suits the former better, but neither motive is entirely compelling.

to *portus*, we might begin with the safe entrance to the mouth of the Umbro, where Rutilius had hoped to halt before being persuaded to press on, only to be forced by the dying wind and light to draw up on a beach and improvise camp[27]. At Vada, laurel trees embedded in the mud-banks allowed the lookout to spot the shifting entrance channel, whereas only a wall of seaweed sheltered Pisa's exposed harbour from the swell of the sea[28]. Populonia looked past its best, but still offered safe haven, notwithstanding the derelict state of its protective fort and beacon[29]. Only Trajan's foundation at Centumcellae, the northernmost extension of the Roman port-system, is depicted by Rutilius as a fully-functioning port, with towers, docks, an island to secure its entrance, and harbour waters so calm that even a weary swimmer could feel at ease in them[30]. Unwise though it would be to take these pleasing sketches entirely at face value, the overall impression of variety that they convey fits not only with the *Maritime Itinerary*, but also with the changing character of the coastline, and, in broad terms at least, with the available geomorphological and archaeological data[31].

Beyond Pisa, Rutilius' poem breaks off just before coming into Luni, and the ensuing fragments offer the merest indications of the Ligurian leg of his voyage, including an allusion to his landing at a port that might be Genoa and a less ambiguous reference to Albenga[32]. Although we are denied his ensuing impressions of the ports of the Provençal coast, the *Maritime Itinerary* suggests it would have offered a similar selection of prospective halts ranging from rudimentary or natural landings equipped with only the bare minimum of facilities (like the steps up from the shore

[27] Rut. Namat., 1, 337-348; the mouth of the Umbro features as an (uncategorised) halt in the *Maritime Itinerary*.

[28] Rut. Namat., 1, 453-462 (Vada), 1, 531-540 (Pisa).

[29] Rut. Namat., 1, 401-414.

[30] Rut. Namat., 1, 237-248. For Centumcellae and the Roman port-system, see Keay 2012.

[31] The syntheses of Pasquinucci - Del Rio - Menchelli 2002 and Baldassarri 2011 include discussion of Vada Volterrana, Populonia, and Pisa. For the shifting geomorphology of the port-complex at Pisa, see Alleine *et al.* 2016.

[32] Woolf - Lancel - Soler 2007, 109-10, summarise opinion on the nature and identity of Rutilius' Ligurian halt. Albenga is very likely to be the 'new city' favoured by Constantius in Fragment B, 7.

that give *escales* their name), through minor ports, to fully-equipped and extensive port-complexes[33]. On this leg of his voyage the poet's eye could again have alighted on once important harbours, such as Fréjus, that were in manifest decay in late antiquity, as well as lesser landings such as the Lérins islands nearby which, by virtue of the monastic community recently founded by Honoratus, had just begun to assume new significance for passing traffic as a 'port of religion and peaceful harbour' (upon which it is tempting to imagine Rutilius might well have cast one of his baleful sidelong glances)[34].

It was only on his eventual arrival at one of the major ports of southern Gaul, however, that Rutilius would finally have encountered facilities equivalent in type, if not quite in scale, to those he had ruefully bid farewell along the Tiber. Here it is worth bearing in mind that, just as Rome relied on Ostia and Portus, so Narbonne and Arles, the two major Mediterranean ports of Roman Gaul, were both polyfocal fluvio-maritime-complexes that required significant organisational and infrastructural apparatus to cater efficiently for bulk cargoes[35]. Although Roman writers routinely regarded Arles, for example, as a seaport, its location some 25 kilometres inland at the head of the Rhône delta meant that it operated in tandem with substantial break-ports closer to the river mouths, whether in the vicinity of Fos, close to the eastern mouth of the delta, or in the holding lagoon at the entry to its western arm marked by a substantial cluster of early imperial wrecks off Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, not to mention a shifting array of lesser landings such as the fifth- and sixth-century site lately discovered at La Montille d'Ulmet in the Camargue[36]. The local *navicularii* and boatmen would then have combined to tranship goods

[33] Arnaud 2010. The *Maritime Itinerary* dignifies fourteen Provençal halts as *portus*, but its preferred terminology varies between sections, and some of these were probably minor.

[34] Fréjus: Gébara - Morhange 2010, p. 14-23. 'Port of religion': Vincent. Ler., *Comm.* 1.1. Hil. Arel., *V. Honorat.,* 20, 1, shows travellers looking to halt at Lérins, or being prevented from doing so by the caprices of wind and weather.

[35] For the workings of fluvio-maritime ports, see Arnaud 2016.

[36] For the Fos and Saintes-Maries zones, see Long 1997, Long - Spada 2015, Long - Duperron 2016, Fontaine *et al.*2019. La Montille: Landuré - Vella 2014, Duperron - Landuré 2019. Djaoui 2017 and Marlier 2018 discuss the port-system in the delta from the perspectives of ceramic finds and shipping respectively.

across the bars at the river-mouths, through the low-lying delta zone, and up to the city's river-port, enabling Arles to function as a trade-hub in the manner so enthusiastically celebrated by the imperial constitution of 418[37]. With the breakdown of the western empire, however, a gradual decline of investment in the requisite facilities is likely, over time, to have reduced the capacity of these complexes to handle bulk traffic so efficiently, particularly in a period when the environmental data suggests the many hazards of the delta zone would have been exacerbated by deteriorating hydrological conditions[38]. It is no coincidence therefore, as we shall see, that in the sixth and seventh centuries it was Marseille, blessed with a superb natural harbour close enough to the Rhône corridor to mediate access to it, but at one remove from the logistical challenges of the delta area, that resumed its pre-Roman hegemony over traffic between southern Gaul and ports in Italy and across the Mediterranean[39].

Despite such changes over time, ships trading between Italy and Gaul throughout late antiquity could thus have exploited substantial ports and their associated transhipment facilities at either end of the route, as well as many potential halts of varied sophistication along the way. Here the contrast that Rutilius explicitly draws between his nippy, coast-hugging *cymbae*, hopping from one landing to the next, and the cargo-ships, *onerariа*, that could safely plough the high seas, plotting a more linear course between major ports, at least in summer, is perhaps deceptively sharp. While it is undoubtedly the case that the huge vessels which had once plied the route between Italy and Gaul, including two of the largest known from Antiquity, the Madrague de Giens and Albenga wrecks, must have sailed directly between those few ports with sufficient depth, manpower, and infrastructure to cope with vessels with capacities of close to 400 tonnes, ships of such size were always scarce, and largely belonged back in the heyday of Gallic thirst for Italian wine[40]. By the fifth century, few cargo-ships were carrying more than 75 tonnes, extending the number

[37] *AE* 2009, p. 822-3 for a recently-discovered epigraphic reference to a college of *lenuncularii* of Arles. For the city's river-port and its wrecks, see Long - Spada 2015, p. 126-37, Long - Duperron 2016, p. 208-13.

[38] Arnaud - Fassetta 2004; Vella *et al.* 2016.

[39] Loseby 1992.

[40] The same goes for the specialised *dolia* tankers peculiar to this quadrant of the Mediterranean: Marlier 2009, Heslin 2011.

of prospective landings available to them. Meanwhile, the locations and homogeneous cargoes of some ancient shipwrecks of lesser tonnage imply that the assumption smaller craft were restricted to tramping from port to port is excessively reductive[41]. Instead, we should probably reckon that even if size of ship was one significant factor in choosing a maritime route between Gaul and Italy in late Antiquity, it was by no means the only nor necessarily the most decisive one; the course selected for any given crossing would also be shaped by circumstantial variables of weather, season, and commercial obligation or advantage, or, in short, the weighing up of the anticipated gains in time and profit against mitigation of the likely risks. So while larger vessels venturing in high season between, for example, the port-complexes of Rome and Arles probably took to the open seas north of Corsica, whereas smaller trading vessels, like Rutilius' *cymbae*, stopped more often and stayed inshore, the distinction between open sea and coastal sailing in many sectors of the Mediterranean was perhaps neither that simple, nor always that meaningful[42]. It is the case, even so, that most of the information we have for voyages between Gaul and Italy in our period tends to emphasise sailing close to the coast or via offshore islands. These are not only the areas where shipwrecks were most likely to occur, and be discovered, but also where the incidents that made a trip worthy of narrative record tend to take place, leaving less eventful and perhaps more linear voyages to pass unremarked[43].

Such sailing stories often involve disaster, because while all ancient voyages came freighted with a measure of uncertainty, those undertaken along the Provençal coast appear especially prone to misadventure, and perhaps stimulated more anxiety than most. The waters off the coasts and islands of southern Gaul have produced an exceptional number of shipwrecks of all periods, including around a fifth of those known from the late antique Mediterranean[44]. It has become conventional to emphasise that this profusion is more a reflection of the precocious and sustained

[41] Arnaud 2005, esp. p. 5-60; Boetto 2012.

[42] Arnaud 2005, p. 107-26; Arnaud 2007, p. 324-9.

[43] For the coastal distribution of ancient Mediterranean wreck data, see Parker 1992, p. 548, fig. 2.

[44] Parker 1992, maps 4 and 5, depicting pre-1500 wrecks off southern France; the vast majority lie east of the Rhône delta, but this is partly a function of coastal morphology. Dahm 2018, p. 289, fig. 5 maps western Mediterranean wrecks of 300-500, assigning 24%

achievements of French underwater archaeology than of peculiarly high concentrations of traffic hereabouts (as is borne out by the unevenness of Mediterranean shipwreck distributions), but it is indubitably the case that this sector has always been particularly hazardous for shipping. Average wind-speeds off Marseille are the highest in the Mediterranean, and while the winds along the Provençal coast mainly blow offshore, their prevailing direction is less consistent than in other sectors, and their character more capricious[45]. Although the combination of fierce and unpredictable winds with sharp storms is more likely to occur here outside the sailing season, perilous conditions can whip up at any time of year with startling rapidity[46]. The shelter that sailors might be driven to seek amongst the rocky capes and offshore islands scattered along the Provençal coast was also a prime source of danger; superimposed wrecks show how ships often went down, hundreds of years apart, on the same low reefs. However well-plotted the maritime route might be, conditions for sailing between Italy and Gaul were prone to be more unstable than in calmer corners of the Mediterranean.

The concern for safety that lingers within Rutilius' narrative was thus more than just a dramatic topos. Alongside the archaeological evidence for shipwrecks along this route, discussed below, late antique Gallic sources preserve a particularly rich array of references to trouble at sea and anxiety about maritime travel. John Cassian dedicated the second set of his *Conferences* to Eucherius to spare him the risks of his intended trip to see the desert fathers in the flesh; his fellow-dedicatee Honoratus had first-hand experience of the dangers, having lost his brother on a similar and probably uncompleted voyage, dramatised by Hilary of Arles as tantamount to an ascetic act[47]. Paulinus of Pella claims that he never embarked on his projected return from Gaul to his estates in Macedonia because his wife flatly refused to undertake the sea journey in light of her 'excessive fear'[48]. Such concerns were perhaps triggered by experiences

of them to southern Gaul (p. 288, n.30); the overall proportion falls slightly if one extends the time-frame to c.700.

[45] Hodge 1983; Arnaud 2005, p. 15-23, 151-2.

[46] As I know from experience, having been waist-deep in a flash flood that hit Marseille in September 2000.

[47] Cassian., *Conl.* 11-17, pf.; Hil. Arel., *V. Honorat.*, 14.

[48] Paul. Pell., *Euch.,* 482-88.

such as those of the aforementioned Martinianus, who took ship at Narbonne in around 400 to convey a letter to Paulinus of Nola. The vessel fell apart on the high seas and went down with all hands; Martinianus and a few other passengers escaped a watery grave by jumping into the ship's boat (another *cymba*), and were eventually washed up on a beach near Marseille[49]. In this case the mishap appears more attributable to the ship's unseaworthiness than to meteorological conditions, but other anecdotes across our period repeatedly blame similar incidents on storms and bad weather. Grain-ships sent from Sicily by the Ostrogothic regime to relieve famine in southern Gaul lost all their cargo in a storm when out in the open seas, although the unlucky *frumentarii* survived to petition for their losses to be covered[50]. In the late sixth century, the envoys of the Frankish king Chilperic had almost made it home from Byzantium when they were hit by a storm and driven aground near Agde; most survived by clinging to planks, but some of their *pueri* were lost, and the locals made off with treasures they were carrying that were washed ashore[51]. Soon afterwards, ambassadors from the Visigothic king Reccared to Pope Gregory in Rome were virtually in sight of Italy when they were hit by the force of the sea, ending up clinging to rocks near Marseille[52]. Similar disasters were only averted by miracles. Greg. Tur. offers a characteristically vivid account of how his deacon saved the ship on which he was returning from Portus to Marseille from being driven to its doom on a looming coastal cliff by brandishing his newly-acquired relics of Roman saints, whose power promptly whistled up an offshore wind[53]. In around 700, the ship upon which Bonitus of Clermont was travelling down the Italian coast to Rome was saved by the bishop's prayers from having to jettison its supplies and cargo to stay afloat[54]. As one might expect, several of these stories, from Paulinus of Nola onwards, associate salvation with pious demonstrations

[49] Paul. Nol., *Carm.* 24, discussed from a nautical perspective by Rougé 1986.

[50] Cassiod., *Var.* 4, 7.

[51] Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 6, 2.

[52] Reccared, *Ep. ad Greg.*, *apud* Greg. I, *Ep.* 9, 229a. The gifts they were carrying did reach the pope; he was less impressed that the envoys had preferred to return to Spain (*Ep.* 9, 229b).

[53] Greg. Tur., *Glor. Mart.,* 82. The deacon was probably Agiulf, who recalls ploughing through the sea waves in *Vit. Patr.* 8.6. For a similar miracle in which a ship sailing from Gaul to Italy was saved by invoking Bishop Nicetius of Trier, see *Vit. Patr.*, 17, 4.

[54] *V. Boniti*, 24; *V. Amandi*, 11-12, describes a very similar episode that would have

of orthodox Christian faith in the midst of heretics and unbelievers, but not all good Catholics were spared. Bishop Romanus of Rochester in Kent was drowned in the 'Italian sea' when his ship sank on the way to Rome in the late 620s[55].

Such shipwrecks, whether experienced or miraculously averted, are obviously over-represented by our sources, to the extent that the examples above constitute a significant proportion of the surviving textual references to late antique and early medieval maritime traffic between Italy and Gaul. Not one of these accounts mentions trade directly, but, besides preserving some incidental nautical detail, they do confirm the persistent use of the sea route throughout our period, as traders and their passengers continued to undertake such voyages regardless of the risks, whether out of convenience or necessity, or simply in pursuit of profit. Martinianus recovered from his traumatic experience swiftly enough to board another ship that took him as far as Centumcellae before proceeding by road to Nola, where Paulinus immortalised the courier's misadventures[56]. In a tub-thumping passage from a late fifth-century sermon, Valerian, bishop of the seaside see of Cimiez-Nice, enquired rhetorically as to the motive that led people to gamble their lives at sea, and found it, unsurprisingly, in greed, but while many of the audience in his maritime community may have winced at his graphic invocation of a shipwrecked sailor's dying curses, the grinding of his body against the rocks, and the tossing of his rock-torn, bloated corpse upon the shore, no doubt they saw it as the risk inherent in making a living[57].

To judge by the numbers of recorded wrecks, our only quantifiable measure, Mediterranean traffic was falling back to pre-Roman levels by late antiquity, but the Ligurian Sea and its associated port-complexes remained busy with ships that might have lacked the massive capacities of some early imperial vessels, but were still capable of handling substantial cargoes from around the Mediterranean[58]. While one might not go so far

occurred around the 630s, during a return voyage of Amandus from Italy to Gaul, shortly after a halt at Centumcellae.

[55] Bede, *HE*, 2, 20.

[56] Paul. Nol., *Carm.*, 24.

[57] Val. Cem., *Hom.*, 20.7; cfr. Caes. Arel., *Serm.* 72,1 for merchants taking risks for gain.

[58] The classic graph of recorded wrecks by century in Parker 1992, p. 549, fig. 3 has

as Pierre Battifol once did in suggesting that connections between Rome and Marseille ran 'quotidiennes' in the time of Gregory the Great, one has the impression that information flows between the papacy and Gaul were still more or less as regular in the 590s as they had been back in Rutilius' generation, when close ties between the Christian communities of Provence, Rome, and Africa are just as evident in disputes about episcopal primacy or the workings of grace as they are in currents of long-distance exchange[59]. Whether the flow of goods between Italy and Gaul remained equally lively is the problem to which we should now turn, beginning with the evidence for the shipment of commodities produced in one region to the other.

Intangible exchanges: Italian exports to Gaul and Gallic exports to Italy

The political disintegration of the western Roman empire during the fifth century had various ramifications for the interregional Mediterranean exchange-system in which both Italy and Gaul were implicated, but wrought no devastating impact upon it. It should be emphasised at the outset that the operation of this system has to be traced primarily through ceramic finds, which provide the quantifiable and serial data that we otherwise lack[60]. While this captures only traffic in pottery, whether as a traded item in its own right, or, more usefully, in those foodstuffs that were commonly shipped in amphorae – especially, though not exclusively, oil, wine, and various fish products – it seems reasonable to assume that this ceramic evidence can serve, *grosso modo*, as a viable proxy for the overall scale and sophistication of Mediterranean interregional exchange, even if it gives no direct insight into the circulation of other important merchandise such as grain and textiles. The volume and complexity of the flows of traffic revealed by the ceramic data have, moreover, tended to refute older, more pessimistic understandings of the scale and significance of ancient

since been updated and recalibrated in Wilson 2011, p. 36, but still features a sharp tail-off in their number from the third century onwards. The prorating method adopted by McCormick 2012, p. 84, defers the sharpest drop to the sixth century. Dahm 2018, p. 266-8, purposefully queries some aspects of the counting of late antique western wrecks, but the downward trend in their number is not in dispute.

[59] Battifol 1928, p. 164.

[60] Wickham 2005, esp. p. 700-6; Loseby 2012.

maritime exchange. More specifically, the role of the Roman state, often seen as driving this system by directing staple foodstuffs in bulk to Rome, Constantinople, and the military, has been relativised through the work of Domenico Vera and others, retaining imperial demands on producers and shippers as a key factor in shaping the contours of such traffic, whilst at the same time assigning considerable importance to the movements of goods that either span off from the fiscal supply-system or, as the ceramic data abundantly indicates, circulated on a commercial basis alongside and, to a significant extent, independently of it[61].

The general parameters of the late antique system established by pioneering syntheses of the ceramic data such as those of Clementina Panella have largely been sustained by subsequent studies, even as our understanding of the production and distribution of pottery and amphorae and their evolution over time has been progressively sharpened through the accumulation of new data and advances in the analysis and dating of ever-proliferating classes of ceramic types and sub-types[62]. In late antiquity, the dominance of African products within networks of interregional Mediterranean exchange was already well-established; its amphorae and pottery had supplanted their Italian and Gallic equivalents on overseas markets, and were coming to eclipse Iberian exports as well. By the fifth century, the main competition for African wares visible in western ceramic assemblages, including those of Gaul and Italy, was instead coming to be provided by the various types of amphorae – and, to a far lesser extent, pottery – shipped west from almost all the regions of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard, from the Aegean round to Egypt[63]. The Vandal conquest of Carthage and the resulting withdrawal of the fiscal underpinning of African production and supply disrupted this pattern, probably lending further impetus to eastern exports as well as stimulating regional pottery production in some areas of Italy and Gaul as import substitutes, but it brought no lasting or systemic change. Instead, the interregional tier of western Mediterranean exchange, insofar as it can be captured through ceramic data, continued to be dominated by African and eastern

[61] Vera 2010.

[62] Panella 1993, updated in reference to Rome by Panella - Saguì 2001, Panella *et al.* 2010, Panella 2013, Casalini 2015. Among many other regional studies with wide implications, see Bonifay 2004, Pieri 2005, 2012; Reynolds 2010; Zanini 2004.

[63] Pieri 2007.

Mediterranean goods throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, until the progressive involution of long-established networks of production and distribution culminated in their final demise in or soon after 700[64]. For as long as it continued to exist, however, settlements all along the western Italian and Provençal seaboard remained integrated into this system, and indeed contexts from Rome, Naples, S. Antonino di Perti in Liguria, Marseille, and now Arles have provided many of the ceramic assemblages that have been crucial in developing our understanding of its dynamics[65]. In particular, they have shown how politics is a less reliable guide to participation in such networks of exchange than demand. For although ongoing shipments of African and eastern goods to Rome and the western Italian seaboard after the Justinianic reconquests can in part be explained by the restoration of the state-backed supply line from Carthage to Rome, the same did not apply to Merovingian southern Gaul, which continued to obtain a very similar repertoire of imported amphorae and pottery to that seen in ceramic assemblages on sites in Byzantine Italy. In western Italy, Rome remained the primary focus of such traffic throughout, despite the impact that the vertiginous decline in its population over the period must have had upon local demand. In southern Gaul, meanwhile, the evidence points to a significant shift in emphasis away from Arles and Narbonne, the two major port-complexes of the imperial era, to Marseille, upon which references to interregional traffic between the Mediterranean and Frankish Gaul in the post-Roman period are consistently concentrated[66]. Along the coasts between the twin poles of Rome and Marseille, meanwhile, the ceramic data shows how even small coastal communities such as Noli in Liguria or Olbia in Provence continued to enjoy access to Mediterranean imports for as long as they remained in widespread circulation[67].

In contrast to the serial and quantifiable, if partial, characteristics of the

[64] This summary is expanded on in Loseby 2005; 2012. See also Wickham 2005, p. 708-59.

[65] Rome: see n. 62; Naples: Arthur 2002, p. 122-33; Carsana - D'Amico - Del Vecchio 2007; Marseille: Bonifay - Carre - Rigoir 1998; S. Antonino: Mannoni - Murialdo 2001; Arles: Duperron - Heijmans 2019, Mukai *et al.* 2017.

[66] Loseby 1992.

[67] For the thriving community at Noli, see Frondoni 2018. The character of sixth- and seventh-century Olbia is more elusive, but its inhabitants had access to a wide range of imports: Tréglia 2006a, 2006b.

archaeological data, the evidence of the written sources for the involvement of Italy and Gaul in late antique Mediterranean exchange consists largely of assorted anecdotal references to trade and traders in historical, hagiographical, and epistolary works, supplemented by a handful of charters regulating access to imported goods. These texts cumulatively provide a broader sense of the range of commodities in circulation, but they are never written from a mercantile perspective, and their indications of exchange remain few in number, allusive in nature, and random in their emphases and their distribution over time. They function best as indices of commercial possibility. As a representative sample of how the evidence for Gallic involvement in Mediterranean exchange is generally more suggestive of its socio-economic significance than precise about its details, we can consider a scatter of references from across the period to the *cataplus* of Marseille, a term that can refer to incoming cargoes, or, by extension, to the regulated quayside at which they were landed[68]. In the 460s and early 470s, Amantius, a lector of the church of Clermont, travelled regularly to Marseille, where he appears to have made a living by buying cargoes arriving at the *cataplus* on behalf of backers in his native Auvergne, who included intimates of Bishop Sidonius, his patron[69]. His repeated journeys show how, even in a period of supposedly overwhelming political crisis, an ambitious young man from central Gaul could hope to make his fortune by brokering the traffic of its Mediterranean ports, but leave us none the wiser as to the nature or origin of the goods in which he was dealing. A century later, Greg. Tur. offers slightly more information in a sensationalised account of the theft from the same *cataplus* of seventy vessels 'which they commonly call *orcae*' (a type of amphora, as Isidore confirms) that contained oil and *liquamen* imported on 'ships from across the sea'[70]. This episode became a *cause célèbre* because, in a demonstration of official concern for the security of imported cargoes, the *patricius* of Marseille arrest-

[68] Vercauteren 1926, modified by Claude 1985, p. 121-2. Cfr. *Lex Visig.* 12, 2, 18 (693) for *cataplus* as the regulated setting for overseas trade.

[69] *PCBE* IV, 1, Amantius 2. Sidon., *Ep.* 7, 7, 1: «Ecce iterum Amantius ... Massiliam suam repetit, aliquid, ut moris est, de manubiis civitatis domum reportaturus, si tamen … [lacuna] aut cataplus arriserit». Cfr. Sidon., *Ep.* 6, 8; 7, 2; 7, 10; 9, 4. For late antique clerics engaging in trade, see Eck 1980.

[70] Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 4, 43: «Igitur advenientibus ad cataplum Massiliensim navibus transmarinis, Vigili archidiaconis homines septuaginta vasa quas vulgo orcas vocant olei liquaminisque furati sunt». Isid., *Etym.*, 20, 6, 5: «orca est amphorae species».

ed the city's archdeacon during Mass on Christmas Day for his complicity in the theft, and later fined him the enormous sum of 4000 solidi[71]. The port's *cataplus* – or *catabolus* – then makes its final appearance in grants made to the monastery of St-Denis by successive Merovingian monarchs between the 630s and 716 of the right for its agents to collect goods to the value of 100 *solidi* each year from the warehouse of the royal fisc at Marseille and transport them north free from toll[72]. The first of these grants made provision for the collection of oil, whereas its later confirmations leave the goods unspecified, but a startling idea of the supermarket-style range of options that might be on offer is provided by a similar concession to Corbie, again in 716, of rights at another *cellarium fisci* located just along the coast at Fos, and conceivably still a part of the port-system of Arles. This stipulated the amounts of twenty different items to which the monastery's agents were annually entitled including oil, *garum*, papyrus, Cordoban skins, and a delectable selection of nuts, herbs, and spices, most of which would have come from the eastern Mediterranean, Arabia, and beyond[73]. Ironically, our richest insight since the – far vaguer – imperial constitution of 418 into the variety of goods coming into Provençal ports via the late antique interregional Mediterranean exchange-system arrives in a period when such traffic was in its death throes, and again it makes no reference to items of Italian provenance. But it broadens the potential range of Mediterranean imports to Gaul during the intervening period far beyond that which can be deduced from the ceramic evidence upon which we are otherwise forced largely to rely.

Despite the very different character of the two data-sets, the combination of the serial and ever-increasing mass of archaeological evidence with the static corpus of incidental textual testimony has often proved rewarding. The identification of the early eighth century as the nadir of western Mediterranean exchange, a claim originally founded on texts, but now

[71] Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 4, 43: the patrician was forced to pay fourfold compensation on appeal to the royal court. Cfr. Cassiod., *Var.* 6, 23, 4, where the count of Naples is explicitly instructed to protect the interests of overseas merchants.

[72] *Gesta Dagoberti* 18 (630s), Kölzer 2001, D138 (693), D170 (716), all with variations on the tricky phrase *iuxta quod ordo cataboli fuerit*, more likely 'at market price', as Claude 1985, p. 122, than 'subject to availability in port', as Ganshof 1960, p. 132.

[73] Levillain 1902, no. 15; Kölzer 2001, no.171. These various grants are discussed in Loseby 2000. For goods warehouses at Classe, see Augenti 2019.

strikingly reinforced by a sharp break in the archaeological data, is a case in point[74]. But for present purposes, it is a matter for regret that the two data-sets are equally in harmony in offering only scant indications of the movement of Italian goods to Gaul, or of the export of Gallic merchandise to Italy. In the written sources, moreover, such references as do exist are generally either context-specific or non-commercial, and cannot be assumed to indicate normal trading relations. The programme of relief measures for war-torn Provence mounted in the immediate aftermath of Theoderic's takeover of the region in 508, which included provision for the supply of grain from Italy to both exhausted provincials and Ostrogothic forces, is one such example[75]. These shipments look more suggestive of an emergency response to shortages than of the routine export of grain from Italy to Gaul, particularly since the *navicularii* of Campania, Lucania, and Tuscany needed some encouragement from the court to exploit the crisis to their commercial advantage; the aforementioned grain-shippers who set out for Gaul from Sicily only to lose their cargo at sea were probably responding to the same appeal[76]. The only documented Gallic exports to Italy, meanwhile, are clothing and slaves. Pope Pelagius I asked Bishop Sapaudus of Arles to spend some of the income of the papal patrimony in Provence on various types of garment urgently needed by the Roman poor; these were presumably basic items, perhaps produced locally from the wool of sheep brought down annually to the nearby Crau plain[77]. Four decades later, Pope Gregory I issued a similar request for clothing to Candidus, his newly-appointed administrator of the Provençal patrimony; he also sent Eulogius, patriarch of Alexandria, six 'smaller Aquitanian pallia', presumably from south-western Gaul, which were of sufficient quality to make them suitable as presents[78]. But while such incidental references are intriguing, they hardly seem sufficient to infer the existence of a significant export trade in Gallic textiles.

[74] McCormick 2001, part I; Loseby 2005.

[75] Cassiod., *Var.* 3, 44, 3 (provisions to be sent by sea to Arles); *Var.* 3, 41 (Italian grain supplies to be moved up from granaries at Marseille to troops on the Durance).

[76] Cassiod., *Var.* 4, 5; 4, 7.

[77] Pel. I, *Ep.* 4 (14 Dec 556), seeking «saga tumentacia, quae pauperibus erogari possint, et tunicas albas aut cucullas vel colobia». *Ep.* 9 (13 Apr 557) reiterates the request: *vestes, que pauperibus erogentur, id est cucullas et tunicas atque saga*. Crau sheep: Honoratus, *V. Hil. Arel.*, 32, Badan - Brun - Congès 1995.

[78] Greg. I, *Ep.* 6, 10 (Sept 595), 7, 37 (July 597): «sex minora Aquitanica pallia».

This leaves the evidence for traffic in slaves between Gaul and Italy, which is rather more compelling. Besides telling him to purchase clothing, Gregory famously commissioned Candidus to use the papal patrimony's funds to procure Anglian *pueri* who could be trained to assist in his prospective mission to the Anglo-Saxons. The pope's precise request for 17 or 18 year-olds could suggest a confidence derived from market information, not least because Gregory's letters also indicate that Jewish traders in Naples were importing slaves from Gaul at the behest of local *iudices*[79]. Their mistake had been to deal in Christians as well as pagans, provoking Bishop Fortunatus of Naples to protest to the pope; the issue had clearly simmered for some years, and Gregory's typically pragmatic resolution of it suggests that the traffic was allowed to continue[80]. The Gallic port of origin of this traffic is left unstated, but it was presumably Arles or more probably Marseille, which emerges in seventh-century hagiographical sources as a cosmopolitan slave-market where one could apparently acquire Romans, Gauls, Britons, Moors and, especially, Saxons in large numbers[81]. It is also worth noting that the bishops of these two cities had previously been warned by Pope Gregory to desist from forcibly baptising local Jews after numerous Italian Jews regularly travelling on business in the region of Marseille had complained to him about it[82]. Although nothing directly links the Jewish communities of the two Gallic ports with the slave-trade, this cluster of references makes it tempting to wonder whether the Jewish community in Naples may have been working with their co-religionists in shipping slaves across the Ligurian Sea[83].

[79] Greg. I, *Ep.* 6, 10. The traffic may well have been reciprocal, since Gregory had complained to the Emperor Maurice just three months earlier about Lombards carrying off Romans for sale in Gaul (*Ep.* 5, 35); the ebb and flow of traffic in slaves was, of course, a byproduct of warfare.

[80] Greg. I, *Ep.* 9, 105 (Feb 599) looks to settle Fortunatus' long-standing concerns (cfr. *Ep.* 6, 29, of April 596, with reference to prior correspondence) while protecting the interests of the protesting traders. For Gregory's pragmatic approach to slavery, see Serfass 2006.

[81] *V. Eligii*, 1.10; cfr. *V. Boniti*, 3.

[82] Greg. I, *Ep.* 1.45 (June 591): «plurimi siquidem Iudaicae religionis viri in hac provincia commanenetes ac subinde in Massiliae partibus pro diversis negotiis ambulantes».

[83] Jews in Marseille: Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 5, 11; 6, 17, cfr. *Glor. Conf.* 95, for a ship with a Jewish crew sailing from Nice to Marseille. Arles: Honoratus, *V. Hil. Arel.* 29; *V. Caesarii* 1.29, 1.31, 2.49; Caes. Arel. *Serm.* 1.8, 104.6, 183.6; *V. Rusticulae*, 25. Gregory's

These explicit textual references to the movement of just three commodities between Italy and Gaul, grain, textiles, and slaves, all usually archaeologically intangible (see below for a rare exception), evidently offer a very incomplete impression of contemporary items of exchange. We might hope to flesh this out with material evidence for the presence of Italian products in Gaul, or vice versa, but because the archaeologically-visible participation of the two regions in the late antique Mediterranean exchange-system was predominantly as consumers rather than producers, the data available is equally meagre. In southern Gaul, the various pottery types that emerged during late antiquity in succession to the industrial-scale productions of earlier periods included the fine-ware known as DSP (*dérivées des sigillées paléochretiennes*), manufactured from the late fourth century onwards in distinct regional subgroups corresponding roughly to Aquitaine, Languedoc (and the Massif Central), and Provence (and the Rhône valley). Production of these wares peaked in the later fifth century before declining in both quality and quantity from around the 530s, after which they gradually became indistinguishable from the local common ware production into which they were eventually subsumed[84]. In its heyday, nevertheless, the grey Provençal variant, made at various ateliers including some in the vicinity of Marseille, was distributed fairly widely along the adjacent Mediterranean coasts, especially to sites in Catalonia and western Italy. However, it only appears in any quantity in ceramic assemblages from neighbouring Liguria, and never constitutes more than a marginal presence at Rome[85]. Its capillary distribution suggests small-scale maritime traffic in what was essentially a regional production, not a significant item of long-distance exchange.

The export of Italian products to Gaul is likewise represented primarily by one main ceramic type, the rather extended family of amphorae known as Keay 52, supplemented on coastal sites in Gaul by sporadic finds of a variety of Italian cooking wares deriving mainly from nearby Liguria and

correspondence with Fortunatus is, however, the only explicit contemporary evidence of Jewish involvement in trading slaves, as Toch 2014 rightly emphasises.

[84] Rigoir 1998; Bonifay - Reynaud 2007, p. 115-8 (Y. Rigoir: overview), p. 159-61 (T. Mukai: the Marseille ateliers).

[85] Reynolds 1995, p. 35-6 (overview); De Vingo 2010, 2018 (Liguria); Panella - Saguì 2001, p. 786 (Rome). The *luisante* ware of the upper Rhône achieves a similar distribution, but in even smaller quantities.

Tuscia[86]. Although the association of individual amphora types with specific commodities has frequently proved insecure, these small amphorae, now known to have been produced at various kiln sites along the coasts of Calabria and, especially, north-eastern Sicily, can confidently be assumed to have transported wine, presumably including the vintages from Bruttium that enjoy some renown in late antique sources[87]. The distribution of these amphorae further shows that these wines were shipped mainly to consumers close at hand along the Tyrrhenian coast, and in particular at Rome, where the proportion of southern Italian containers rises significantly in the mid- to late fifth-century to as much as 17% of amphora assemblages[88]. In this period, these vessels were also exported more widely around the Mediterranean, and especially to Marseille, where they comprise a very similar percentage of the amphorae present in mid-fifth century contexts. But while this would suggest that traffic in southern Italian wine to Gaul was temporarily of some significance, this conjuncture was short-lived. Whereas amphorae of southern Italian origin remained present in similar quantities at Rome and Ostia down to the late seventh century (and beyond), at Marseille they were already tailing off by c.500, after which they hardly appear at all in subsequent contexts, in a pattern repeated on other Gallic sites[89]. Although one might have expected the reunification of Provence with Italy under the Ostrogoths between 508

[86] The evolution of our understanding of Keay 52 can be traced through Arthur 1989, Pacetti 1998, Corrado -Ferro 2012, Franco - Capelli 2014. For Italian cooking wares in Gaul see Menchelli 2017, p. 204-6, Cathma 1991, p. 38-42, Bonifay - Raynaud, 2007, 129-31 (E. Pellegrino).

[87] *Expos. Mundi* 53, for the «vinum multum et optimum» of Bruttium (the only Italian export it mentions). Cassiod., *Var.* 12, 12, 3, compares one prized Bruttian wine to those of Gaza and the Sabina. The rise of southern Italian amphora exports is probably linked to state-subsidised supplies of wine to Rome: Panella 1993, p. 646-8.

[88] Casalini 2015, p. 543.

[89] For consistently high levels (15-25%) of southern Italian amphorae in sixth and seventh-century Rome – including Cripta Balbi 2 amphorae as well as late variants of Keay 52 – see Panella and Saguì 2001, p. 787, 802. Marseille: Bonifay and Pieri 1995, p. 114-6 (10%-16% in mid-fifth century contexts, falling to 7% in the late fifth). Small amounts of Keay 52 appear in some early sixth-century deposits at the Bourse (Pieri 2005, p. 25, p. 165-6: contexts 44 and 50), but the only later find at Marseille to date is from a later seventh-century context: see S. Bien in Bonifay - Reynaud 2007, p. 156. Its absence from other sixth-century Gallic contexts is noted in Bonifay - Carre - Rigoir 1998, p. 114.

and 537 to have stimulated traffic between the two, the scarcity of these amphorae in early sixth-century Gallic contexts therefore suggests the opposite. Besides offering a further example of the frequent disjunction between the ceramic data and political developments, the lack of Italian amphorae in Gaul after 500 also tends to confirm that the shipments of Italian grain to Gaul encouraged by Theoderic were more the exception than the norm. While the Mediterranean cargoes arriving at Marseille from which Amantius was hoping to profit in the 470s could conceivably have included Italian wine, therefore, the imported *orcae* stolen from its quayside a century later were probably produced in other regions of the Mediterranean.

Amid the relative profusion of evidence for regular maritime communications between western Italy and southern Gaul between the fifth and seventh centuries, neither the textual nor the archaeological evidence therefore gives us much reason to think that the shipment of Italian products to Gaul, or vice versa, was of more than temporary or local consequence. Trading in slaves between the two regions may have been more significant, but firm evidence of such traffic is confined to the 590s, and it will always have been susceptible to fluctuations in supply. Instead, a significant proportion of commercial exchange between Italy and Gaul was probably concerned with the redistribution of those wares of African, Aegean, and Levantine origin that, as we have seen, dominated interregional Mediterranean exchange from the fifth century onwards. It is to such traffic that we should finally turn.

Wrecks and routes: traffic between Italy and Gaul within the late antique Mediterranean exchange-system

For obvious geographical reasons, we can assume that African and eastern merchandise was not typically redistributed to Italy via Gallic ports. However, it is much more likely that some of the pottery and amphorae from these regions that reached Gallic sites arrived on ships that had initially sailed for Rome or other ports along the western Italian seaboard, whether in the context of state-backed supplies or commercial enterprise, or on ships with Italian home-ports engaged in the onward distribution of African and eastern goods to Gaul. It is obviously difficult to distinguish this putative traffic from the same imports arriving either directly from their regions of production or, in the case of the eastern wares, via alter-

native intermediary harbours in Tunisia. But three types of data through which we might at least attempt to explore the problem are textual references to the use of specific routes, archaeological evidence for differential patterns of ceramic supply, and shipwrecks.

The shipwreck data is potentially the most revealing, since it offers snapshots of cargoes in the process of distribution, but it is also unevenly distributed across time and space[90]. Whereas only a handful of poorly-documented late antique wrecks have to date been located off the western Italian mainland, we know of over twenty ships that sank off the stormy shores of southern Gaul during late antiquity, many of which have been published in detail[91]. This sample is, however, heavily skewed towards the period between the late third and the mid-fifth century, from which three-quarters of these Gallic wrecks date. Most of these were carrying cargoes composed exclusively of African amphorae and pottery, and despite their modest size and tonnage, typical of late antique shipping, they appear to have been sailing direct from Africa to Gaul. The homogeneity of the ceramics carried by some of these ships suggests, moreover, that they did so not only from the major warehouse-port of Carthage, as one might expect, but from other ports to the east of Cap Bon in the immediate vicinity of the workshops that produced their cargoes of amphorae and fine-ware, such as Nabeul and Salakta, thereby maximising the efficient overseas distribution of these wares[92]. One such vessel is the wreck known as Dramont E, which went down c. 440 near the Ile d'Or, west of Fréjus, a well-known ships' graveyard. Its main cargo of some 700 amphorae of three different types was revealed by analysis to derive from a single ceramic workshop, Sidi Zahruni, near Nabeul, and it was also carrying 800-900 fine-ware plates manufactured by ateliers in the same area[93]. But whatever their specific port of origin, these ships probably set out from Tunisia on a similar course northward, reflected in the cluster of ancient wrecks that have been located in deep water on the reefs of Skerki Bank, to

[90] For an overview of late antique shipwrecks, see Kingsley 2004.

[91] McCormick 2012, p. 88, fig. 3.14, maps Gallic wrecks by century. Dahm 2018, p. 289, fig. 5, shows all fourth- and fifth-century western Mediterranean wrecks, labelling all the western Italian ones 'uncertain'.

[92] Bonifay - Capelli - Long 2002; Bonifay 2007; Bonifay - Tchernia 2012, p. 317-25.

[93] Santamaria 1995. Vandal coins give a *terminus post quem* in the 430s for a wreck with an estimated capacity of 40-50 tonnes.

the north-west of Sicily, which includes one early fifth-century vessel with a cargo of African ceramics comparable to that carried by Dramont E[94]. From this point, African ships could head for ports in Italy or Gaul, but the wreck evidence suggests most probably did not go to Italy *then* Gaul. Instead, those bound for Gaul continued north on the most direct route, up the eastern coasts of Sardinia and Corsica, before turning west and coming to grief along the same short but hazardous stretch of the Provençal coast[95]. Such direct traffic between Africa and Gaul had indeed been envisaged, albeit along a different route, in Diocletian's prices edict[96]. Its feasibility is further apparent in one or two fourth- and early fifth-century narrative sources and implicit, for example, in the routine contacts that existed between the Christian communities of Provence and Africa in the days of Augustine[97].

Although African merchandise continued to arrive at Italian and Gallic ports throughout the Vandal era, despite the severing of the state-backed supply-line from Carthage to Rome, a hiatus in the shipwreck evidence means we lack proof of the persistence of direct traffic between Tunisia and Gaul during this period. But the La Palud wreck that went down in around the mid-sixth century on the northern side of Port-Cros in the Iles d'Hyères appears thoroughly reminiscent of the earlier pattern in its origin, cargo, and location[98]. Some 150-200 large cylindrical African amphorae constituted the vast bulk of its known cargo, which, on the basis of their capacity of 80-90 litres and the absence of pitch from their interi-

[94] Skerki 3: Weitemeyer - Döhler 2009, esp. p. 261-71.

[95] Bonifay 2004, p. 453-4.

[96] Diocl., 37, 29, covers sailings from Africa to Narbonne, but the rate is more suited to the faster north-south crossing, reflecting the artificiality of some of the data in the edict: see Arnaud 2007, esp. p. 329-33.

[97] Sulp. Sev., *Dial.* 1, 3, has Postumianus report 'a prosperous voyage' that saw him reach an African port on the fifth day out from Narbonne, matching the rate in the *Edict*. A six-day crossing from Marseille to Igiligili, some 300 miles west of Carthage, is mentioned in *Geog. Comp.* 40: see Arnaud 2005, p. 153-8. Theodosius' forces sailed direct from Arles to Igilgili in 373: Amm. Marc. 29, 5, 5.

[98] Long - Volpe 1996, 1998. The wreck probably postdates the Vandal era, though it is hard to be that precise from the ceramic material; a wooden box recovered from it contained a precision balance and several weights, but the identity of the imperial pair depicted on two of the latter is uncertain.

ors, would have contained around 150 hectolitres of oil. The provenances of these amphorae again point to Nabeul as the ship's likely port of origin, while the location of the wreck suggests Marseille could have been its intended destination; perhaps the seventy *orcae* of oil and *liquamen* reported by Greg. Tur. to have been stolen from its *cataplus* had arrived at the port on a similar vessel[99]. Although the continuing feasibility of direct sailings between Africa and Gaul in the late sixth century has left only the faintest of traces in the written sources, it therefore seems as if traffic between Tunisian and Gallic ports was still operating much as it had in the days of the western empire[100]. Again, a series of wrecks north of Sicily, such as one located in deep water off Ustica with a very similar cargo to that of La Palud, probably represent one of the Italian branches of the same route north from Tunisia, along which some ships were once more operating in the service of the state[101]. But Frankish Gaul, like late Roman Gaul, had its own, commercial supply-line of African merchandise.

While the shipwreck evidence thus suggests that some proportion of the African wares reaching Gallic ports were shipped there directly, it does not as yet offer similar confirmation of direct shipments of amphorae to southern Gaul and western Italy from the eastern Mediterranean. The available data allows us to pursue late antique vessels of likely eastern origin up the Adriatic and as far as the southern coast of Sicily, but not into western Mediterranean waters, where no late antique wrecks loaded with amphorae of exclusively eastern origin have to date been found[102]. When such amphorae are present in western wreck assemblages, they tend instead to constitute secondary elements in predominantly African shipments. The La Palud wreck, for example, was also carrying four different

[99] Long - Volpe 1996, p. 1274-6; Bonifay - Capelli - Long 2002, p. 198-9. For oil imports to Marseille, see the references above.

[100] Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 10, 2, for a Frankish embassy to Constantinople that sailed to an unnamed African port, and proceeded overland to Carthage; perhaps the old route from Marseille to Igilgili was still operative. The emperor's attempts in *Hist.* 10, 4 to resolve the ensuing diplomatic incident further imply that communications between Africa and Gaul were fairly routine.

[101] Volpe 2002, p. 244-6. Gregory I's letters unsurprisingly show regular and rapid communications between Rome and Africa, but give few indications of specific routes: Contu 2002, p. 287-93.

[102] Dahm 2018, p. 297-300; McCormick 2001, p. 596-8.

types of eastern amphorae, albeit in such trivial quantity – just half a dozen in total – that it is debatable whether they should be regarded as cargo; they could in any case have been taken on board, alongside its main load of African amphorae, at Nabeul, where all four types are attested[103]. The likelihood that ships of eastern origin did venture deep into the north-western Mediterranean is nevertheless suggested by another southern Gallic wreck, or rather the intimation of one in an assemblage of bronze items and coins dredged up on two occasions in the Grazel channel, just south of Gruissan, at one of the entry-points to the ancient Narbonne port-complex. The bronze finds here included a balance bearing two measuring-scales in Greek, while all but one of the 105 coins were copper *folles* from various eastern Mediterranean mints, particularly Constantinople; the latest nine of these bear Sicilian countermarks, and date from 630/1[104]. Although here we have neither a ship nor an amphora cargo, this homogeneous array of finds points to the existence of a vessel – dubbed Grazel B – that had set out from the vicinity of Constantinople in the early 630s and sailed via Sicily to southern Gaul, where it sank in an entrance to the former Gulf of Narbonne.

While Grazel B remains an outlier in the shipwreck data, the written sources meanwhile offer a relative profusion of incidental references to eastern traders and shippers in the west that have long been seen as indicative of their pivotal role in trans-Mediterranean exchange. Such material falls into two broad categories: reports of the presence of eastern ships in western waters, and of the activities of eastern traders in western markets[105]. The significance of the latter is deduced primarily from a series of references in fifth-century sources to an influx into the late antique west of easterners, often described as Syrians, whose association with trade (and avarice) is presented, in particular by Jerome, as almost proverbial, and whose appearance coincides rather neatly with the growing presence of imported eastern amphorae on western sites[106]. Many historians have

[103] Long - Volpe 1998, p. 336-8. Bonifay - Capelli - Long 2002, p. 198-9, for the possibility they were loaded at Nabeul.

[104] Solier *et al.*1981, p. 23-51 (including H. Lavagne on the workings of the balance, and C. Morrisson on the coins).

[105] Claude 1985, p. 149-54, p. 170-87.

[106] Jerome, *Ep.* 130, 7, 8 (Africa), *in Ezech.* 8, 27 (everywhere); Salv., *Gub.* 4, 69 (Gaul); Val. III, *Nov.* 3, 5 (Rome); Sidon., *Ep.* 1, 8, 2 (Ravenna).

extrapolated from such assertions by treating subsequent references not only to Syrians, but also Jews, in Gallic cities as proxy evidence of long-distance trade-networks, plotting mentions of them on maps much as one might now chart the distribution of Gaza wine amphorae[107]. This remarkably tenacious assumption is doubly problematic. Firstly, very few of these references explicitly state these Syrians and Jews had any involvement in trade. While Mark Handley's recent study of the epigraphic evidence for travellers in the late antique west offered remarkable confirmation of both a movement of easterners into the west that reached a peak in the earlier fifth century, and the particular prevalence of Syrians within it, he also showed that these individuals were active in a variety of occupations[108]. Secondly, our sources rarely suggest that those Syrians and Jews who were resident in the west had any particular links with the east, although in the case of the latter, just as likely to be members of long-established communities as recent immigrants, this should hardly be surprising[109]. This is not, of course, to deny that there were Syrian traders in the west. Two long-term residents of Italian ports whose involvement in maritime trade is explicitly noted by Procopius are, for example, an unnamed friend from his Palestinian childhood whom he encountered in Syracuse, and Antiochos, a pillar of the community in Ostrogothic Naples who advocated its surrender to Belisarius' forces[110]. But while one might reasonably suspect that these men were involved in trade with the east, they have no known counterparts in the ports of southern Gaul. Although it is eminently possible that similar traders could have been based in Marseille, Arles, or Narbonne, each of which housed Greek-speaking and Jewish communities in the fifth and sixth centuries, firm evidence for their members being

[107] Pirenne 1937, p. 52-7; Lambrechts 1937. For one especially egregious map, see Rouche 1993, p. 407-8, carte II. Such claims are put into perspective by Devroey 1995, though the default assumption that easterners in sixth-century Gaul must be traders persists, e.g. in McCormick 2001, p. 107, n.100.

[108] Handley 2011, esp. ch. 5. Half of the 251 epigraphically-commemorated easterners in late antique Gaul and Italy came from Syria and Palestine (table 5.7, p. 85). For the early fifth-century peak in such travellers, see p. 102-3 (though their distribution over time must be skewed by changing patterns of commemoration).

[109] Handley 2011, p. 30-3, p. 84-5.

[110] Proc., *Goth.* 3, 14, 7; 5, 8, 21. The ports of Sicily do appear a particular focus for eastern traders, and late antique interregional exchange in general: see e.g. Vera 1997-8, Volpe *et al.* 2015.

engaged in overseas trade is lacking[111]. Much as one might like to imagine Syrian traders resident in Gallic ports were implicated in the arrivals of LRA 4 amphorae direct from Gaza, their very existence is hypothetical.

We can be a little more confident about the arrivals of eastern ships in both Gallic and Italian harbours. One source in particular, Leontius' *Life of St. John the Almsgiver*, written in the early 640s, offers a series of stories recounting the financial and miraculous backing lent by its protagonist to the mercantile ventures of his church's fleet and local ship-captains during his time as patriarch of Alexandria in the 610s[112]. Here we learn how ships from Alexandria not only set out far and wide across the Mediterranean, but out through the Straits of Gibraltar, and up the western coasts of Iberia and Gaul to the 'islands of Britain', a route long corroborated by finds of eastern Mediterranean wares in south-western Britain, and now by the presence of similar material at sites along the Atlantic seaboard[113]. Neither western Italy nor southern Gaul are among the various destinations mentioned by Leontius, but if ships with eastern home ports ventured as far as Tintagel, one imagines they could readily make for Rome or Marseille, and in the former case this is confirmed by the protracted efforts of Pope Gregory to arrange shipments of timber to the patriarch Eulogius in the 590s, which show an Alexandrine ship sailing to and from Portus on a more or less annual basis[114]. The evidence for Gaul, a passing reference by Leontius to the *gallodromoi* of Alexandria, whose name suggests they specialised in the Gallic route, and the incidental mention of a ship undergoing repair in Constantinople before heading for the Gauls, is more allusive[115]. But it is surely revealing that when Dynamius, who in his capacity as *patricius* of Marseille in the late sixth century would have overseen the operations of its port, sought in writing his *Life* of Maximus

[111] For Marseille and Arles: see n. 83 and for Greek-speakers, *V.Caesarii*, 1.19 (Arles), *I.G.*, XIV, 2462-3 (Marseille). For Narbonne, see Sidon., *Ep.* 3, 4, 1; *I.G.*, XIV, 2517; *Conc. Narb.* 589, can. 4, 9, 14, Greg. I, *Ep.* 7.21. We do hear of Jewish traders going to Marseille, but not of any based there. The two named Syrian traders in sixth-century Gaul are in Paris and Bordeaux.

[112] Leontius, *V. Joh. Eleem.*, 10, 13, 20, 26, 28.

[113] *Ibid.*, 10; for the latest on the ceramic data, see Duggan - Turner - Jackson 2020.

[114] Greg. I, *Ep.* 6, 61, 7, 37; 8, 28; 9, 176; 10, 21; 13, 43. Eastern ships also sailed to Mérida in the mid-sixth century: *Vit. Patr. Emeret.* 4, 3.

[115] Leontius, *V. Joh. Eleem.*, 35; *Mir. S.Artemii* 27.

of Riez to imagine a temptation that might have beset the saint during his time as abbot of Lérins, he came up with demons in the shape of eastern sailors who appeared to the holy man one night on the island at a place called *Moles*, presumably its quay. Two of them said they had come to these parts to do business, and in the person of Maximus had found a good of greatest value, if only they could take him back with them to Jerusalem to greet his eager eastern public. Naturally, Maximus saw through this fiendish deception, and the ghost ship evaporated in the face of his prayer[116]. While we cannot know if the merchants who supplied Dynamius' contemporary Hospitius, a recluse near Nice, with Egyptian herb-roots had brought them direct from Alexandria, the prospective arrival of eastern sailors was clearly part of the *outillage mental* of late sixth-century Provence[117].

The feasibility of direct shipments of African and eastern merchandise to southern Gaul is therefore demonstrable primarily from shipwreck evidence in the former case, and from the written sources in the latter. It has also been argued that the distinct provision of goods from these regions to Gaul is discernible in differential patterns of ceramic supply to Marseille and western Italian ports such as Rome and Naples[118]. This is plausible in principle, although one of the main discrepancies cited in support of this claim, a higher incidence of Phocaean fine-ware at Marseille, has been doubted in light of the consistent presence of this ware along the Tyrrhenian seaboard[119]. In broad terms, moreover, the considerable similarities between the Roman and Massiliote assemblages not only in the types of imported wares present, but also in the fluctuations over time of the relative proportions of amphorae of African and eastern origin arriving at the two ports seem more compelling than the differences[120]. But one marked divergence between them, as previously noted, is the virtual absence of southern Italian and Sicilian amphorae in contexts at Marseille

[116] Dynam., *V. Maximi*, 6. «Dum pastor egregius ... ad litus aequoris qui vocatur Moles accessit».

[117] Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 6, 5.

[118] Reynolds 1995, p. 134-5.

[119] Martin 1998, p. 116-7.

[120] Bernal Casasola - Bonifay 2010, p. 56-7. The specific ceramic types imported to Rome and Marseille (and elsewhere) would merit renewed comparison, but that lies beyond the scope of this paper, and my expertise.

beyond the early sixth century, whereas such wares continue to make up a significant proportion of those present in ceramic assemblages at Rome up to and beyond the breakdown of the wider Mediterranean exchange-system in around 700. While the persistent shipment of southern Italian and Sicilian produce to Rome is readily explicable in light of the extent of senatorial and ecclesiastical landholding in the region, it is less easy to see why the same amphorae were no longer exported to southern Gaul in any quantity from these regions, whether directly, or by onward redistribution from Rome or Naples. Their absence is perhaps one further argument for many of the African and eastern wares imported to Gaul having been shipped there either directly or, in the case of the latter, via intervening halts in Africa, rather than via Sicily or Rome.

While the evidence is scarcely conclusive, one might therefore tentatively suggest that although the repertoires of imported Mediterranean pottery and amphorae arriving at western Italian and southern Gallic harbours were broadly similar in nature, a significant proportion of this material was shipped directly from African and eastern ports to a handful of privileged centres such as Rome, Naples, Marseille, and perhaps Arles (in conjunction with the royally-controlled facilities at Fos) and Narbonne, and only then redistributed more widely along the adjacent coasts to the numerous landings of the Rome-Arles route recorded in the *Maritime Itinerary*. This process of redistribution, evident from the ceramic finds from coastal sites in Tuscia, Liguria and Provence that continue well into the seventh century, and implicit in the textual indications of routine maritime communications between them, could in part have been carried out by the same ships on their return voyages, but much of it must have been facilitated by ships based in Italian or Gallic ports, of which we catch only fleeting but suggestive glimpses, such as Pope Gregory's passing allusion to Pisan *drumones*, or his frustration that Bishop Pascasius of Naples took more interest in squandering large sums on building ships than in fulfilling his pastoral duties[121]. These locally-based vessels could have shuttled between the major ports and other intermediate harbours such as Pisa, Genoa, identified by Procopius as a convenient halt for ships en route to Gaul and Spain, and perhaps Nice, supplying a host of lesser landings along the way[122]. One recurrent port of call for such vessels emerges as the island of Lérins, whether by design, as indicated by papal correspondence,

[121] Greg. I, *Ep.* 13, 34; 13, 27.

[122] Procop., *Goth.* 6, 12, 29. For imports well into the seventh century at Pisa, see

or divine agency, as in the case of a ship which was stopped in its tracks by a miraculous lull when sailing from the vicinity of Nice to Marseille until its Jewish crew fulfilled a passenger's desire to be put off there[123]. Almost a century later, Benedict Biscop would end his two-year stay on Lérins by catching another such *navis mercatoria* back to Rome in the late 660s, before taking ship again to Marseille to escort Theodore and Hadrian on their journey to Canterbury, one of the last recorded uses of the maritime rather than the Alpine route by travellers to and from Anglo-Saxon England[124].

One final wreck that might give an idea of the sort of vessel on which Benedict could have travelled, but which also highlights the many gaps in our knowledge, is the ship known as St-Gervais 2, which sank in the later seventh century just off the port of Fos, and was excavated in the late 1970s[125]. The wreck's proximity to the shore probably allowed the cargo in the forepart of the ship to be recovered at the time, but the central area of the vessel was fortuitously preserved by the pitch contained in four re-used African amphorae that had broken on impact. Congealed within this matrix were significant remnants of the ship, and of a large wooden barrel, as well as traces of the grain it was carrying in its rear section. Quite apart from this exceptional survival of a grain cargo, almost everything about this ship is enigmatic. The vessel itself was well-built, largely in the new, skeleton-first style, and substantial, with an estimated total capacity of 40-50 tonnes; its expensive bilge-pump implies it was equipped for open-water sailing, while its deep keel would have ruled out beaching, suggesting it was not designed for local cabotage[126]. The small ceramic assemblage recovered from the pitch, which probably came from the ship's galley, was

Alberti - Costantini 2015. For Nice, see Greg. Tur., *Hist.* 6.5; his stories of Hospitius have a distinctly maritime flavour.

[123] Pel. I, *Ep.* 3, sent Childebert I relics via its monks, while Greg. I, *Ep.* 6, 57 shows Augustine's mission went via Lérins; Greg. Tur., *Glor. Conf.*, 95, for the miracle, wrought by relics of Hospitius.

[124] Bede, *Hist. Abb.*, 3-4.

[125] Jézégou 1998; Kingsley 2004, p. 128-9; Bonifay - Reynaud 2007, p. 102, 106, stress that the amphorae and fine-wares securely associated with the wreck are strongly suggestive of its later seventh-century date.

[126] For a true caboteur, contrast the Dramont F wreck of c.400, roughly built, with a cargo of three tonnes of re-used African amphorae containing pine resin: Joncheray 1975.

largely of African origin, though it did also contain a very few sherds of eastern or more local provenance[127]. Was this a ship from overseas delivering a cargo of grain and – perhaps – amphorae to Fos, the location, as we have seen, of a contemporary *cellarium fisci*, or was it sailing away from it having offloaded part of its original cargo? Like so much of our evidence, the exceptional nature of this wreck serves more to expand the range of commercial possibilities than to reveal their salient characteristics, but it nevertheless confirms that vessels of some size and sophistication were still operating in the Ligurian Sea area in the later seventh century.

Although at that date many of our African and eastern markers of ongoing long-distance Mediterranean exchange were directly descended from fifth-century amphora families, the volume of such traffic is likely to have declined substantially from the period with which we began. The significance of these imports within the economies of Byzantine Italy and Merovingian Gaul must also have changed considerably, although the historiographical frameworks within which they have customarily been interpreted are noticeably different. Whereas in Italy the presence of such wares has often been set in the ominous context of state-sponsored supplies to Byzantine redoubts coming under mounting pressure from the Lombards, in Gaul precisely the same imports have been talked up as symptomatic of the tenacity of Frankish connections with the Mediterranean, and slotted into an illusory framework of long-distance trading networks sustained with particular zeal by members of resident communities of Syrians and Jews. Each of these traditional interpretations seems exaggerated, in the latter case to the point of caricature. While the state clearly played a significant role in the supply of goods to Rome and particular strongholds of imperial power such as S. Antonino di Perti, the availability of similar goods along the Gallic coasts implies that at least some proportion of Italian coastal traffic was also taking place on a commercial basis[128]. While overseas merchants will have been involved in shipping goods to Frankish ports, evidence for their involvement in moving such wares inland, whether directly, or in partnership with associates of the same origin or religion, is virtually non-existent. Indeed, in

[127] McCormick 2001, p. 594, assigns it an eastern home port, for reasons unstated; an African origin seems more likely, but is still speculative.

[128] For recent and well-balanced syntheses, see especially Zanini 2015, 2021, and other papers in the latter volume.

both Italy and Gaul, archaeological evidence for the inland penetration of Mediterranean imports is limited, and retreating over time, though it should be noted that this is hardly a new phenomenon. In western Italy, this diminishing distribution of imported wares is clearly linked at least in part to the advance of the Lombards, but it is becoming increasingly clear that familiar geographical and economic factors were equally at play in determining access to such goods[129]. In Gaul, meanwhile, the scarcity of finds of imported Mediterranean ceramics north of Lyon may in part be indicative of the decanting of oil, wine, and other goods from amphorae into barrels or skins for their onward journey northward; one might doubt, for example, that the forty or so African amphorae that would have been required to convey the 10000 pounds of oil stipulated in the privilege granted to Corbie in 716 were carted 600 miles from Fos to the monastery when other forms of container better suited to overland transport were available[130]. In any case, regardless of its volume or reach, the enduring significance of this traffic cannot be doubted, perhaps ultimately as much for its cultural as its economic value. Although Mediterranean imports had once been a lifeline for Rome, its much-reduced population appears to have adapted rather rapidly to their disappearance in around 700 by expanding its local and regional networks of supply[131]. In Francia, meanwhile, I have suggested elsewhere how a series of particular mechanisms in Marseille and along the Rhône corridor devised by the Merovingian kings to exploit such traffic to their advantage are among the best indications of its enduring significance. But while such imports were highly desirable, most were hardly essential, and when long-distance Mediterranean exchange-networks finally ground to a halt, substitutes for imported oil, wine, or papyrus were readily available[132]. Until then, nevertheless, the evidence from Rome and Marseille shows that these privileged sites in Italy and Gaul remained implicated in that wider system to the end, however difficult it is to isolate the specific commercial interactions between the two regions that were taking place within it.

[129] Menchelli 2017, p. 216-7.

[130] Bonifay - Pieri 2020, p. 876, for the number of amphorae required. The *tractoria* accompanying the grant specifies the provision of carts.

[131] Saguì 1998a; 2002; Marazzi 1993; Delogu 2007.

[132] Loseby 1998; 2000.

Conclusion

As the papers in this volume illustrate from various perspectives, communications and exchange between Italy and Gaul remained regular and vigorous throughout late Antiquity, both by land and sea. The overland routes through the Alps were far better suited to the movement of goods of high value and low volume, however, and for much of our period, especially between the mid-sixth and later-seventh centuries, individual travellers between the two regions chose to go by sea, taking advantage of the ready access to the Gallic interior afforded by the Rhône corridor, and the relative frequency of maritime traffic transporting goods across the Ligurian Sea. Although such shipping had no doubt declined in total volume since the early fifth century, the archaeological evidence confirms that the Italian and southern Gallic coasts continued to be integrated into the interregional exchange-system of the late antique Mediterranean for as long as it continued to exist, down to the early eighth century; the range and variety of imports which the monastery of Corbie was entitled to claim from the *cellarium fisci* at Fos in 716 indicates the persistence of maritime connections of similarly wide scope to those celebrated in more generic style in reference to Arles three centuries earlier by the imperial constitution of 418. While in Italy access to such imports appears increasingly to have privileged Byzantine-held areas, the evidence from Gaul demonstrates how the distribution of such goods transcended any state-sponsored systems of supply, and was substantially commercial.

Within this framework of the persistent integration of both Gaul and Italy into wider Mediterranean exchange-networks throughout late Antiquity, it remains much easier to recognise the routine nature of maritime communications between the two regions than to identify goods shipped from one to the other. In part this is a function of the evidence, because by late Antiquity neither Gaul nor Italy was still exporting archaeologically-traceable merchandise around the Mediterranean in substantial quantity. But it is probably also a reflection of how both regions were predominantly involved in long-distance maritime exchange as consumers rather than producers. As we have seen, textual evidence for the export of Italian merchandise to Gaul or vice versa is scarce, while archaeological indications of the movement of such goods between the two, whether in the form of DSP and common ware pottery or southern Italian and Sicilian amphorae, are short-lived or slight.

Similarly, within a late antique western Mediterranean commercial system dominated in the shipwreck evidence by African cargoes, and in the texts by eastern traders, the activities of Gallic and Italian merchants in moving goods between the two regions remain opaque. While it is presumably the case that some proportion of the African and eastern wares found in southern Gaul were mediated via Italy and its islands, the direct shipments to Gaul from Tunisian and probably eastern Mediterranean ports that had characterised the fourth century seem likely to have persisted, as traders built connections with a relatively stable and wealthy Merovingian market alongside a war-torn and rapidly contracting – if still substantial – Roman one. The broadly similar trends that can be seen in ceramic assemblages from Rome and Marseille between the fifth and early eighth centuries are as likely to reflect two distinct long-distance commercial axes north from Africa as onward traffic from one to the other, especially given the failure of Sicilian and Calabrian amphorae to reach southern Gaul in any quantity after 500, despite their continued prevalence at Rome. The African and eastern imports found at sites along the Ligurian and Provençal coasts will thus have got there, as in earlier periods, via redistribution from the major warehouse ports of Rome and Marseille by overseas ships returning home, but primarily on local vessels engaged in coastal tramping. Only in the decades around 700 did this pattern finally change, as the supply of imports from around the Mediterranean even to privileged sites like Rome and Marseille finally dried up, and Ligurian Sea shipping reached a low ebb, leading travellers between north-western Europe and Italy to prefer the Alpine passes over the Rhône corridor. Maritime traffic between Italy and Gaul never entirely stopped – in 822, ironically, we finally have an explicit reference to ships from Italy putting in at Marseille[133] – but the wider Mediterranean system in which both regions had been implicated throughout late antiquity had ceased to function, and neither the variety nor the complexity of the exchanges that had once taken place across Rutilius' blue Etruscan sea would be rapidly rebuilt.

[133] Guérard 1857, no. 11, in which Louis the Pious confirms Charlemagne's earlier grant to St-Victor of tolls paid by ships from Italy putting in at the monastery.

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