Rome in the ninth century:  
the economic system*

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The economic history of Rome in the period between the fifth and the ninth centuries has been described as a process of reduction from the status of central point in a world economy to that of a regional capital – in fact the capital of a region that was smaller than modern Lazio.¹ Both the archaeological and the written records show that in those centuries the city increasingly came to rely only on local resources, as regards food supply and artifacts of various kinds. The process reached its peak in the eighth century, contemporary with the establishment of the temporal government of the popes.

The most characteristic symptoms of this process are the domuscultae that were established by the popes in the second half of that century. They were large farms, or compounds of farms, directly administered by the Roman church, with the aim of supplying the papal house and the various officials of the papal administration with agrarian products and meat.² The same tendency to self-supply is seen in the economic policy of other Roman ecclesiastical institutions, such as monasteries, hospitals and diaconies, all of which endeavoured to obtain large estates that had to provide food and other commodities for the consumption of the personnel and for institutional tasks such as charity and the maintenance of the ecclesiastical buildings. The same can be surmised for the urban lay society.³

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¹ Durliat 1990, 155, note 296, 161; Marazzi 1993.
² On domuscultae, see Marazzi 1998, 235-261; idem 2003. On the reserved destination of their products: pope Zacharias establishes the domusculta Sancta Caecilia, “quae videlicet domum cultam usui proprio, dominicae videlicet rationis, descripsit”; the same pope “obligavit usui ecclesiae permanendum” the other domusculta Galeria and the “massae” Antius and Formias (Lib. Pont. 224, I, 434-435); pope Hadrian I, establishing new domuscultae, states “tantummodo in propriis subsidis et cotidianis alimentis predictorum fratrnum nostrorum Christi pauperum cuncta proficiant atque perenniter erogentur”; “in usu et propria utilitate sanctae nostrae Romanae ecclesiae perenniter permaneant” (Lib. Pont. 328, I, 502).
³ Cf. Delogu 1993; Noble 2000, 70-72. Economic self-sufficiency of the ecclesiastical establishments, for instance: Gregory II presents the basilicas of St Peter and St Paul with “praedia et
This redimensioning of the economy of the city and its territory to local production is confirmed by the archaeological evidence that shows how the import of food from distant countries gradually declined during the seventh and eighth centuries and ceased completely in the ninth.\(^4\) The numismatic record adds further support to this picture and to our perception of the city’s economic system. In the second half of the eighth century Rome suffered a heavy monetary crisis. The local mint produced gold and silver coins with an increasingly reduced content of precious metal; by the end of the century the Romano-Byzantine monetary system was abandoned and the popes, who in the meantime had become the rulers of Rome, ordered the mint to produce only one silver denomination, modelled on the Carolingian \textit{denarius}.

However, in the ninth century the new Roman silver coins circulated very little in everyday life.\(^5\) This suggests that recourse to the market was limited; the essential needs of daily life were probably provided for by self-supply of the landowners, whether individuals or institutions; at the lower levels of society, there may have been non-commercial distribution of goods, on behalf of the dependants of ecclesiastical

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oliveta ... \textit{pro concinnatione luminariorum}” (J.E. 2184); Gregory III establishes the monastery dedicated to the holy Stephen, Laurence and Chrisogonus: “\textit{in quo monasterio pro sustentatione ibidem ... praeda et dona atque familiam largitus est}” (Lib. Pont. 197, I, 418-419); the same pope restores the diacony of Ss Sergius and Bacchus “\textit{concedens omnia quae in usu diaconiae existunt, statuit perpetuo tempore pro sustentatione pauperum in diaconiae ministerio deservire}” (Lib. Pont. 201, I, 420); Hadrian establishes two new diaconies “\textit{concedens eis agros, vineas, oliveta, servos vel ancillas et peculii diversis atque rebus mobilibus, ut de reeditum eorum crebro lusma diaconiae perficientes pauperes Christi refocillentur}” (Lib. Pont. 545, I, 509-510); similar provisions of the same pope in \textit{Lib. Pont.} 337, I, 506; 347, I, 510; 351, I, 511; Leo III rebuilds a hospital in \textit{Naumachia} and “\textit{predia etiam illic urbana vel rustica pro alimonis Christi pauperum seu advenis vel peregrinis ... obtulit}” (Lib. Pont. 412, II, 28); similar measures taken by Paschal I: \textit{Lib. Pont.} 434, II, 54; 439, II, 57; 442, II, 58.

On the economic self-sufficiency of the diaconies, see also Bertolini 1968, 373. So far the economic basis of the Roman lay people in the ninth century has been little investigated. No doubt the nobility and the urban middle class based their economy on landed property, see Marazzi 1998, 206-235; \textit{idem} 2001, 57. On the analogy of the ecclesiastical economy, it seems quite likely that the produce of the private estates was primarily intended to supply the owners with food and other essential commodities. On the relevance of local production for the urban people: when, on December 791, the Tiber flooded the Roman country “\textit{nec serere pars maxima Romanorum valuit ipso tempore, et pro hoc imminebat tribulatio magna}” (Lib. Pont. 356, I, 513). On the agrarian use of large parts of the Roman urban territory in the eighth-ninth centuries, see Santangeli Valenzani 2003, 228-230. Bread was usually home-made in Rome: Johannes diaconus, \textit{Vita Gregorii}, IV, 97 (P.L. 75, 239).
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\(^4\) Romei 2004. It is worth noticing that large vessels, suitable for the transportation of foodstuffs, were not produced in Rome and its region during the ninth century, see Patterson 1993.

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and lay lords as well as the poor and foreigners. As regards food supply, it is likely that the market played a subsidiary role; agrarian surpluses may have been sold on the market only on special occasions; the market may have been more important for pottery, tools and other handicrafts – though these were also produced within the seigneurial system of the great landlords – or for raw materials such as wood and others. In general, one can imagine that market activity took place mainly in the form of direct sale from producers to consumers, without commercial mediators. Traders of supplementary commodities may well have existed, but in the absence of relevant evidence it is unlikely that they were the members of a professional group dedicated to commerce. In my opinion, a pattern of this kind explains the scanty occurrence of

6 Patrons and charitable institutions as distributors of primary resources: Stephen II establishes the xenodochion in Platana that was to feed a hundred poor men daily (Lib. Pont. 228-229, I, 440-441); Nicholas I orders daily meals for Roman disabled people as well as weekly subventions for the poor (Lib. Pont. 600, II, 161); more references above, note 3. Scholae as corporated bodies that administered financial and alimentary resources: Leo IV on the consecration of the new Leonine City near St Peter gave “magnam sive Romanis sive diversis nationibus ... rogam” (Lib. Pont. 535, II, 125) if nationes refers to the scholae peregrinorum; Stephen V (885-891) finds that “horrea simul et cellaria vacua inventa sunt, et quid erogaret clero et scolis non habebat” (Lib. Pont. 644, II, 192); scholae as collective toll payers (for economic activities?): Marinus I (882-884) “scholam Saxonum in Roma morantium pro amore et deprecatione Aelfridi, Angulsaxonum regis, ab omni tributo et telonio benigne liberat” (Asser, De rebus gestis Aelfridi, 71, 53-54).

7 A letter of pope Stephen V to Anastasius, bishop of Naples (y. 886), exemplifies the relation between the usual and the exceptional alimentary supply of a town (J.L. 3414): the pope threatens that he will have the Neapolitan crops destroyed in retaliation for the bishop’s rebellious attitude, “et non dicas quia si domnus apostolicus veniens messes nostras deleverit, habemus alias provincias, unde labores habere possimus; nam nos et Romam, Sardiniam, Corsicam et totam Christianitatem contra te claudemus, ut nullo modo recuperare valeatis”. In this late document Rome appears as a potential exporter of food.

8 Artisan production in the estate of Monte Gelato: Potter/King 1997, 92, 368 (pottery kiln). Patterson 1991, 136 believes that other rural estates too produced their pottery.

9 Firewood purchased in the town: Johannes diaconus, Vita Gregorii, IV, 96 (P.L. 75, 238).

10 A Roman citizen went to Beneventum “negotiandi gratia” y. 827 (Einhard, Translatio, I, 3, 241), but nothing can be deduced about the nature (import, export, primary or luxury wares?) and the regularity of such enterprises. When Geary 1990, 45 speaks of a “highly organized group of relic merchants” based in Rome, c. 830, he is quite aware that this commerce was then illegal; people involved in it acted as smugglers. Probably not by chance, different Frankish sources from those years refer to the same persons as providers of Roman relics for the Frankish churches; the commerce may have been the business of one or more clever adventurers who happened to establish a network of relations with Frankish clergy in search of relics. So much seems to result from the episodes narrated in Einhard’s Translatio as well as in Rudolf’s Miracula sanctorum, c. 3-4, 331-333. Surely other relic-thieves sold relics in Rome on a lesser scale, but it is difficult to think of them as the members of a “professional group” plying a regular trade.
money in the archaeology of everyday life in Rome, without excluding a certain level of exchange. Luxury goods are a special case and will be discussed later.

On the other hand, the tendency towards direct consumption did not mean the loss of technical abilities or the decline of an urban ideology. Archaeology shows that in the eighth and ninth centuries local pottery production maintained high quality standards and there were even innovations with the introduction of new ceramic types and techniques, as is revealed by the well known Forum Ware.11 In the same period a new form of private housing came into use: two-storey houses, totally independent from the surviving remains of ancient buildings.12 Also monumental building activity and artistic production underwent significant developments from the end of the eighth century till the middle of the ninth. The popes then dedicated themselves to the restoration and maintenance of the urban infra-structures, such as the city walls and aqueducts; above all they endeavoured to embellish and richly endow the churches and other ecclesiastical buildings of Rome, because these represented the monumental face of the city, in its qualification as the religious and liturgical centre of western Christendom.13

Some years ago, I maintained that the wealth invested by the popes in their building activity did not derive from the city’s economy, but mainly from the revenues that they extracted from their landed property and the exercising of public jurisdiction over a territory stretching from Ravenna to Beneventum. This income was increased by the gifts of pilgrims and, on special occasions, by donations from emperors, kings, prelates and distinguished lay people; these donations were sometimes extremely rich. Not by chance, the most intense periods of papal expense coincide with such special provisions of wealth.14 This hypothesis seems to me still to stand and to explain the special features of the Roman urban economy.

14 Delogu 1988; idem 1993; idem 1998. Public revenues of the papacy: a suffragium was paid to the papacy by the dukes established in various towns of the papal dominion (Leo III’s letter to Charlemagne, y. 808: J.E. 2516, in: M.G.H., Epp. V, 89, n. 2); Eugene II “quicquid iuste percipiebat a subditis pondere ... distribuebat” (Lib. Pont. 452, II, 69). The pactum Ludovicianum – the treaty concluded in 817 between Louis the Pious and pope Paschal I – mentions census et pensiones that the papacy extracted from its territories. The main sources of papal income in the second half of the ninth century are listed in the proceedings of the Ravenna synod celebrated by pope John VIII on 877, August 1. They were: the old patrimonia of the Roman church “… Appiae videlicet, Lavicanense, Campaninum, Tiburtinum, Theatinum, utrumque Sabinense et Tusciae” together with “porticum sancti Petri, monetam Romanam, ordinaria vel actionarica publica, Ripam, Portum et Ostiam”; moreover “… monasteria, cortes, massas et salas tam per Ravennam et Pentapolim et Aemiliam, quam per Tisciam Romanorum atque Langobardorum et omne territorium Sancti Petri constituta”. The synod stated that “… haec omnia in usum salarii sacri palatii Lateranensi perpetualler maneant, ita ut solitos reditus et angarias perpetualler ... absolvant” (J.E. p. 394 in: Mansi XVII, 15-17, 337-340). It is probable that the first two groups
It is quite likely that papal wealth had a significant impact on urban economic life; for their building activity the popes needed craftsmen, such as masons, painters, goldsmiths, and labour; they injected wealth into the urban society, when paying wages or ordering special commodities; on occasions they also distributed coins to the clergy, the nobles and the people of Rome, as a ceremonial expression of their sovereignty and largesse.15

supplied the papacy with monetary income from leasing of lands, rights of jurisdiction and telonea, whilst the third group with seigneurial rents and services. Gifts of the Carolingian emperors: Lib. Pont. 377, II, 7-8; 532, II, 123; 569, II, 159; 600, II, 161; Annales regni Francorum, y. 796, 64; Einhard, Vita Caroli, c. 27, 198; Thegan, Vita Hlodowici, c. 8, 222; Annales Bertiniani, y. 869, 188 (Lothar II). Gifts from other princes and magnates: Lib. Pont. 423, II, 33; 574, II, 147-148; 575, 148; 602, II, 162; 608, II, 164; 639, II, 185; tributes from Anglo-Saxon kings: Offa king of Mercia granted 365 mancusi yearly (Leo III’s letter to king Coenulf of Mercia y. 797, J.E. 2494, in: M.G.H., Epp. IV, 187, n. 127); the same king Coenulf forwards 120 mancusi (Leo III’s letter, y. 802: J.E. 2511, in: Guillelmus Malmesburiensis, Gesta regum Anglorum, I, c. 89, 130; cf. Guillelmus Malmesburiensis, Gesta regum Anglorum, I, c. 88, 128); king Ethelwulf allots a yearly tribute of 300 mancusi to Rome (Guillelmus Malmesburiensis, Gesta regum Anglorum, II, c. 109, 158).

15 Papal payments for public works, for instance: Gregory III restores the Roman city-walls, “alimoniam quoque artificum et pretium ad emendum calcem de proprio tribuit” (Lib. Pont. 202, I, 420); Hadrian I restores the Roman city walls, “ubi et multa stipendia tribuit, tam in mercedes eorum qui ipsum murum fabricaverunt, quamque in ipsorum alimentis, simulque et in calce atque diversis utilitatis ...” (Lib. Pont. 326, I, 501). See also Noble’s reflections on this subject in Noble 2000. Papal distributions of money: Leo III pays again the roga to the Roman clergy; a usage that had been interrupted since Gregory III’s times; cf. Lib. Pont. 359, II, 1; the roga was paid also by Paschal I: Lib. Pont. 431, II, 52. Other forms of monetary distribution: Eugene II (824-827) “quicquid iusto percipiebat a subditis pondere, non solum pupillis ac viduis, sed etiam divitiis incessanter omnibus distribuebat” (Lib. Pont. 452, II, 69); Leo IV on the feast of the Octave after the Assumption Day, “omnes qui aderant huius celebratibus plenius argenteis erogavit” (Lib. Pont. 508, II, 112); the same pope, inaugurating the Leonine City near St Peter, “cunctos nobiles Rome multiplicibus donis, non tantum in auro argentove, sed et in servis palleis honoravit et ditavit” (Lib. Pont. 535, II, 125); the same pope consecrating the new city Leopolis, founded by him, “non modicam manibus propriis prae amoris magnitudine universo populo rogam distribuebat” (Lib. Pont. 550, II, 132); Benedict III asks the Anglo-Saxon king Ethelwulf on his visit to Rome “ut facias roga in ecclesia beati Petri apostoli publica”; consequently the king gives gold to the clergy and the nobles, as well as “minutumargentum” to the populace (Lib. Pont. 575, II, 148); Hadrian II, still a priest, receives together with other priests “a sanctissimo papa Sergio consuetudinaliter denaris XL” (Lib. Pont. 613, II, 173); prophetic dreams saw the same Hadrian II “more apostolico in basilicis Lateranensis aureos erogare” (Lib. Pont. 614, II, 174).
Yet these provisions do not seem to have either modified the basic tendency to the self-sufficiency of urban society or to have stimulated the market. Monetary wealth simply existed alongside real property; a large part of it was hoarded, as reveal the catalogues of ecclesiastical treasures; otherwise it was used either for increasing the estate, by buying and renting lands and houses, or for purchasing luxury goods. Also, it is not clear how large was the monetary stock available to Roman society. Payments and wages may have been limited, because they were probably integrated or substituted by gifts in kind or by the privileged leasing of lands; labour was often extracted as a corvée from the dependants of churches and monasteries, or as a public duty from the subjects of the papal government; finally, the total output of the Roman mint is unknown, and may have been modest.16

In short, the economic structure of ninth century Rome looks like a local system, mainly self-sufficient, in which production and consumption basically met with one another; nonetheless the local society was prosperous, and the living standards satisfactory, but this depended more on the effects of the papal presence, than on surpluses or profits freely produced by Roman society. In this sense the system could be termed a “patriarchal economy”.

Such a model is now called into question; recent studies have maintained that the city of Rome was connected to a network of commercial traffic that exceeded local or regional dimensions; consequently the market has been credited with a much more important, even a fundamental, role in the urban economy.17 Important archaeological

16 Craftsmen as subjects of ecclesiastical institutes: Iohannes diaconus, *Vita Gregorii*, IV, 90 (P.L. 75, 235): the *familia* of the Roman monastery of St Andrew includes, besides the monks, a cook, a carpenter, a baker as well as other lay people. In a building enterprise of pope Hadrian I, manpower was supplied by the towns of Lazio as well as by the ecclesiastical estates “*cum sumptibus dapibusque apostolicis*” (*Lib. Pont.* 355, I, 513; also 341, I, 507); Ostia was fortified by Gregory IV “*cum suis hominitibus*” (*Lib. Pont.* 477, II, 82); the walls around St Peter’s basilica were built by Leo IV with manpower recruited “*de singulis civitatibus massisque universis publicis ac monasteriis*” (*Lib. Pont.* 532, II, 123). It is possible that the employees of the papal administrative offices were paid at least in part with privileged leasing of lands from the papal *patrimonio: notarii* and other officials are mentioned as grantees of lands of the Roman church in the registers of pope Gregory II and Zacharias (respectively J.E. 2190-2228 and 2297-3202). The “*massa de vestiario domnico*” cited in *Regestum Farfense*, n. 656, y. 1012 (vol. IV, 53) and *Regestum Farfense*, n. 1026, y. 1079 (vol. V, 29), may have been an appannage linked to the office of the papal *vestararius* together with other urban estates; see Galletti 1758, 9-22, 38. However the methods of rewarding papal employees in the early Middle Ages have not yet been sufficiently investigated. For the, probably modest, output of the Roman papal mint see Grierson/Blackburn 1986, 263; Rovelli 2000, 99.

17 The importance of the market in the Roman economic system of the ninth century has been recently vindicated for instance by Paroli 1996; Noble 2000; McCormick 2001, 618-626.
evidence for this assumption is the Roman ninth century pottery that has been found in various coastal places along the north Tyrrhenian sea, from Liguria to Corsica and to Provence.\textsuperscript{18} This demonstrates that Roman artifacts travelled outside the Roman district, although at the moment the number of finds is modest and the circumstances of the transport unknown. One may hypothesize an interregional circulation of wares, whose importance and frequency are still to be ascertained.

Other clues, taken from the written sources, are more significant for asserting that Rome had the role of an active market and was integrated in an international trading network. These are as follows.

In the last quarter of the eighth century and in the first half of the ninth, large quantities of Byzantine and Oriental precious textiles reached Rome. This would seem to demonstrate that Rome was connected to the Mediterranean trading network that supplied such sorts of luxury wares, probably together with others, such as spices, that have left no trace, either in the written or in the material sources.\textsuperscript{19} A further important clue is the gold currency available in the city long after the papal mint had ceased to coin gold. Since the Roman sources sometimes use the term \textit{mancusi}, which the majority of scholars take as referring to Islamic gold coins, this would seem to confirm that Rome not only imported, but also exported luxury wares, that were paid for with the gold currency that has left its trace in the sources.\textsuperscript{20}

The modern concept of the balance of trade seems to play a prominent role in the assumption that ninth century Rome was a lively international market. The contemporary influx of luxury wares and gold currency seems to presuppose that Rome exported wares as valuable as, or even more valuable than, its imports; otherwise it would be difficult to explain the presence of \textit{mancusi} in the city. But the question is: what kind of Roman wares were likely to be appreciated in the distant lands that produced luxury textiles and gold coins?

The pottery found along the Tyrrhenian coasts was a commodity of low intrinsic value, that could scarcely counterbalance luxury imports. Moreover, it has been found in countries where the usual currency was the Carolingian silver \textit{denarius}, whilst it has not been attested, so far, in southern Italy or Sicily, the lands where gold coins circulated. We do not possess any further evidence of Roman products being exported

\textsuperscript{18} Paroli 1993; \textit{eadem} 1996.
\textsuperscript{19} Delogu 1998.
\textsuperscript{20} Gold coins mentioned in Roman documents between the end of the eighth and the ninth centuries, see McCormick 2001, 814; additional references below, note 30. A discussion of these documents \textit{ibid.}, 335-342.
to the South and the East; and we can speculate that textiles, jewelry and other handicrafts, that were definitely made in Rome,\textsuperscript{21} could hardly be appreciated on the eastern markets, where the same wares were produced, probably with higher standards. Provincial artifacts, like the Roman ones probably were, are more likely to have circulated, if they ever did, on inter-regional circuits, like those of the pottery, or to have been appreciated by the western pilgrims visiting Rome and its sanctuaries. Consequently the only sensible explanation of the Roman balance of trade remains the same as is usually put forward for the entire Carolingian West in its commercial relations with the East: that is the export of human cattle, the slave trade.\textsuperscript{22} In fact two texts from the eighth century refer to the purchase of slaves in Rome and the Roman region; but they both show that the buyers were foreigners – Venetians and Greeks – and that the popes repressed the trade and persecuted the traders.\textsuperscript{23} Afterwards, throughout the whole of the ninth century, there is no further evidence referring to Rome as a slave market. This is probably not by chance: the popes, who were Roman sovereigns and Christian priests, could not allow Christian people to be sold as slaves to the Infidels; in this they were supported and even controlled by the Carolingian emperors.\textsuperscript{24} Smuggling cannot be excluded, of

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\item Handicrafts in Rome in the ninth century: cloths, Delogu 1998; stone-carving, Paroli 1998; metalwork, Ponzo 1996; Ricci 2001b. So far nothing is known about the organization of artifact production in Rome during the ninth century. It seems unlikely that the workshop of the Crypta Balbi, that ceased to function at the end of the seventh century (see Ricci 2001a), offers a valid pattern for the ninth century organization, because of the profound changes that the administrative and economic conditions of Rome underwent in the meantime. Given the modest level of standardization of Roman ninth century pottery, Patterson 1993, 323 believes that it was produced by a variety of workshops, each operating on small scale in Rome as well as in the rural territory.
\item So McCormick 2001, 618-622; 625-627. The different evaluation of the Roman case does not lessen my admiration for McCormick’s major work, in which Rome is but a single element.
\item Lib. Pont., Zacharias, 222, I, 433; Adrian I’s letter to Charlemagne y. 776 (J.E. 2426 in: Cod. Carol., nr. 59, 584).
\item Charlemagne forbids that mancipia christiana were sold outside the Italic kingdom: see Capitulare Mantuanum y. 781 (M.G.H., Capitularia I, n. 90, c. 7, 190). In Lothar I’s pactum with the Venetics (y. 840), the latter promise never to buy or sell homines christianos subject to the Italic kingdom or to transport them “ut propterena in potestatem paganorum perveniant” (M.G.H., Capitularia, II, n. 233, c. 3, 131; the same agreement is renewed in the pactum of Charles III, y. 880, M.G.H., Capitularia, II, n. 236, c. 3, 139). Hadrian I’s letter to Charlemagne, quoted above, is a reply to the king’s queries about rumors relating that slaves were being sold in the Roman territory. The popes always regarded redemption of prisoners and slaves among the main offices of their charitable activity: cf. Lib. Pont. 431, II, 53 and 643-644, 192, concerning respectively Paschal I and Stephen V. John VIII asks the principes Sardiniae to release those captivos that certain Greeks had redeemed from the Saracens’ slavery, only to sell them anew in Sardinia (J.E. 2983, y. 873; in: M.G.H., Epp. VII, n. 27, 288); the same pope rescued by military action some people taken in captivity by the Saracens (J.E. 3008, y. 875, P.L. 126, n. 334, 939).
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course, but it remains difficult to imagine that in the ninth century the slave trade and a notorious slave market were a structural feature of the Roman urban economy. Even in southern Italy the slave trade, that at the beginning of the ninth century was fuelled by the wars between the Roman-Byzantine coastal cities and the Lombards of the interior, by the middle of the century seems to have become the business of Saracen marauders, who kidnapped the inhabitants of the country to sell them in the markets of North Africa. Perhaps this way of self-provisioning calls into question the assumption that a regular trade of human beings was run directly by south Italian merchants.25

In fact, the balance of trade is not the only possible explanation for the eastern textiles and gold coins which arrived in Rome. According to the sources, the popes were great buyers of precious textiles, that they distributed to the Roman churches for their liturgical adornment, or gave to the Roman nobility, as a mark of honour and alliance. The huge quantities of silk and linen cloths imported into Rome may be explained within the patriarchal economy that I have described above. Drawing from their large financial resources, the popes made their demand of precious wares known through their political and institutional relations. This is well documented: for instance, in 851 pope Leo IV asked a judex of Sardinia to buy the filament produced in the island by certain marine molluscs and to ship it to Rome, because it was needed to decorate the ceremonial dresses of the pope and his optimates; the price did not matter.26 In this case, as in others, the papal demand resulted in the influx to Rome of the requested wares; so the trade was largely set in motion by papal commission, though part of the wares could be bought by Roman nobles or by rich

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25 On the slave trade in Southern Italy and especially in Bari, see McCormick 2001, 628-630; 637; 770-773. Though it cannot be excluded that the Campanian maritime towns took part in the slave trade directed towards Africa, one must also note that such an activity is not mentioned in John VIII’s letters condemning in general terms the foedus of those towns with the Saracens. The content of the foedus may be deduced from the letter of the Italian emperor Louis II to the Byzantine emperor Basilius I. Louis II deplores the fact that the Neapolitans supply the Saracens with “arma, alimenta et cetera subsidia”, that they guide the Saracens in their raids along the coast and give them shelter in the Neapolitan port. Concerning the slave trade, the emperor condemns the Neapolitans because they “unanimiter [with the Saracens] arma contra Christianos ferant et dimicent, et si quos fidelium capere possunt, Saracenorum manibus tradant, cum ipsis ad bella uno studio procedentes” (Chron. Salern., c. 107, 119). It seems likely that the Neapolitans joined the Saracens in their raids and did not prevent them from taking the prisoners to Africa, but they do not appear as autonomous slave traders. Similarly John VIII condemns Atanasius bishop of Neaples because of the pactum that the bishop has made with the Saracens “pro turpis lucri commodo ... de praeda eorum partes recipiendo” (J.E. 3346, y. 881, P.L. 126, n. 321, 950). In his turn the Lombard chronicler Erchempert charges the Greeks (Achivi) with raising slaves in southern Italy to sell them to the Saracens, but he does not mention south Italian traders being involved in the business (Erchempert, Historia, c. 81, 264).

pilgrims. Consequently, one need not imagine that exports of corresponding value were necessary to balance the imports. The imported wares were paid for by the financial resources of privileged purchasers; and the traders took away gold and silver coins. One should also note that the eighth and ninth century sources never mention Roman merchants operating on the international scale; on the other hand, the popes frequently complained about the lack of Roman ships and sailors;27 the traders mentioned by the Roman sources in the eighth century are “Greeks”, perhaps from Sicily,

27 Hadrian I regrets that he has neither “navigia ... nec nautas” (J.E. 2426 in: Cod. Carol., n. 59, 584); on the other hand Leo III reports to Charlemagne that “coniunxit ad nos unum navigium nostrum cum aliquibus Grecis hominibus” (J.E. 2527 in: M.G.H., Epp. V, 99, n. 8, y. 813). However no Roman ship took part in the battle of Ostia y. 849. A few decades later, John VIII informs that he is having “dromones ... cum ceteris navibus” made to defend the coast (J.E. 2966, y. 872, P.L. 126, n. 336, 939), but at the same time he appeals to the people of Amalfi to remove the Saracens from their refuge in the Circeo promontory (J.E. 2960, P.L. 126, n. 344, 942; in the same letter he speaks of “Graecorum nostrorum naves”); in 877 he asks the Greek bailus Gregory to send at least ten battle ships to keep the Arab pirates away from the Roman coast (J.E. 3092, P.L. 126, n. 73, 727; cf. J.E. 3091, P.L. 126, n. 72, 725); later on he entrusts the Amalfitans with patrolling the coast from Traetto to Centumcellae offering to pay ten or twelve thousand mancusi for this (J.E. 3126, 3127, y. 878, P.L. 126, nn. 99, 100, 749-750. See also J.E. 3278, y. 879, P.L. 126, n. 250, 877, urging the Amalfitans to give back the mancusi they had received “pro defensione terrae sancti Petri” without fulfilling the task). Greek dromones helping against the Saracens: J.E. 3303, y. 879, P.L. 126, n. 286, 900. J.E. 3323, y. 880, P.L. 126, n. 296, 909: J.E. 3327, y. 880, P.L. 126, n. 301, 914. Possibly the pope refers to these Greek ships, rather than to Roman ones, in his letter of September 879 to the Amalfitan praefecturus Pulchari, where he speaks of “dromones nostri” (J.E. 3281; P.L. 126, n. 253, 878 = M.G.H., Epp. 7, n. 217, 879). Similarly the dromones transporting John VIII to Genoa and to Provence on May 878, came from Naples (Auxilius, in defensionem sacrarum ordinationis papae Formosi, c. 4, 63). Still in 885 Stephen V asks Emperor Basil to send ships to defend the “portus maritimave loca contra Agarenorum populationes” (J.E. 3403).

It seems likely that the popes endeavoured to provide for the defence of the Roman coast by means of inland strongholds, rather than by war fleets: Leo III co-operates with king Pippin for the defence of “litoraria nostra et vestra” (J.E. 2515 in: M.G.H., Epp. V, 88, n. 1, y. 808); Leo III assures Charlemagne that he is providing for the defence of the coast (J.E. 2524 in: M.G.H., Epp. V, 96, n. 6, y. 813); Gregory IV fortifies Ostia, threatened by Saracen raids, “pro populi ac liberatione patriae” (Lib. Pont. 476-477, II, 81-82); in 846 the Roman prudentiore, on being informed that the Mauri were preparing an assault, summon “subjectas civitates et adiacentis eorum, ut omnes hostiliter festinantes venirent ad maritima litoralia custodiendae” (Lib. Pont., Vita Sergii II, xli, II, 99); Nicolas I re-builds and fortifies Ostia and establishes there a garrison of “promptos ad bella homines” in order to defend Rome against the Saracens (Lib. Pont. 607, II, 164).
and they were progressively substituted by the Amalfitans in the ninth century.\textsuperscript{28} Islamic merchants, if they ever came to Rome, must have been an exception.\textsuperscript{29}

The second anomalous factor of the economic system – the gold money available in Rome – need also not be explained by the suggestion that it was the return for Roman goods exported to distant Mediterranean markets. It should be highlighted that \textit{mancusi} – whether or not this term always refers to the Islamic dinar – appear only in part of the Roman written records. Alongside them the sources mention other gold coins, like \textit{tremisses} – at that time still minted in Beneventum – and \textit{solidos domnicos} – probably Byzantine imperial coins. In addition, there are references to silver \textit{mancusi}, a money of account without any coined equivalent, whose very mention may show that in everyday life gold \textit{mancusi} were rare.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Greek traders of unspecified provenance mentioned in Hadrian I’s letter to Charlemagne (J.E. 2426 in: \textit{Cod. Carol.}, n. 59, 585). Greeks repeatedly appear as informers to Leo III about events in Sicily and the Byzantine empire; see for instance J.E. 2526 in: M.G.H., \textit{Epp.} V, 97, n. 7, y. 813: the pope receives a letter from the Sicilian \textit{patricius} as well as news from a \textit{missus} of his; J.E. 2527 in: M.G.H., \textit{Epp.} V, 99, n. 8, y. 813: the pope gets news from a \textit{graecus quidam} who came together with an envoy of the Sicilian \textit{patricius}. The Amalfitans are mentioned in the \textit{Liber Pontificalis} only with the battle of Ostia, y. 849, when they still seem to be relatively unknown to the Romans. Amalfitans as frequent visitors to the Roman port in John VIII’s letters: see below, note 34.
\item \textsuperscript{29} McCormick 2001, 622-625 gives great importance to the text of Yakut ibn Abdallah (y. 1218-1228), recording an earlier testimony by Walid ibn Muslim of Damascus, died in 810, who in his turn reported the tale of a Muslim merchant who narrated that he had been in Rome and described the city and its markets. In my opinion the testimony does not deserve special credit, not so much for the late date of the final witness, as for the fact that he is transmitting second hand information of a dubious nature (Walid ibn Muslim reports what the merchant told him, God knows how reliably, given the nature of the description of Rome made by the merchant, many aspects of which are found in other texts of the Arabic imaginary geography; cf. Miquel 1975, 368-374, 491-492). One should also note that prior to McCormick, Yaqut’s text was never considered a reliable witness on Roman commerce, although it had been translated into Italian since 1877 (Guidi 1887, 181).
\item \textsuperscript{30} The evidence amounts to but a few items. Without any aim to completeness, I remember that \textit{mancusi} as real money are mentioned in the life of Hadrian I (\textit{Lib. Pont.} 344, I, 509) as well as in the life of Sergius II (2,000 \textit{mancusi} being the simoniac price for a bishopric; \textit{Lib. Pont.} 493, II, 98). Further evidence for gold money consists of a handful of private acts transcribed in the Register of the Subiaco monastery; cf. \textit{Regesto Sublacense}, n. 111, y. 758?; n. 29, generically dated to the ninth century; n. 55, y. 821; n. 60, y. 837; n. 87, y. 857; n. 83, y. 866; n. 116, y. 897; furthermore a grant by Leo IV to St Martin monastery in Rome, y. 854 (J.E. 2653; Marini, \textit{Papiri}, 14). Only one piece of this evidence (\textit{Regesto Sublacense}, n. 60) refers to gold \textit{mancusi}, whilst another to silver \textit{mancusi} (\textit{Regesto Sublacense}, n. 196, y. 876, written outside Rome). \textit{Mancusi} at John VIII’s time: \textit{not specified alloy}: J.E. 3116, 3117, y. 878, P.L. 126, nn. 96, 97, 747-748 (1,400 \textit{mancusi} + a supplementary sum); J.E. 3126, 3127, y. 878, P.L. 126, nn. 99, 100, 749-740 (10,000 \textit{mancusi}); J.E. 3278, y. 879, P.L. 126, n. 225, 877; \textit{silver mancusi}: J.E. 3139, y. 878, P.L. 126, n. 117, 771 (a tribute of \textit{viginti}}
In short, it seems that the gold currency available in Rome in the ninth century had various origins. The bulk was probably formed by the monetary stock hoarded up in the Byzantine period and then released, perhaps to make up for the new silver money that may have been insufficient or undervalued. This stock was enlarged by the revenues that the papacy received from the regions where gold money was still in use: the former Byzantine Exarchate and the Lombard and Byzantine provinces of Southern Italy. Furthermore, gold money in Rome seems to have been reserved for buying or renting lands and houses or for luxury purchases; but the total amount of the stock was probably limited and gradually it became exhausted; gold coins did not circulate outside the city and even within it their use seems to have ceased by the end of the ninth century, because from the beginning of the following century estate transactions were regulated only in silver or in non-monetary equivalents, like everywhere in Western Europe.

31 Gold currency in the Ravenna territory in the ninth century: *Breviarium ecclesiae Ravennatis*, docs. 20-22, 26, 28, 45, 46, 72, 76, 125, 126, 138, 139, 145, 162, 175, etc. Gold coinage in Southern Italy during the ninth century: Martin 1983; Rovelli 1995; Day 1997. A set of gold denominations stored in Montecassino’s treasure c. 840 are mentioned by *Chronica sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, c. 7, 473; on the treasure itself see Citarella/Willard 1983. Papal landed property in South Italy, where rents in gold could come from: “*patrimonia Neapolim sita*” (Paul I’s letter to Pippin, J.E. 2364, in: *Cod. Carol.*, n. 37, 550, y. 764/66); Hadrian I asks Charlemagne for help to recover “*nostrum … patrimonium quod ibidem in territorio Neapolitanon ponitur*” (J.E. 2428, y. 779-780, in: *Cod. Carol.*, n. 64, 591); “*patrimonium beati Petri … in Neapoli*” (J.E. 2428, y. 779-780, in: *Cod. Carol.*, n. 64, 591); “*episcopio, monasteria et curtes publicas*” in the Beneventan duchy handed over to Hadrian I (J.E. 2464, y. 788, in: *Codex Carol.*, n. 84, 620); the same pope claims the lands that the Roman church had been given by Byzantine emperors and *patricii* “*in partibus Tusciae, Spoletio seu Benevento atque Corsica simul et Savinensae patrimonio*” (J.E. 2423, y. 778; in: *Cod. Carol.*, n. 60, 587). “*Patrimonium Kaietanum*” (Cod. diplom. Cajet., n. 3, 5; n. 7, 13); “*patrimonium Beneventanum et Salernitanum*”(pactum Ludovicianum, y. 817, in: Capitularia, I, n. 172, 353. On the reliability of this document see Noble 1984, 300-308). The popes also exerted a form of authority over Capua thanks to a donation made by Charlemagne (*Cod. Carol.*, n. 82, 616; *Cod. Carol.*, Appendix, n. 1, 620; pactum Ludovicianum, 353). See also the texts quoted above, note 10. Other remittances in gold: John VIII urges Anno, bishop of Freising, to send the rents due to the Roman church, both in “*aurum aliasque species*” (J.E. 2980, P.L. 126, n. 1, 651).

32 This results from the series of the ninth and tenth century documents transcribed in *Regesto Sublacense*. Other Roman monastic archives have preserved documents only from the beginning of the tenth century; they confirm that only silver coins were then in use, but do not allow us to determine exactly when these became the sole real currency. It is worth stressing that no hasty conclusion can be drawn from the fact that gold, either weighed or in coins,
This general system, that in my opinion accounts for the existing evidence without forcing it, probably underwent a progressive transformation during the second half of the ninth century. In this period the domuscultae seem to have ceased to function. The last mentions of them do not go beyond the central years of the century and their archaeological traces fade out by the end of the century. During John VIII’s pontificate (872-882) references are found to tributes and tolls paid by the Amalfitans in the Port of Rome, a fact that suggests the existence of commercial enterprises, independent of papal demand and therefore taxed. The same pope, who also relied on fiscal revenues from the urban port of Ripa on the Tiber, had close relations with the Amalfitans to whom he also paid tributes in order that they patrolled the coasts of Lazio against the Saracen raiders. This should show that the Amalfitans were a real presence in the Roman horizon, unlike other Campanian traders, whose domain of action was probably more restricted.

The transformation of the Roman economic system speeded up dramatically in the last two decades of the ninth century, when the crisis of the Carolingian empire seriously endangered public order in Italy and among other consequences made it difficult for the popes to collect their revenues. The contemporary papal lives in the Liber Pontificalis make dramatic references to this state of affairs, when they report the total shortage of cash and the apostolic basilicas deprived of maintenance and lighting. In those conditions the papacy ceased to be the dispenser of wealth and the motor of long distance trade for Roman society; disorder in the economic and social structure followed; for example the urban aristocracy endeavoured to get hold of the papal lands and rents. An additional factor of crisis may have been the possible growth of the Roman population; a fact that, if real, could have impaired the social equilibrium continues to be mentioned in the penalty clauses of the documents in the tenth century. Rovelli 1992 has convincingly demonstrated that in these documents prices reflect the usual currency, whilst fines are always expressed in species of very high value, that surely existed, but were rare and did not normally circulate. The solemnity and deterrence of the penalty clauses were thus increased, but these clauses cannot be seen as representative of the actual circulation at the time.

34 John VIII’s letter to Marinus and Pulchari of Amalfi, promising to relieve them of the fiscal burdens that were being imposed upon them ultra consuetudinem (J.E. 2960, y. 872, P.L. 126, n. 344, 942); in his letter to the Amalfitans (J.E. 3308, y. 879, P.L. 126, n. 288, 901) the same pope promises to pay an annual tribute to them and to exempt them from the “teloneum quod in portu nostro dare debitis”. See also J.E. 3278, y. 879, P.L. 126, n. 250, 877.
35 Cf. the papal letters quoted above, notes 25 and 34. In this period falls also the episode of count Gerald of Auxerre, who sometimes between 879 and 909 bought precious clothes in Rome at a price much lower than the current price in Pavia (Oddonis Vita Geraldi, I, c. 27, in P.L. 133, 658).
guaranteed by the previous system.\textsuperscript{37} It is quite likely that the entire economic system felt the effects of the changing urban structure and adapted to the new conditions, though for the moment it seems difficult to perceive the direction of change. A relevant datum is the exhaustion, at the end of the ninth century, of the archaeological evidence from Portus, the coastal landing place of Rome; a fact that hints to the demise of its usual functions. This demise was to last a long time, given that rich archaeological evidence does not re-appear in Portus before the eleventh century.\textsuperscript{38}

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\textsuperscript{37} At present, the growth of the Roman urban population at the end of the ninth century is a matter of speculation more than a proved fact. The hypothesis primarily rests on the general theses concerning the growth of the population in the West: see for instance Toubert 1973, 321-322, 328-329; Toubert 1990; Verhulst 2000, 23-28. However, as regards Rome, the hypothesis seems now supported by the evidence for building construction in public or deserted quarters, that took place in the late ninth-tenth century, see Paroli 2004, 33-34.

\textsuperscript{38} On the archeology of Portus in the ninth and tenth centuries, see Paroli 2001. Lidia Paroli calls my attention to the fact that, parallel to the demise of Portus, important archaeological traces suggest that economic life was being reorganized within the city of Rome. Such traces are the already mentioned building construction of the quarter along the \textit{vicus Iugarius} and the production activity that was pursued there in the tenth century. Both circumstances may reveal a market oriented activity now located in the core of the city. I thank Lidia Paroli very much for her important suggestions.
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