

Introduction: Movement and Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean: Changing Perspectives from Late Antiquity to the Long-Twelfth Century

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This article introduces the themed section »Movement and Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean: Changing Perspectives from Late Antiquity to the Long-Twelfth Century«. This series of articles engages with the ongoing debates in historiography on the role of movement and mobility in the socio-political frameworks of medieval societies throughout the Mediterranean world from Iberia to the Near East. The papers introduced here consider a wide range of contacts and exchange from the diplomatic encounters of late antique Byzantium via the exchange of (religious) ideas and spiritual objects in Italy and the Near East to the fundamental mobility of capital, slaves and goods. Rather than reveal a static, ossified and self-contained range of landscapes, this article will argue that there were not only cross-cultural, religious and political contacts but also economic and social connections that fused the Medieval Mediterranean into a heterogenous contact zone of cultures, ideas and products. Using this broader framework of the Mediterranean as a contact zone and border region between and across the *longue durée* represented by the period from Late Antiquity until the end of the twelfth century allows the contributions to demonstrate movement, not stasis after Rome and the expansion of horizons rather than their restriction.

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...the king possessed nothing at all of his own, except a single estate with an extremely small revenue in which he had his dwelling and from which came the few servants, few enough in number who ministered to his wants and did him honour. Whenever he needed to travel he went in a cart which was drawn in country style by yoked oxen with a cowherd to drive them. In this fashion, he would go to the palace and to the general assembly of this people which was held each year to settle the affairs of the kingdom and in this fashion he would return home again.¹

Einhard's memorable depiction of a Merovingian king in the early eighth century making his lugubrious way to the annual assembly of the Franks struck a chord for both Einhard's Carolingian contemporaries and later commentators.² It is, of course, as a passage, used as a demonstration of the weak, feeble and somewhat tragi-comic state that the Merovingians then embodied, a pale shadow of their powerful predecessors. Or at least, this is what Einhard would have us believe. Careful reflection on this passage also feeds into the perpetuation of persistent characterisations (one might be tempted to suggest caricatures) of early medieval society in Occidental Europe that such societies were fundamentally ossified, static and immobile. There remains an apparent dichotomous paradox that, on the one hand, emphasises regional and local impulses as the foundational engine of society, and on the other hand, identifies a vibrant mobility, between, across and through the continent and beyond. Defining this vibrant mobility has been an encouraging aspect of recent historiographical endeavours to tackle the realities behind early medieval societies in Europe.³

Asking the right questions and finding an effective interpretative balance between narrative and normative sources stands at the centre of the contributions below. In seeking to understand the role of movement and mobility in the Mediterranean societies analysed in this themed series of contributions, it is evident that a clear-cut paradigm does not work. Pre-industrial societies may well have depended upon the agricultural resource base at their disposal and have had limited inter-connectivity, economically speaking, beyond immediate contexts and contacts, but this did not mean that they remained closed to movement and mobility into and across their territories.⁴ In this special section, for example, some contributions concentrate on movement within Italy, as we will explain in more detail below.

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- 1 Thorpe, *Einhard and Notker*, 55-56. »*Nihil aliud proprii possideret quam unam et eam praeparvi reditus villam, in qua domum et ex qua famulos sibi necessaria ministrantes atque obsequium exhibentes paucae numerositatis habebat. Quocumque eundum erat, carpento ibat quod bubis iunctis et bulbulco notico more agente trahebatur. Sic ad palatium sic ad publicum populi sui conventum qui annuatim ob regni utilitatem celebrabatur ire, sic domum redire solebat*«. *Einhardi Vita Karolis*, ed. Pertz, 444. The key word here is *carpentum* which can be rendered as either carriage, cart or chariot. This word originates from the Gaulish *carbantos*. It could also be used to mean a wagon or barouche. Du Cange highlights two senses: a) a two-wheeled covered carriage/coach or chariot especially used in towns or by women and b) a wagon or cart for agricultural use. See Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infime latinitatis*.
 - 2 For discussion of this passage see Fouracre, *Long shadow*, 5-6 and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 102.
 - 3 For the broader picture McCormick and Wickham remain fundamental. Works on particular aspects of the mobility in the Middle Ages continue to encourage refinement of the perceptual responses to these issues. As starting points, see McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy* and Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*. For interesting perspectives on contact zones and border regions, see Wolf and Herbers, *Southern Italy as Contact Area*.
 - 4 There are many examples which allow one to identify longer-distance trade and contact in specific items: olive oil, chestnuts and silk for instance, although the latter is hardly an everyday item at this time. See Story, *Lands and lights*, and Balzaretto, *Chestnuts in charters*. For silk, see Fleming, *Acquiring, flaunting and destroying*. On the other hand, one should also recall the inter-connections maintained by the post-Roman Byzantine Empire through its maritime links. On this, see Zavagno, *Going to the extremes*. In contrast, see Prigent, *Monnaie et circulation*.

Still, the Mediterranean Sea and travel by ship along its coasts, straits and inlets was a major connecting element that is present in most contributions in the section in some form or another. It has often been shown just how central this sea was, even after the political integrity of the Roman Empire had been lost – and before modern seafaring technologies brought another revolution.⁵

There was a wide plethora of possible contacts predicated upon social, economic, political, intellectual and ecclesiastical bases which, at any point, may or may not have aligned in such a way as to initiate and invigorate fundamental change at the socio-cultural and socio-economic levels. Consequently, it flows from these multivalent movements that there remains a variance between societies in terms of scale, in other words, between the macrocosm (e.g. the empire, the kingdom, the city) and the microcosm (e.g. the valley, the village, the landed estate). Here again, historians have to ask the right questions and find the appropriate interpretative model, which takes into account variance in the experiences of individuals who managed and lived the realities of the situation on the ground.

Contact at the elite level is not the same, of course, as that lower down the societal ladder. The latter is less likely to be commented on in narrative sources and to attempt to unpick the reality, one must resort to the witness of diplomatic and normative materials which generally retain their own issues of interpretation. In this respect, one example of elite movement in Italy will illustrate the scenario. In 661, Aripert I (653-661) died, and the Lombard kingdom was partitioned between his two sons Perctarit (661-662 and 671-688) and Godepert (661-662) in an experiment of shared authority that was not repeated in this fashion again. Within the year, however, Godepert had been killed and Perctarit had been forced into exile. He travelled eastwards to the Avar Qaganate, where he was protected for a time until a messenger from his supplanter Grimoald (662-671) reached the Avars demanding that Perctarit be given up.⁶ Perctarit returned to Pavia where he resided briefly under the rather grudging protection of Grimoald. This uncomfortable scenario did not persist, for we are told by Paul the Deacon that Grimoald was worried that the popularity of Perctarit in Pavia would prompt the return of his predecessor to both prominence and power. Once again, Perctarit was forced into exile via Asti, the powerbase of his father, where »friends« (*amici*) were resident who were »still rebels against Grimoald« (*et qui adhuc Grimualdi rebelles extabant*) as Paul the Deacon indicates.⁷ Thereafter, Perctarit travelled to Turin and westwards into exile in Francia. Even here, Perctarit feared the intentions of Grimoald and had embarked to sail across »to the island of Britain to the kingdom of the Saxons«, at which point the news of the death of Grimoald reached him and he returned to Italy.⁸ The prominence of this story in the *Historia Langobardorum* implies that the events described were hardly run-of-the-mill and commonplace. For our purposes they adequately demonstrate that movement and mobility was perfectly possible in the late seventh century. Of course, it does not demonstrate that such theoretical

5 Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, esp. 7-172. See also McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*. All this refers to the great Braudel, *La Méditerranée* for the big changes in the early modern era.

6 Paolo Diacono, 4.51 and 5.2, ed. Capo, 234-253, trans. Foulke, *Paul the Deacon*, 205-213.

7 Paolo Diacono, 5.2, ed. Capo, 252-253, trans. Foulke, *Paul the Deacon*, 213.

8 Paolo Diacono, 5.33, ed. Capo, 278-281, trans. Foulke, *Paul the Deacon*, 236-237.

transit was either straightforward or certain. In his commentary on the pilgrimages of Willibald (721-724) and Bernard (867) from the west to Palestine, McCormick sets out the very real difficulties experienced by pilgrims and travellers who were beset not only by physical challenges but also by the random inadequacies of the transport infrastructure and the limitations imposed by those who controlled the territories visited.⁹ Clearly, these movements were anything but ordinary.¹⁰

Thanks to the recent insights provided by sociological studies,¹¹ the issue of human mobility, together with its practice and its representation, is investigated according to innovative and more comprehensive approaches, which aim to examine the phenomenon in the broadest and most multifaceted way possible.¹² Applied to the early medieval period, this theme has mostly been tackled through the concept of »great migrations« of the fifth and sixth centuries, which has now replaced the traditional concept of »barbarian invasions«.¹³ In both cases, however, it is a similar way of understanding the physical movement of large human groups, which can be more or less violent, from one point of origin to one of final arrival. It is therefore essentially understood as a change of residence or as a crossing of a political-administrative border. If instead applied to the Middle Ages, the concept of movement is immediately connected to the so-called »armed pilgrimages«, the crusades, in which the predominant movement is that of armies and the encounter with other cultures is invariably a religious, political, and economic clash. The studies presented here deliberately depart from these paradigmatic visions of the concept of mobility in the medieval period, to present instead a broader, nuanced and more complex picture, which can also take into account other types of mobility, the examination of which increasingly helps our understanding of medieval societies.

The essays presented here are the proceedings of the papers presented during the conference of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean held in Barcelona in 2019, under the general theme of »*Movement and Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean (6th-15th centuries)*«, in the session entitled »*Movement and Mobility in Uncertain Times: Changing Perspectives in the Mediterranean*«. This dossier interrogates the reality of movement and mobility in the Middle Ages adopting a *longue durée* perspective. Considering both a wide range of source material and immediate contexts, the articles are designed to allow discussion between and across both chronological and geographical boundaries but at the same time permit detailed consideration of specific localities and contexts. How did individuals on the ground perceive and understand movement in the Mediterranean world? What does this tell us about the responses of both societies and individuals to those who moved through and between the spheres of a multidimensional Mediterranean? These are the key questions which this section of articles will approach and discuss.

9 McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 129-138. But on Bernard, see recently Reynolds, *History and exegesis*, who shows that the author may have used second-hand knowledge.

10 McCormick sets out in a number of useful graphs the hierarchy of status with regard to movement. See McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 160, 163. A glance at his »Register of Mediterranean communications« is also illustrative and softens the bias, see, *ibid.*, 852-973.

11 See Cresswell, *On the Move*.

12 See also the recent Paziienza and Veronese, *Persone, corpi e anime*.

13 See, for example, Pohl, *Eroberung und Integration*; Pohl, *Wandlungen und Wahrnehmungen*; Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*; Pohl, *Migrations, ethnic groups*.

Admittedly the Mediterranean is not the only protagonist in all of the case studies herein. Indeed, rather than the sea itself, it is people (both alive and dead) and artefacts that will be considered. The approach here, then, is one that supplements the approach of significant recent scholarship, rather than seeking to replace it with new theoretical modelling.¹⁴ That said, of course, the Roman *mare nostrum* provides the key framework within which the contributions are presented and thus the Mediterranean context is not one that is incidental to the issues discussed. The sea, then, facilitated movement and communication and thus promoted mobility and connectivity. Only through the Mediterranean could all the mobility described in this section ever happen. So, despite not being mentioned constantly, the sea was always there, making all the communication described possible, sometimes even causing it. The Mediterranean and its shores are thus at the centre of our section, not only geographically. They had retained their connecting role despite having split up politically and gradually becoming culturally even more diverse than the old empire had been. This did not keep people from feeling a strong connection. Even in the emerging Islamicate world, many »stayed Roman«, as they did elsewhere.¹⁵ It (nearly) goes without saying that, albeit only a small section in this journal, our goals can only be achieved through a comparative approach, including several historical disciplines. We are thus providing input from medieval studies (both the early and the high Middle Ages), Byzantine and Late Antique studies, orientalist and Judaist approaches. It would be unrealistic to include all of these viewpoints in all contributions. Rather, the articles gathered here each provide a focused analysis of aspects of movement around the Mediterranean. By doing so, however, what emerges is a mosaic that provides at least a little more information than the sum of its parts. This bigger picture can only be produced by examining different source types comparatively and by choosing a perspective »from the ground« up, by studying microstructures even, in some cases.

The essays of this section will be presented in this and a subsequent issue of *Medieval Worlds* (vols. 13-14),¹⁶ pursuing the individual approaches and chronologies selected by each of the authors to examine the theme of mobility and its perception in various contexts of the medieval Mediterranean. However, more precise and meaningful lines of research also link the studies. The essays by Christopher Heath, Ecaterina Lung and Enrico Veneziani examine the issue of human mobility in the Italian peninsula and towards the East through the diplomatic and juridical perspective typical of political authorities: in his examination of Lombard legislation, Heath will consider how Lombard kings, and therefore society as a whole, perceived those who moved through and across the kingdom, both illicitly and legally, arguing that the Lombard kingdom was subject to greater interconnectivity between the Atlantic world of Francia and the Mediterranean cultures of the East. The Perctarit episode, discussed above,

14 Both Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, and Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, for example, follow a far more holistic approach, which can only be achieved in a monograph

15 See Conant, *Staying Roman*, on northern Africa in early Muslim times. See also the contributions by Heath (touching on the situation in Lombard Italy), Gantner (showing Rome, Italy and Constantinople in the process of drifting apart, embodied in the diplomatic mission of Anastasius), and Bondioli, whose piece will demonstrate prolonged, if not intensified interconnectivity, not least on the economic level. See also McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*.

16 The contributions by Lorenzo Bondioli, Fabrizio De Falco, Andra Juganaru, Ecaterina Lung and Enrico Veneziani are planned for publication in *Medieval Worlds* 14. We rely on provisional versions of these articles for this introduction.

also had a »diplomatic« context as well as political, religious and cultural dimensions that illustrate the mosaic of connections between the Mediterranean and beyond. Lung instead focuses on diplomatic relations between the western post-Roman kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire. Paying particular attention to the »barbaric« component of these relations, she considers the barbarian embassies sent to Constantinople or to Byzantine generals on the battlefield in order to understand what problems were linked with the distances they had to cover in order to complete their missions and what role cultural differences played in these relations. Still on the relationship between political institutions and mobility, Veneziani shifts the focus to the twelfth century by offering an emblematic case of immobility through the examination of the pontificate of Honorius II (1124-1130), considered by historiography to be a weak pope due to the fact that, unlike his predecessors, he displayed a much lower level of mobility. Veneziani shows that Honorius was an exception because he managed to control and reside in Rome for much of his pontificate thanks to his solid authority and to the broader consent his authority attained among Roman elite families. As we see here, in and for the 12th century, lack of mobility can and could still be interpreted as a sign of weakness, very similar to the depiction of the already mentioned last Merovingian king in Einhard's rendering many centuries before. Acting as a counterpoint to the issues of multifaceted movement, this contribution concludes this section.

It is not only the movement of people and individuals which is discussed in the papers here. Objects, too, played a crucial part in the movements around the Mediterranean – as did both ideas and religions. These movements attest that human mobility is directly linked to the transfer and germination of ideas and thought.¹⁷ Our essays, however, provide more information than that and therefore contribute strongly to the image of an interconnected Italy, as we shall show. The joint essay by Francesco Veronese and Giulia Zornetta and the contribution by Edoardo Manarini focus on the mobility of relics and their cult as an occasion for political itineraries and power struggles in early medieval Italy. Manarini examines the case of the cult of the relics of Pope Sylvester I (314-335) which assumed importance in the legend of the holy pontiff only during the eighth century, when the *translatio* of the body by the abbot Anselm, from Rome to his monastery of Nonantola, gave rise to the clash over his memory and ideology between Lombard Nonantola and the Roman popes. These two institutions had built their own legitimation discourse in the eyes of Christianity on the basis of the mobility/immobility of these relics. Veronese and Zornetta consider two other cases of the translation of saints' bodies, with the *furta sacra* of St. Mark and of St. Bartholomew. Related to plans to strengthen local public authorities, the mobility of two of the most important relics in the whole of Christianity is investigated in the wide Mediterranean context, thus also considering the circulation of cultural models to and from the Carolingian worlds to which Italy very much belonged at that time.¹⁸ The authors will show just how complex and multifaceted these worlds had become.

17 For a theory of relic transfer and mobility, see, for example, Smith, *Portable Christianity*, and the classic Geary, *Furta sacra*.

18 Bougard, *Was there a Carolingian Italy?*, as well as the entire new volume Gantner and Pohl, *After Charlemagne*.

The remaining essays contemplate aspects of political and cultural mobility together in the broad geographical horizon of the Mediterranean basin. Clemens Gantner explores the figure of Anastasius *Bibliothecarius*, examining his characteristics as a »broker« between two cultures and three courts, namely Rome, Constantinople and Pavia. His career was embellished with many points of intersection between different political environments, which, through his abilities and knowledge, made him one of the most illustrious figures of the ninth century. The contribution will, however, focus on a quite well-documented diplomatic mission that led Anastasius to Constantinople – and on the implications this particular embassy had for himself, the eastern and the western empires and the papacy. Committed to the study of pilgrimages of ascetic women towards Eastern holy places, Andra Juganaru examines the texts of the Church Fathers addressing spiritual relationships and providing advice for nuns who were willing to embark upon their own long and perilous *peregrinatio*. A picture emerges marked by the question of authority between late antique male spiritual guides and ascetic women. Whereas the contributions by Gantner and Juganaru stay very much within the framework laid out by the Ancient Roman Empire – and show the longevity of it – the essays by Lorenzo Bondioli and Fabrizio De Falco shift the chronology and the geographical focus to different landscapes and cultures. Bondioli proposes an extensive study on the Islamic Mediterranean of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with a markedly economic perspective, while also considering diplomatic, cultural and political elements of the interactions that Muslim rulers reserved for non-Muslim cultures. Starting from the documentation of the Cairo *geniza* also helps us to take a short look at the world of Jewish traders active around the Mediterranean. De Falco explores the same shores from the particular point of view of the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II of England (1154-1189), through the works of Gerald of Wales and Walter Map. The negative description of the eastern Mediterranean, of the crusade and, in a way, also of the Holy Land is examined in the context of Henry II's political initiatives, showing clearly how the two authors' personal motivations concurred to shape their narratives.

The dossier therefore presents many different ways of approaching and studying the theme of mobility and human movement, which can be physical or imagined, of living or dead people, or even of spirituality, of texts and cultural materials, as well as of goods and riches. The meeting point of all the events and the cases studied always remains the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, a fundamental means that unites the lands they water and the human societies that reside on them. Over the centuries, these societies have faced the issue of human, social and economic mobility, always in original and never unequivocal ways.

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