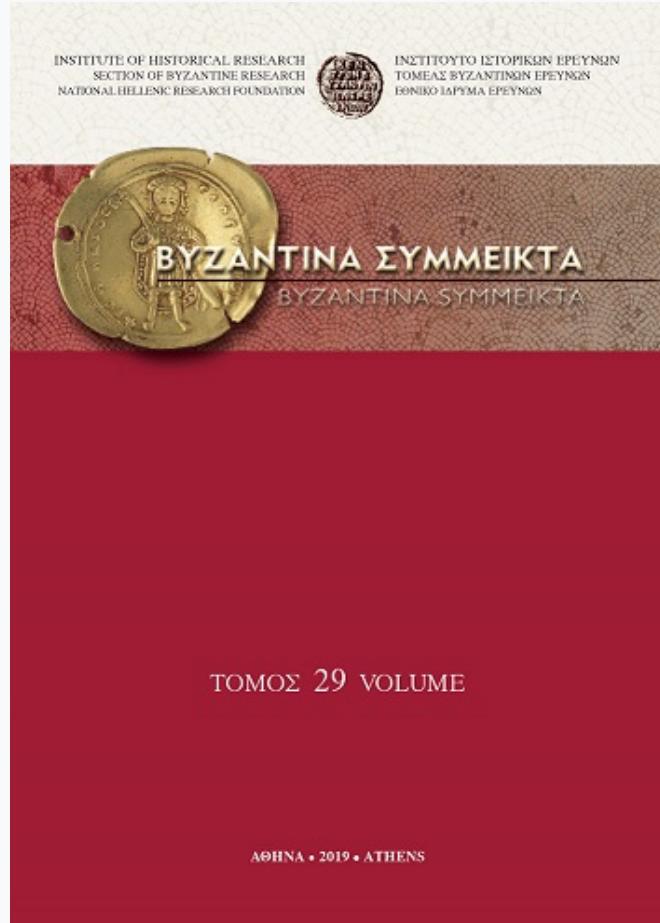


Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 29 (2019)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 29



Book Review: Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic. Byzantium, the Carolingians and the Treaty of Aachen (812), ed. M. ANČIĆ, J. SHEPARD and T. VEDRIŠ, London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018

Eleni TOUNTA

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.21934](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.21934)

Copyright © 2019, Eleni TOUNTA



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

TOUNTA, E. (2019). Book Review: Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic. *Byzantium, the Carolingians and the Treaty of Aachen (812)*, ed. M. ANČIĆ, J. SHEPARD and T. VEDRIŠ, London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 29, 453–459. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.21934>

Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic. Byzantium, the Carolingians and the Treaty of Aachen (812), ed. M. ANČIĆ, J. SHEPARD and T. VEDRIŠ, London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, pp. xxxii+333. ISBN 978-1-138-22594-7

This volume is the fruit of a conference held in Zadar in 2012 and disseminates through the more accessible English language the research done by Central and Eastern European medieval historians, art historians and archaeologists. It focuses on the broad region of the Northern Adriatic, Dalmatia and Pannonia which, geographically and politically, is situated on the periphery of the Frankish Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire but gained a central importance when it was claimed by both political forces. After military confrontations and a long period of negotiations (803-812), the Treaty of Aachen (812) [hereafter Treaty] agreed by Charlemagne (768-814) and Michael I (811-813) settled the question of territorial boundaries between the two rivals. The Franks withdrew from Venice and the Dalmatian coastal towns, while keeping under their control Istria and Lower Pannonia, and also gained the recognition of Charlemagne's imperial title by his Byzantine counterpart. The volume examines the impact of the Treaty on these peripheries. Its focus shifts from the imperial centres to local politics and their agents, individuals or socio-political groups in order to understand the role they themselves played in the shaping of their political and social life.

This approach presupposes a methodological framework that is capable of unveiling the interaction between the imperial centres and their peripheries. The use of modern analytical categories, such as the concepts of frontier societies, soft power, and identity/otherness, sheds new light on old material and enables a fruitful juxtaposition of written sources and archaeological data. Thus, the authors of the volume overcome the obstacle of the sparse and uneven documentation which had left these imperial peripheries in relative obscurity. Moreover, the methodological framework becomes the backbone of the volume and provides it with the necessary coherence.

The volume is divided into five thematic sections. An introduction by Jonathan Shepard (Ch. 1, pp. 1-22) sets the tone. To explain both the military confrontations and the Treaty between the Frankish Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire, Shepard examines their relations in a wider chronological framework, from the 6th until the middle of the 10th century. Thus, he establishes the importance of the Upper Adriatic and the Dalmatian coastal cities to the Byzantine Empire in securing both its northern borders and southern Italian territories. Charlemagne's awareness of the geopolitical importance of the area, as well as of its increasing economic growth, created what Shepard calls "circles overlapping in the Upper Adriatic". In this complex political reality, the use of soft power by both empires to establish their influence in the region shaped local elites which took advantage of the Frankish-Byzantine conflicts in order to secure local interests.

The first part of the volume deals with the Frankish expansion to the east. Mladen Ančić (Ch. 2, pp. 25-42) highlights the attraction the Roman imperial culture held for Charlemagne and his ambition to take the imperial title, and he argues that the negotiations between Charlemagne and Michael I presupposed a shared vision of the Roman Empire as an ecumenical Christian community with two administrative centres. According to Ančić, both emperors are perceived to "govern one and the same Roman empire" (p. 32). However, modern research should downplay the *romanitas* of the imperial title, as both Charlemagne and Michael I had done. During the Frankish-Byzantine peace negotiations the Roman character of imperial power did not come to the fore in the political debate. Otherwise, it could have aggravated the already tense relations, since it was mainly the Romaness which established the exclusivity of the imperial title to one political entity. Charlemagne had been recognized as "basileus" by the Byzantine ambassadors in Aachen in 812. In his letter to Michael I (813) he defined himself as "gloriosus imperator" and attributed the same title to his Byzantine counterpart and insisted that they should rule, the former over the "imperium occidentale" and the latter over the "imperium orientale"¹. Ančić goes on to attempt to reach a conclusion on the Treaty's content. In his view, it should have defined loose territorial boundaries between the two empires which would have permitted the local elites to negotiate their political affiliations. Ivan Majnarić (Ch. 3, pp. 43-56) discusses the role of the Frankish Kingdom in the formation of the kingdom of Croatia. His guiding

1. Charlemagne's Letter to Michael I, ed. E. DÜMMLER, in *MGH. Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, ep. 37, p. 556, l. 1-9.

analytical tool is *aemulatio imperii*, a concept created by Evangelos Chrysos². Majnarić discerns a deep affiliation to Roman imperial institutions, which leads to the shaping of an analogous political entity. Participation in the Frankish army provided local warlords with an important material and symbolic capital. Thus, a local elite emerged which gradually adopted Frankish legal and social patterns and constructed the political identity that was required to transform a multi-ethnic region into a *regnum*. The political complexity in the “overlapping circles” of the Upper Adriatic and the key role of local factors, even individuals, are examined by Peter Štih in a case study of Istria (Ch. 4, pp. 57-72). The author analyzes the socio-political and economic dissolution of the region during the first period of the Frankish occupation (788-804), since its inhabitants and resources were used to support the Frankish wars against the Avars (791-803). In 804, however, after the elimination of the Avar factor and during Charlemagne’s efforts to increase his influence in the Upper Adriatic, the Istrian urban elites regained their previous autonomy and threatened to offer their allegiance to the Byzantines. Against this backdrop, Štih examines the role of Fortunatus, Patriarch of Grado (803-820), who had been recognized by Charlemagne as Patriarch of Venice and Istria. He therefore mediated between the king and the local elites to the latter’s benefit, in order to secure his own authority over the Istrian Church. However, the Treaty of Aachen and the political demarcation between Venice and Istria frustrated Fortunatus, who changed sides and lent his support to Byzantine interests.

The second part of the volume examines the political conditions prevailing in the Byzantine Empire at the time of the Treaty and underlines the interconnections between the northern borders of the Empire and Adriatic polities. Panos Sophoulis (Ch. 5, pp. 75-83) challenges the commonly held view of a resurgent empire in the early 800’s and explains Byzantium’s precarious situation due to its many external enemies in the form of Bulgars, Franks and Arabs. Sophoulis supposes that Nikephoros I (802-811) had probably planned to recognize Charlemagne’s imperial title in order to gain his military support against the Bulgars. The vital importance of the Middle Danube region to the Byzantine Empire is highlighted by Angel Nikolov (Ch. 6, pp. 84-92). Nikolov offers an overview of the relations between Franks and Bulgars after the destruction of the Avar khaganate by the Franks at

2. E. CHRYSOS, The Empire, the *gentes* and the *regna*, in H.-W. GOETZ, J. JARNUT and W. POHL (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationships between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13-20.

the beginning of the 9th century which gave both forces the opportunity to expand their territories into former Avar lands. Taking his cue from Sophoulis and Nikolov, Daniel Ziemann (Ch. 7, pp. 93-107) juxtaposes Frankish and Byzantine written sources and convincingly argues that the Byzantine embassy to Aachen in 812 downplayed Nikephoros I's defeat by the Bulgars a year earlier in order to negotiate from a position of strength.

The focus of the volume's third section is the Northern Adriatic. This section explores both the influence of the Frankish expansion in this area and the fluidity of political affiliations in the region. With the aid of archaeological sources, Sauro Gelichi (Ch. 8, pp. 111-120) contributes to the research on the much-debated subject of Venice's economic growth in the 9th century. The transfer of the ducal seat to Rivoalto in 810, a major event in the formation of the maritime republic, indicates the existence of a growing mercantile elite which sought to protect its territories against the expansionist aspirations of external powers, such as the Franks. Magdalena Skoblar (Ch. 9, pp. 121-139) examines fragments of early medieval ciboria in the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Grado. Through stylistic analysis, these had been attributed by various scholars to the patronage of Patriarch Fortunatus and Patriarch John II, whose political affiliations, pro-Frankish and pro-Byzantine respectively, had been associated with their aesthetic preferences. The author compares the material data with the written sources, challenges the view that the ciboria were commissioned by Fortunatus and convincingly argues that patronage was interconnected with artistic networks and served more to enhance the Church's status than to propagate the political affiliations of the patrons. Marianna Cerno (Ch. 10, pp. 140-151) turns her attention to the negative impact of the Treaty on the status of the Aquileian Church and the latter's rivalry with the Patriarchate of Grado. She investigates the impact both issues made on the hagiographical writing of the era, and more specifically the *Passio* of Aquileia's first bishop, St. Hermagoras, and that of his successor, Hilary. The author accepts the view that the first *Passio*, written between the late 7th and early 8th centuries, had been used after the Treaty to support the primacy of Aquileia over Grado through the addition of a prologue establishing the apostolic origins of the seat. She challenges, however, the assumption that Hilary's *Passio* was the Patriarchate of Grado's response to Aquileia's politics. Through literary and textual analysis, she convincingly proves that the second *Passio* is a typical piece of Aquileian hagiography written before the 9th century.

The fourth part of the volume focuses on Dalmatia. Daniel Dzino (Ch. 11, pp. 155-173) compares material and written sources to study the revival of the region in the 9th century after its decline from the 5th century onwards. In the 9th century, the conflicts between the Frankish Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire increased the geopolitical importance of Dalmatia and gave impulse to the emergence of a complex social system and an increasing economic growth in the region. Moreover, local elites constructed a Roman identity which they legitimized by fostering relations with the Byzantine Empire. Neven Budak (Ch. 12, pp. 174-191) amplifies Dzino's argument by examining archaeological data which demonstrate the increasing circulation of coins and goods in the 9th century.

The fifth part of the volume focuses on Pannonia and constitutes an important contribution to the understanding of its cultural development through the re-interpretation of the existing scarce documentation. I would recommend that the readers start their reading from Chapter 15 (pp. 225-239). Miklós Takács provides an essential analysis of the term "Pannonia" and its changing geographical borders (pp. 225-227) which enables us to understand the transformations Pannonia underwent in the 8th and 9th centuries. The author refuses to accept the view that the Avar khaganate became totally depopulated in the 9th century and instead argues that its political structure gradually collapsed in this period. He examines the finds from seven archaeological sites at the western and southern edges of the khaganate which, despite lying near the routes that would have been taken by the armies of external enemies, such as the Franks and the Bulgars, or by those of internal factions, give no indication of destruction layers. His argument is corroborated by the contribution of Béla Miklós Szőke (Ch. 13, 195-206), who clarifies the participation of members of the Avar elite in the Diet of Aachen in 811, where a peace treaty between Franks, Avars and Slavs was signed and brought Pannonia under Carolingian rule. Although the Avars lost important territories and became tributaries to the Frankish Kingdom, they were still considered as an important local power. In the same vein, Hrvoje Gračanin (Ch. 14, pp. 207-224) focuses mainly on archaeological sources and discusses the social and economic changes brought about in lower Pannonia by the Franks. He argues for the emergence of a south Pannonian Slav elite which gradually constructed an ethnic identity under the Frankish influence.

The last part of the volume is dedicated to the complex situation of the Church in south-eastern Europe which was defined by the contradictory jurisdictional claims of the Roman and Constantinopolitan sees, as well as by the political situation in

the region. Maddalena Betti (Ch. 16, pp. 243-252) focuses on the Roman Church's efforts to control central and south-eastern Europe through intensive missionary activities. According to her reading of the written sources, Pope Hadrian I (772-795) was the first to use the argument of the *iura antiqua* of the Roman Church over Illyricum, thus enhancing papal influence and its intermediary role between the Frankish Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire. Predrag Komatina (Ch. 17, pp. 253-260) discusses a well-known but much-debated subject, namely the subordination of the Dalmatian Church to the Roman Church's jurisdiction in the 8th and 9th centuries, and brings more evidence by examining the order of precedence of the Dalmatian bishops at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787. Ivan Basić (Ch. 18, pp. 261-287) points out the fluidity of political allegiances in Dalmatia, which belonged politically to Byzantium and ecclesiastically to the Roman Church. The competition between the Byzantine Empire on the one hand and the Frankish Kingdom and the papacy on the other gave the opportunity to the local elite, bishops included, to foster its own interests. Therefore, the upper social strata aligned themselves with the western forces, since the latter offered them more opportunities for involvement in local administration. Against this backdrop, the Church's control became a diplomatic tool for both sides and in this way the local elite succeeded in re-organizing their dioceses at the end of the 8th century after a long period of decline in the 7th and most of the 8th centuries. The last contribution (Ch. 19, pp. 288-311), which amplifies Basić's conclusion on the role of the local Dalmatian elites, is an exemplary illustration of the volume's methodological approach. Trpimir Vedriš skillfully applies the method of "thick description" to contextualize a short account by the Archbishop of Trier, Amalarius of Metz (c. 780-c. 850) of his stay at Zadar in late June 813 on his way to Constantinople as Charlemagne's ambassador to Michael I. Using the analytical tools introduced by Jonathan Shepard in the opening chapter of the volume, the author examines a particular moment in Zadar's history: that of the elevation of its diocese to the status of archbishopric in the 9th century, which is mentioned only in Amalarius's account and in sources of the mid-12th century, when Zadar had been actually elevated to an archbishopric. The author argues for the plausibility of the event and understands it as evidence of the ability of Zadar's elite to increase its own influence by taking advantage of the conflicts between the Frankish Kingdom and the papacy on the one hand and Byzantium on the other. Zadar profited from the Byzantine efforts to increase the Empire's influence by attracting the Dalmatian bishops into the Constantinopolitan orbit by means of soft power, and finally convinced the Patriarchate to elevate its seat to an archbishopric.

Maps showing the main areas mentioned in the different chapters (pp. xxiv-xxxii), a glossary of medieval technical terms (pp. 312-315), an index of places which have multiple alternative names (pp. 316-318) and an index of places, persons and things (pp. 319-333) facilitate the reader's understanding of the work. The volume examines a decisive moment in the Frankish expansion to the east and constitutes an important contribution to the research on the broad region of the Northern Adriatic, Dalmatia and Pannonia in the 9th century. In highlighting these peripheries and skillfully applying the necessary analytical tools, it provides insight into the emergence of local elites and their central role in building their own communities.

ELENI TOUNTA
School of History and Archaeology
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki