

Charlemagne minus Mohammed?

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On 28th January it will be 1200 years since Charlemagne died in 814. His legacy was immense. Poems and epics over the next half-millennium ascribed to him the status of the architect of Christian Europe, a crusader against the Arabs and Ottomans. This mythic importance was to grow greater still. Montesquieu and Voltaire traced the roots of the enlightenment to him. Then, in the aftermath of the First World War, the Belgium historian, Henri Pirenne fixed Charlemagne's role forever in his classic, posthumous history of Europe: *Mohammed and Charlemagne*. In this influential text, a keystone of world history since its publication, Pirenne concluded:

'It is therefore strictly correct to say that without Mohammed Charlemagne would have been inconceivable. In the seventh century the ancient Roman Empire had actually become an Empire of the East; the Empire of Charles was an Empire of the west.... The Carolingian Empire, or rather, the Empire of Charlemagne, was the scaffolding of the Middle Ages'.

Somewhat accurately, Chris Wickham recently commented that this phrase 'fits in with the longstanding metanarrative of medieval economic history which seeks to explain the secular economic triumph of north-west Europe.' As Wickham set out to show, this triumph needs reassessment.

Nevertheless, Pirenne's canonical thesis has held most historians in thrall. Indeed, drawn to its simplicity, like moths to a flame, popular European history still slavishly follows his interpretation. In fact, as my colleague David Whitehouse and I argued thirty years ago, the first systematically assembled archaeological evidence showed that the collapse of the Roman Mediterranean, except in the Levant, clearly predated Mohammed. The Arabs did not destroy 'the Roman pond'. Pirenne was wrong! However, we concluded in 1983 that Charlemagne was the architect of the renaissance of Latin Christendom thanks, in particular, to

silver acquired from the Abbasid Caliphate. Our archaeological revision in support of part of Pirenne's thesis has been widely adopted. The most important support has come from Michael McCormick's in his marvelous *Origins of the European Economy*. McCormick, following Sture Bolin's re-working of Pirenne's thesis, sought the origins of Charlemagne's renaissance in the connections with the Umayyads and especially the Abbasids in the Near East. Slaves were the primary export from Christendom and Scandinavia; in return silver and precious goods were imported in small but politically significant amounts. These imports, he argued, fuelled the take off of the political economies of Latin Christendom and the west Baltic communities. McCormick concludes: 'So in a paradoxical and profound sense, perhaps Pirenne was right, even when he was wrong: without Mohammed, there would have been no Charlemagne'. In sum, McCormick wrote 'communications between the Frankish empire and the eastern Mediterranean world surged in the final decades of the eighth and the first decades of the ninth century....never again in the history of Europe did they come close to the low levels that prevailed before 750'. Other recent studies of the history of the Mediterranean Sea – by Horden and Purcell – *The Corrupting Sea*, and by Abalafia – *The Big Sea* – have essentially accepted this revised Pirenne paradigm. By contrast, Wickham contends that the Merovingians and Carolingians had no interest in the Mediterranean. Their focus, he argues, was on building relations with the Popes in Rome.

Thirty years on from my book with Whitehouse and a dozen years after the publication of McCormick's monograph a wealth of archaeology now challenges these 20th-century conclusions. Today it is clear that China expanded rapidly to be the great power of this era, partly determining the direction of the Abbasid Caliphate. Latin Christendom was hugely underdeveloped by these global standards. Under Charlemagne there was undoubtedly an economic transformation, but events show now that real values significantly altered not around 800, but forty to fifty years later in the mid 9th century. Distracted by the civil wars that occupied Charlemagne's descendants, and by the rise of the Saracen and Viking raiders, like our Renaissance and Enlightenment ancestors we have been misled by the cultural discomforts experienced by the narrators of the time. In this first post-Roman experience of globalization, I would argue, as in our own times, there has been a

temptation to listen to those making history. Instead, we should be analyzing what was happening to the vast majority whose economic activities have left only an archaeological record.

On the bases of this evidence I will argue, thirty years on from my earlier book, we have all misread the evidence. Our attention should be on a global reading, as well as measured events and changing values. Central to my case is the work of the American sociologist, William Sewell. In his book the *Logic of History* Sewell contends that historical events are as profoundly spatial as they are temporal. If, as Sewell suggests, histories acquire shape and texture during transformative but unpredictable events, then to reject eventful analysis in the absence of text is to deny history to this most substantial part of our collective past. Sewell's *Logic of History* has been skillfully adapted by the archaeologists, Beck, Bolender, Brown and Earle who have termed it 'Eventful Archaeology'. I shall in this lecture offer several examples of this kind of archaeology.

First, a geo-political assessment. The archaeology of late antiquity reveals a seismic break between the ancient world and the 9th century. The scale of the seismic break in much of Latin Christendom still perplexes historians. But it is incontrovertible. By the 7th century metropolitan Rome was falling into ruin, and its population was no more than a few thousands. By AD 800 when Charlemagne was crowned Emperor, the ancient city was a loose coalition of aristocratic and ecclesiastical communities comprising numerous churches (listed in the Einsiedeln itinerary) lacking the idea of a city. Perhaps five to ten thousand people lived here in contrast to the million under Augustus. Rome's population, nonetheless, was still possibly the biggest assembly of people in the Continent. Contrast this with Xian in Tang China with a population said to have numbered a million; or with Baghdad or Samarra in the Abbasid Caliphate. Urban society in the West was reduced to what Theodore Laskaris later called "mouseholes", except in the North Sea emporia. In the Caliphate and China the motor of development lay with the massive state artisanal enterprises. This is mostly visibly witnessed in the excavation of the Belitung wreck found off of Indonesia, dating to about AD. 837. The Belitung boat was built on the Persian Gulf, but it was filled with exquisitely made Chinese porcelains and Thai lead ingots. Aside from the boat, which conjures the

world of Sinbad the Sailor, this cargo speaks to a scale of manufacturing we associate with the later Middle Ages. By contrast, Byzantine or North Sea wrecks of this same era were carrying miniscule cargoes. Are we surprised? Not at all. Look at the tons of Abbasid glass being produced at Tyre and Raqqa, traded to Urumchi and Edo, Japan. By comparison, glass in Christendom was manufactured in miniature bowl kilns at Glastonbury and San Vincenzo al Volturno. John Goldstone makes this point rather baldly: 'On the far western periphery of Eurasia, in western Europe, is a savage but nimble race of warriors, skilled forgers of arms and armor, clever with clockworks and other trinkets but dependent on crude iron and cruder steel, and with no skills in production of silks, fine cottons, or other rich textiles, nor in the production of ceramics, lacquers, nor any resources of precious jewels, jade, spices and aromatics, or other valuables. From the perspective of Europe (and of the rest of Eurasia), the Orient is the fountain of all riches; thus, the western Europeans scheme on how to get there.' (Goldstone 2000: 181). Hard as it is to grasp this, our medieval western texts read like English or Italian newspapers today oblivious to the massive urbanization underway in the Gulf and China. To be fair, when Charlemagne was given a water clock as well as an elephant by an Abbasid embassy, he felt so certain of his status he reciprocated with some modest counter gifts. Almost certainly he did not understand that a metropolitan world of a different order of magnitude existed far, far away.

Charlemagne's elephant belongs to an undeniable moment of great change in Latin Christendom. A gift from Caliph Harun al'Rashid, it is the unspoken touchstone of great change for historians like Pirenne, Bolin and McCormick. Great changes, or at least incremental reforms were certainly taking place. With the *Admonitio Generalis* in AD 789, Peter Brown points out, there was a major shake-up of the Frankish Church. With the reforms of coinage at the Council of Frankfurt of AD 793/4 a new direction was envisaged for the economy in which the importance of a measured currency now took legal priority over customary tribute. From this time, too, dates the Capitulary *de Villis*, a handbook on estate management. These were part of the "*correctio*" agenda, evident to art, architectural and numismatic historians, yet fundamentally part of the larger political and economic initiative that fascinated Pirenne.

As we have seen, most historians, like our earlier book, looked to Abbasid silver dirhems as the economic driver. At face value, this is still an appealing argument. Let us consider the cornerstone of North Sea commerce in the late 8th century, Dorestad, to once again review relations between the German homeland and the Baltic. This is my first illustration of 'eventful archaeology'.

Dorestad had been founded in the 680s as the Mediterranean economy reached its lowest point. It was a weathervane for Rhine artisanal production and above all Austrasian demand. The emporium, like others around the North Sea, flourished until the mid 8th century when a crisis occurred. New excavations at Dorestad reveal a staggering revival in the 790s lasting until about 820. At Dorestad, for example, craftsmen are largely absent in the late 7th-century at the newly excavated 2 hectare 'Veilingterrein' site. Instead, in its first phase there were three enclosed farmsteads set back a hundred metres or so from the waterfront. A century later around AD 790 the area was completely redeveloped. The farms were replaced by seven enclosed homesteads, at least three of which were active workshops. In other words, the late 7th-century town appears to have been an entrepôt of merchants – initially perhaps the celebrated Frisians – who handled the exchange of Rhenish manufactured commodities (in particular barrelled wine, ceramic tablewares, glassware and lava quernstones) and west Scandinavian products (amber, furs, ivory and slaves). Its inhabitants clearly drew upon a hinterland in the Lek-Rhine delta, but Dorestad's maritime impact was far greater. This 'business model' was replaced by another in the late 8th century. Not only was it now the entrepot for increased Carolingian output, but even its rural heart was transformed into an industrial sector of 7 workshops, where over forty Carolingian coins provide an index of increased wealth and probably intense taxation. Here, for example, imported Italian tesserae were melted down to make the beads much in demand at the Danish emporium of Ribe.

Dorestad's zenith begs a simple question: what was driving the intensified commerce? Approximately 250 wooden barrels re-deployed as well casings were found in the 'Veilingterrein' excavations, an illustration of the massive trade in Rhenish wine. The beads and ironwork, too, along with the ceramics testify to the importance of commodities. But how was the demand for these items met in west Scandinavia? What actually funded this boom that coincided with the

explosion of monumental church construction throughout the Frankish realms? Was it really amber and furs, or high quality Norwegian iron and slaves? Or was it Arab silver as Bolin, McCormick and our book proposed? The answer is that Arab silver existed in the western Baltic but in tiny amounts. New research on the history of the Arab dirhems indicates that these were only flowing into Scandinavia from the 840s onwards.

In the absence of silver, are we to believe it was a demand for slaves sold to the Caliphate by Mediterranean merchants? Dorestad, in this model, was the gateway to Venice and the Adriatic Sea, which, in turn, was the conduit to the Levant. But, does the archaeological evidence shed light on this?

The excavations at Butrint on the Straits of Corfu, the channel leading from western Greece to the Adriatic Sea, reveals no such large-scale commerce. Excavations of Butrint's *kastron*, burnt down around the time of Dorestad's vast expansion around AD 800, shows it was an aristocratic household engaged in prestige goods exchange reaching to the Aegean and southern Italy. But its material culture was miniscule by the standards of one Dorestad dwelling. A crate of raw glass waste and a mixture of ceramics showed wealth and connections, but on a small scale. This picture of small-scale long-distance trade is repeated at the 6-hectare emporium Comacchio at the mouth of the river Po. No less materially underwhelming are the 9th-century merchants's house from Torcello near Venice. Trade in the Adriatic Sea at about AD 800 can best be described as administered or directed commerce: small ships travelled from point A in Byzantium to Butrint or Comacchio or Venice, perhaps collecting cargoes as *cabotage* en route as had been the tradition since the Bronze Age Uluburan ship. There is simply no evidence of bulk trading. Any trade in Scandinavian slaves would have been in small numbers just as the movement of raw glass, mostly refuse coming from the Levant, was small if significant.

Was there more commercial traffic in the Tyrrhenian Sea? After all, it was at Pisa that an Abbasid ambassador disembarked with an elephant before travelling to Charlemagne's court. The answer is no. The archaeology shows small amounts of *pietra ollare* being distributed, possibly from Genova, as far as Tuscany. Small amounts of globular amphorae occur on coastal sites but these are not indicators of bulk commerce. Pisa was possibly a small emporium of Comacchio

dimensions; perhaps Portus Scabris existed on the same scale. I have described Rome already where traded bulk goods are absent. Similarly, bulk imports are absent at Naples and coins are absent until the mid 9th century. Like the Adriatic Sea, no Dorestad or Ribe existed in the 8th or 9th centuries along this coast.

In sum, when Charlemagne made his treaty with the Venetians in AD 812, he almost certainly had aspirations to revive a Mediterranean connection. But if he was planning a connection to the Caliphate and possibly China, it certainly did not take shape in his lifetime.

Mediterranean trade in the age of Dorestad can be measured, at its maximum, in a few slaves for a few crates of glass waste and other precious goods.

But Charlemagne did create a lasting legacy that led to substantive commercial transformation by the 840s. Here the British School at Rome excavations at San Vincenzo al Volturno in Molise have completely altered our European understanding of the *Admonitio* of AD789. Uniquely at San Vincenzo al Volturno, Charlemagne's conceptual new business plan for rural and ideological management, the *correctio*, can be measured, much as at Dorestad.

Let us not pretend that Charlemagne's advisers invented a blueprint for his reform monasteries like the St. Gall Plan (c.AD 830). Like the European Union today, the *Admonitio* was an operating concept, but now, thanks, to the excavations at San Vincenzo we can measure the main features of this ideological concept. Until now, Pirenne's thesis in this respect had to be measured by the texts written by stakeholders who gained massively under Charlemagne and, as we shall see, lost as massively to the rise of a new aristocracy over the course of two generations following his death.

First, let us look at the *eventful archaeology* of this Dark Age Pompeii.

This was a Beneventan monastery, occupying an earlier rural bishopric, at the juncture between a polyculture and pastoral economies. Remote today, it was well-placed on a major route, close to the frontiers between Beneventum, Spoleto and the Papal State. As importantly, San Vincenzo belonged to a network of major Carolingian monasteries that included Fulda and Monte Cassino. Like these monasteries, San Vincenzo's chronicle provides a narrative that in no way illustrates the changing history of this small town.

Briefly, the excavations throw light upon the main four 8th- to 9th-century phases are as follows:

1. Phase 3c, the 780s: the small proprietary monastery expanded to cover 5/6 hectares.
2. Phase 4a, 792-808 (Figure 3): the expansion of the proprietary monastery with its focus being a huge new basilica, San Vincenzo Maggiore. Constructed under the patronage of Grimoald III, the monastery fused Beneventan and Carolingian palatial models. The new plan focussed upon its two axial corridors and upon administered consumption. One corridor provided access to San Vincenzo Maggiore from the palace; the other provided access to San Vincenzo Maggiore from its claustrum. During this time until c.819, according to the *Chronicon Vulturnense*, the monastery acquired many estates. Most of these estates were in Campania, though significantly some were along the Adriatic coast, mostly in northern Apulia.
3. Phase 5a, c 833-9: probably supported by Sicardus, Prince of Benevento, San Vincenzo Maggiore was remodeled. A ring crypt was inserted into the basilica to promote a cult of relics. The monastery also created facilities for welcoming minor aristocratic donors for the first time. So now there were two secular entrances to the great basilica. First, the phase 4 connection from the palace to San Vincenzo Maggiore, and now, second, a new, grandiose entrance for these other visitors. At this time the monastery also built a collective workshop for producing prestige goods. We must presume, too, that only in the 830s was the monastery accessible to pilgrims travelling down the Via Numidia from Rome to San Michele in Apulia. In short, new productive and institutional elements were incorporated in a significantly revised plan of the monastery.
4. Phase 5a2, c 842-48: enhanced status was given to minor donors. First, a new, more welcoming entrance to the monastery was made for minor donors. Second, the workshop was re-designed: it was remodeled to be managed by an official, in all likelihood a chamberlain. The chamberlain himself had his own staircase entry into the great basilica, San Vincenzo Maggiore. With these changes, the monastery was placing greater emphasis upon the cult of relics to win support for itself. We can surmise that in the 840s its principal royal donors played an increasingly marginal role in sustaining the monastery. Output from the workshops was apparently considered more important. These included enamels,

fine metalwork and bonework. We propose that from this time the monastery produced counter-gifts, creating gift-giving cycles with minor donors drawn to support this monastery by its cult of relics. At this time Campanian pottery occurs at San Vincenzo al Volturno for the first time, showing its consumption patterns were changing too. Meanwhile, in the monastic *terra* in the upper Volturno valley new churches were built, laying the framework for future *incastellamento*. In sum, new values were being adopted by the monastery as a central-place and by the minor aristocrats now supporting it.

In sum, San Vincenzo had shifted in the arc of 60 years from an emphasis upon consumption based on one donor to one in which production linked to many minor donors was increasingly instrumental in its survival. Significantly, as San Vincenzo formed a relationship with minor donors, it had already accumulated lands on the Adriatic Sea coast. From the 830s onwards Adriatic Sea merchants presumably supplied the monastery with small amounts of Alpine soapstone. These were presumably traded down the Po and then southwards along the Adriatic coast by way of Comacchio. By this route, it also obtained the large amount of maritime fish that the monks consumed as well as its sea salt. By this route, too, it may have acquired the two Abbasid polychrome glazed dishes found in the excavations. The confluence of minor donors and new consumption patterns at San Vincenzo from the mid 9th century, therefore, invites us to look to the revival of Adriatic trade.

So what do we find at Butrint, that weathervane opposite Corfu connecting the Aegean to the Adriatic Sea? This is my third example of *eventful archaeology*.

According to David Abulafia, ‘...the Adriatic Sea is a miniature Mediterranean; the Adriatic has, since the early Middle Ages, brought the inhabitants of Italy face-to-face with Slavs, Albanians, and other Balkan peoples.... The Adriatic was a special theatre of operations for Venice....’ (2005, 67). Situated on the Straits of Corfu, at the junction to seaways leading westwards to Sicily, and northwards to Venice, as we have seen, in the 7th century Butrint was reduced to little more than a castle located in two towers in the lower city’s seaward defenses. As we have seen these towers were destroyed by fire around AD 800. Two

elements of the material culture need to be emphasized: coins are conspicuously absent and the ceramic diversity is striking. Being in the lower city we can only assume that Butrint's commander at the time wished to have direct control over traffic plying the straits as Frankish pilgrims and travellers such as Amalarius in 813 sailed by the port.

In the light of the San Vincenzo sequence, it is the successor to the towers inside Butrint that interest me. These were found in the ruins of the Roman suburb on the Vrina Plain. Here, within an abandoned 5th-century ecclesiastical complex an undefended aristocratic *oikos* of the commander was discovered. Postholes found within the paved narthex of the 5th-century basilica show that its upper floor was reinforced to take a new residence. Fire-blasted through the paving stones, the primitive architecture of the house cannot be understated. No less fascinating were the contemporary conditions. Its ground floor, like the areas around the church, were covered in a thick deposit of black earth in which 1 silver *milaresion* and 48 bronze *folles* spanning c 840-950 were found. 5 Byzantine lead seals belonging to the same period were also discovered. The complex comprised other buildings, workshops a cemetery and a rich material culture. The ceramics, like the prolific coins, distinguish the culture of this household from the towers inside Butrint. Amphorae of a distinctive Otranto type make up about 50% of the pottery, while local kitchen wares made here amount to most of the rest.

The coins and seals confirm the Byzantine administrative role of this household. Certainly, the material culture distinguishes the household from anything yet found in the large excavations in Butrint, including the towers described earlier. Was this, then, the residence of the *archon* of Vagenetia, the region opposite Corfu, whose seal has been discovered in excavations in Silistra, Bulgaria? Indeed, was this the household at Butrint (*polis epineios*) in which according to the *Vita Eliae iunioris* St Elias the Younger and his companion, Daniel, were held prisoner at Butrint in 881-2, on suspicion of being Arab spies, on returning from visiting shrines in the Peloponnese?

In summary, then,

1. c AD 800 Butrint comprised an area concentrated upon the western defenses, with a mixture of East Mediterranean and Apulian imports besides local wares and a crate of raw glass waste. This was a centre of consumption with limited evidence of production or involvement in bulk commerce.
2. c AD 840-950 an aristocratic *oikos* was located in an unfortified open area of the old Roman suburb. Its ceramic assemblage comprised approximately 50% Otranto wares and 50% locally made wares. The coins, seals and imported globular amphorae show a marked switch of emphasis towards greater demand by the community associated with managed production and bulk commerce.

In short, returning to the bigger picture, the archaeology emphasizes only small-scale administered connections between largely closed Mediterranean worlds when Charlemagne struck a deal with the Venetians in AD 812. This treaty, we must surmise, promised better controlled, if small-scale, connections to the Caliphate than the Abbasid-Scandinavian route to the Baltic Sea through western Russia that had existed since the 780s. By 812 when the treaty with Venice was signed, we might speculate, the Franks were well aware that too many Scandinavian stakeholders were now drawing down upon the imported resources that were needed to sustain the high level of consumption of the palace and monastic cultures of Francia from c 780. Certainly, by altering the balance of power, with an eye on potential oriental traffic, the communities around the Adriatic Sea were sensing the first winds of change.

Change actually occurred a full generation later in the 840s, just as it did at San Vincenzo in the centre of the Italian peninsula. We must look for two origins for this economic transformation. First, the Byzantine economy was revitalized. Secondly, as we have seen at San Vincenzo, the minor aristocracy was once more active in rural Italy, creating new demands for commodities. Let us look at each of these two new circumstances in turn.

First, as we have now seen, from about AD 840 Byzantine officials and merchants reached out to the western Balkans and, more importantly, to Sicily and Malta. Malta and Sicily suddenly became the crucible of an

economic upturn, fostering connections to North Africa and as far north as Naples. Urban revival in Sicily, at places like Sofiana, unlike peninsular Italy, illustrate an economic energy comparable to the North Sea zone at this time. Not surprisingly it is Byzantine coins minted in Sicily that date the aristocratic *oikos* at Butrint, as well as the expansion of Byzantine operations in the Salento. It is exactly at this time that the Byzantine ambassador, Theodosius visited Mainz, and precisely at this moment that Byzantine seals occur at Tisso, the palatial residence in central Denmark. The Franks and Byzantines, we are told, were exploring new forms of cooperation that actively involved the Venetians in 840 trying to destroy the Arabs who had seized Taranto. But there is a bigger picture to consider.

From this same moment, new studies show, Arab silver dirhems poured into the western Baltic Sea region. A reinterpretation of this influx of silver – focused upon the Norwegian emporium of Kaupang - now indicates that the boom in Scandinavian relations with the Caliphate – *contra* Bolin and our book – occurred from the 840s. These dirhems continued to arrive until the late 9th century. It is no surprise, then, that as Byzantine seals occur in central Jutland, so the greatest hoard of this age, from Hon in Norway, contains not only dirhem but Byzantine coins newly minted in Sicily.

In sum, in the 840s the conditions for growth and in particular, demand, existed in Denmark and Norway as they did now in Italy. Just as Samarra was becoming the greatest metropolis of the Caliphate and as the Belitung wreck sank off of Indonesia with its Chinese cargo, by small steps new Mediterranean bulk commerce was taking off. Historians have focused upon the pirates described in the texts, whereas archaeologists have noted the new engineering of Byzantine merchant ships. Which is the correct measure: pirates or commerce? The distribution of Sicilian coinage from the 840s as far north as Naples, and the spread of traded goods along the Adriatic Sea littoral shows that the Italian aristocracy was engaging with these new commercial opportunities. Pirates or no pirates, the volume of maritime commerce was once again increasing.

Second, this commercial revolution was based upon new demand. This is best illustrated by the rise of the Italian rural aristocracy and

concomitantly a new, agrarian managerial strategy. In the past the scale of this agrarian transformation has either been understated or tacitly ascribed to the procurement need to provide provisions for the new urban centres. The undisputed collapse of Roman agrarian systems in Italy occurred as marked investment was being made in transforming agricultural output in the Merovingian, Anglo-Saxon, Irish, and Danish regions. We now know that in Mercia, for example, field systems once attributed to the 10th century or later were created by the 7th century. Similar rural intensification also characterizes northern France in this era. By the early 9th century this intensification involved a programme of cerealization and managed livestock production. These required strategic agrarian planning of landscapes, much as Charlemagne's reforms envisaged. By the 9th century the same agrarian intensification appears to be occurring in western Denmark. Contrast these new findings with the important excavated data now available from Tuscan and other Italian rural sites. Here, the agrarian economy at places like Cugnano, Miranduolo and Monterotondo before the mid 9th century was quintessentially based upon subsistence resources. Italy had reverted to Bronze Age levels of rural productivity. These Tuscan excavations now show the adoption of a cerealization programme by the mid 9th century. Its archaeological index is the sudden occurrence in these villages of grain storage pits. At this moment new, small manor houses also appear in the villages. Village production and consumption suddenly altered. Nearly two centuries after northern Francia or southern England, a new rural economy was being shaped in Italy. This was the platform upon which the new villages of Italy were shaped. Perhaps the issue is not why it happened, but why this agrarian intensification in Italy occurred so long after a similar transformation north of the Alps. Nevertheless, as North of the Alps, with new rural management in Italy, there were new material demands. In mid 9th century Italy, reaching out to the Byzantines and the Caliphate for luxuries now made sense just as, earlier, 8th-century Frisians created new consumption patterns around the North Sea.

Can we wonder that the narrators of this age found these social and economic changes uncomfortable? The 'Other', especially Arabs and Vikings, where the economies were energized, represented a huge new threat. But from the 840s the economic framework that fascinated Henri Pirenne endured. This is the real point. Charlemagne was the change

agent, taking old ideas and reaching for new ones. Thirty years after his death, with the revival of Mediterranean commerce, Chinese jade reached San Vincenzo as did Abbasid polychrome dishes. A new global order was seeking connections in a minuscule manner that, judging from the elephant and the clock, were of immense symbolic importance in this economically under-developed society.

Charlemagne's geopolitical vision is of course unknown. Could he have understood that the growth of the Caliphate and its demand for Chinese goods would lead to significant overtures to the Baltic Sea, to Byzantium, and indirectly to Latin Christendom? Could he have foreseen the rise of the aristocracy and the concomitant fear this induced in the old command economy? Binary opposites perhaps, Charlemagne and Mohammed, really speak to the first steps to make a European economy, but not in the 790s. Old post-Roman values had to end before this economy actually operated effectively across Christendom.

What was the key to this history? As Soren Sindbaek has shown using network analyses, it was not about territories but small worlds connected through nodes. As he put it: 'we find a maximum of eight links separating a milkmaid in Uppland from a shepherd in Tuscany'. We can see this vividly at San Vincenzo al Volturno, so let me return there to conclude. Here was a node with an abbot networked across Christendom, plainly sensitive to changes in the built environment and the materialism that shaped this.

In 783 at San Vincenzo the Abbot and his community had a ferocious dispute about allegiance to Charlemagne. Such was its significance that the monks were summoned to Rome where the Lombard Abbot won his case because his accuser had been caught having sex in the church. It was a pyrrhic victory. The abbot died on his return to San Vincenzo and his successor, the new abbot, favoured the Frankish reforms. Almost a century later on the 10th October 881, San Vincenzo was sacked by an Arab warband hired by the Neapolitan Bishop, Athanasius. In this century the material culture separating these two events was revolutionized. This was the essence of the so-called Carolingian renaissance. From almost nothing to extraordinary materialism this *eventful archaeology* mirrors our own last century - from the age of Pirenne till today. The archaeology also shows that the attackers

targeted the Abbot's house, burning it to the ground. However, very little else was destroyed, contrary to the long poignant description in the *Chronicon Vulturnense*. Within two years the survivors had made peace with the Neapolitans, and together developed commercial connections in the Bay of Naples, and then founded new villages. Between these two key dates at San Vincenzo, AD783 and 881, Carolingian Europe engaged the Mediterranean by stages, imitating its inventions in the Baltic Sea. I hope that I have shown that archaeology fixes these events today better than the texts. More to the point, the *eventful archaeology* unlike the texts shows North and South Europe became far points during the mid 9th century in a new world order which has, in its various forms, dominated global economic history ever since. We await a new version of Pirenne's great text: Charlemagne, Mohammed and the Tang.