

## MARSEILLE: A LATE ANTIQUE SUCCESS STORY?\*

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Documentary and archaeological evidence concurs in placing the foundation of Marseille by colonists from Phocaea in around 600 B.C.<sup>1</sup> The site can only have been chosen with an eye to its maritime commercial potential. Surrounded on the landward side by a chain of hills, the city's immediate hinterland was tiny, and only moderately fertile.<sup>2</sup> Geographically, in the words of Camille Jullian, 'Marseille . . . semble tourner le dos à la Provence'.<sup>3</sup> But thanks to its magnificent, sheltered, deep-water harbour, now known as the Vieux-Port, the city has been a focal point for Mediterranean trade throughout its long history, and its immediate landward isolation has not affected its ability to exploit the Rhône corridor and establish commercial relations with the interior of France. Its location makes it a classic gateway community.

From its beginnings as a Phocaeen colony until the successive waves of expansion in early modern times, the heart of the city was on the north bank of the Vieux-Port, where it straddled a series of hills: from west to east, the Buttes Saint-Laurent, Moulins, and Carmes (Fig. 1). Strabo summed up this setting as 'a south-facing theatre-like rock with the harbour at its foot', and indeed the hills fell more directly to the water than they do today after centuries of deposition, reclamation, and redevelopment.<sup>4</sup> In antiquity the site of the city could with pardonable exaggeration be described as a peninsula, because a marshy creek, fed by copious springs, flowed out into the north-east corner of the port.<sup>5</sup>

The wealth of references in late antique and early medieval sources to commercial activity at Marseille guaranteed the city a regular place in the works of Henri Pirenne. Here it recurs as a leitmotif, illustrative first of the persistence of long-distance Mediterranean trade and ultimately of its collapse.<sup>6</sup> Surprisingly, however, Marseille has been somewhat neglected in more recent general studies of this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of a corpus of archaeological material now provides an opportunity for a reappraisal of the other evidence for the city's

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<sup>1</sup> Date: Timaeus in Ps-Skymnus, ll. 211-14; foundation legend: Justin, XLIII. 5; Athenaeus XIII. 576. Subsequent excavations have confirmed the archaeological dating established by F. Villard, *La céramique grecque de Marseille (VI<sup>e</sup>-IV<sup>e</sup> siècles), essai d'histoire économique* (1960), 76-81.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo IV. 1. 5: its *chora* could support olives and vines, but not grain.

<sup>3</sup> C. Jullian in 'Arles grecque et romaine', *Journal des savants* n.s. 20 (1922), 97-113, at 100.

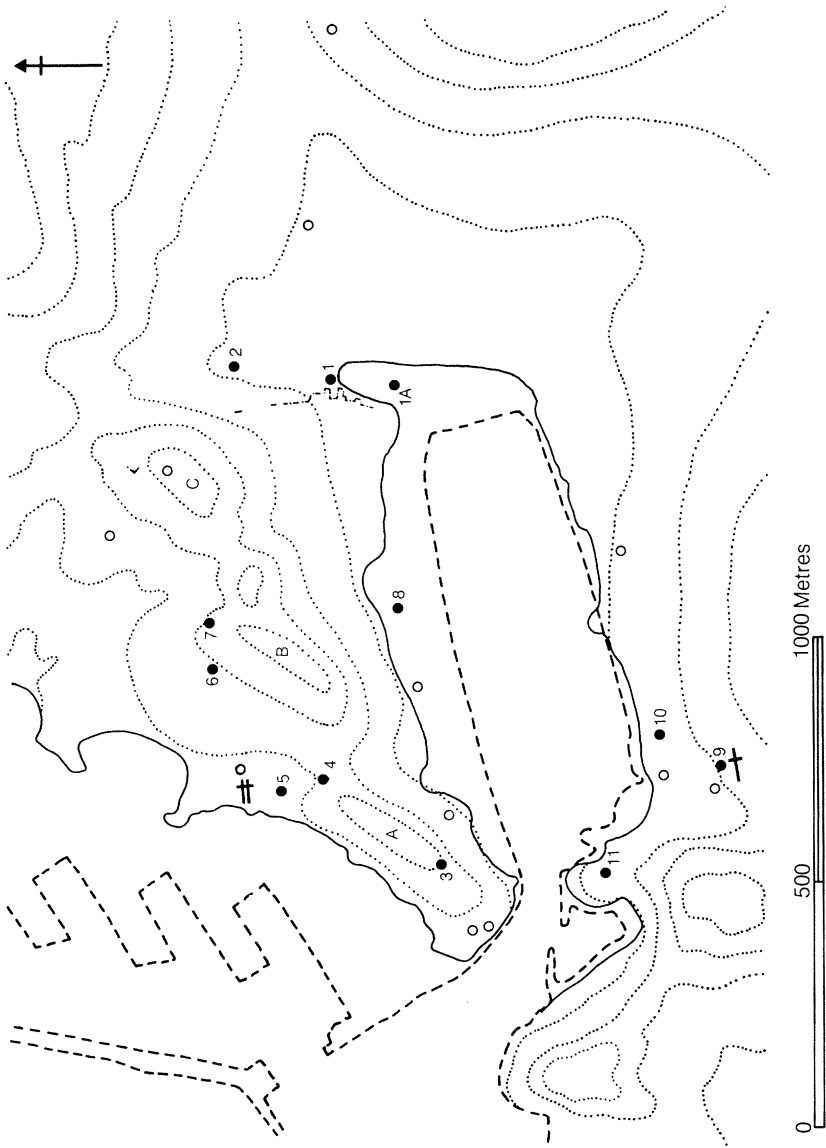
<sup>4</sup> Strabo IV. 1. 4. Post-War excavations suggest that the coastline in antiquity was on average some 100 m back from the modern north quay, but that the process of encroachment into the Vieux-Port was already well under way in antiquity: see e.g. the reports of H. Rolland and F. Benoit in *Gallia* 5 (1947), 155-7; 6 (1948), 208;

8 (1950), 116; F. Benoit, 'L'évolution topographique de Marseille: le port et l'enceinte à la lumière des fouilles', *Latomus* 31 (1972), 54-7. Cf. L.-Fr. Gantès and M. Moliner, *Marseille, itinéraire d'une mémoire, cinq années d'archéologie municipale* (1990), 41-2, for more recent data.

<sup>5</sup> Avienus ll. 704-12; Caesar, *BC* II. 1. 3. Avienus' choice of language is at the mercy of his metre. Caesar is concerned to emphasize the difficulty of besieging Marseille. One of these springs was almost certainly the Lacydon, the name of a local water-divinity (C. Jullian, 'Le port du Lacydon et le ruisseau sacré des Marseillais', *Provincia* 1 (1921), 1-6), by whose name the whole Vieux-Port was known in antiquity (Mela II. 5. 77).

<sup>6</sup> e.g. H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*<sup>3</sup> (1937), *passim*, ranging from triumph (p. 77: 'Marseille nous donne tout à fait l'impression d'un grand port') to disaster (p. 168: 'Marseille est mort à cette époque').

<sup>7</sup> Marseille is absent from the index in both R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: the Origins of Towns and Trade, A.D. 600-1000* (1982) and K. Randsborg, *The First Millennium A.D. in Europe and the Mediterranean, an Archaeological Essay* (1991). It figures but once in R. Hodges and D. Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe: Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (1983), in an inaccurate reference (p. 23).



- A Butte St-Laurent
  - B Butte des Moulins
  - C Butte des Carmes
  - approximation of ancient coastline
  - - - modern coastline
  - - - - - hellenistic rampart
  - ⊥ baptistery and presumed episcopal group
  - ⊥ St. Victor
  - major archaeological sites
  - recent excavations producing late antique material
1. Bourse
  - 1A. Corne
  2. Puget III
  3. St. Laurent
  4. Ilot 55
  5. Avenue Vaudoier
  6. Vieille-Charité
  7. RHI des Pistoles
  8. Place Villeneuve-Bargemon
  9. St. Victor
  10. Jardin Louis Audibert
  11. Fort Ganteaume

FIG. 1. MARSEILLE IN LATE ANTIQUITY: TOPOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

commercial importance in late antiquity and for Marseille to resume its rightful place in wider analyses of the Mediterranean trade of this period.<sup>8</sup>

This analysis will concentrate on the evidence for the exceptional vitality and prosperity which the city enjoyed in the fifth, sixth, and perhaps even seventh centuries, and not on its subsequent decline. It opens (I) with the archaeology of the city's late antique buildings and settlement, showing that Marseille was apparently expanding during a general period of urban decline. The archaeology of the port is presented in the next section (II), with discussion of the limitations of this evidence and its uneasy relationship with the contemporary documentary record. Section III seeks to set this archaeological evidence in context by reconsidering the documentary and numismatic indications that by the late sixth and seventh centuries Marseille was of particular value to those who controlled it, and argues that this was because it had acquired a nodal role in exchange and communications networks. Having demonstrated that this was the case, the paper concludes (IV) with some hypotheses to explain how and why Marseille was able to regain this gateway function in late antiquity, after losing it to Arles during the Roman period, and suggests that the city's commercial significance may have peaked in the particular circumstances of the late sixth century.

## I

The archaeology of late antique Marseille is largely concerned with the recovery of fragmentary and often robbed-out occupation levels. One or two monumental features of the urban landscape, churches and walls, do nevertheless re-emerge. If the wealth of a city is reflected in its buildings, then in late antiquity the monuments of the Christian faith, which every city now had to have, are one potential index of urban success. This is less true of martyrial or funerary churches, the splendour of which could be influenced by the degree of veneration felt for the holy tombs they contained, than it is for episcopal groups, symbols of their cities and of the power of the living, not the dead. At Marseille the only known element of the late antique episcopal group is its baptistery, but this in itself stands as a striking symbol of civic and Christian prosperity.<sup>9</sup> Its plan presents architectural variations on a theme of squares

<sup>8</sup> There is as yet no definitive publication of the Bourse, the key site and pioneering excavation (1968–84) of French urban archaeology, but the late antique material has been discussed in a series of excellent surveys: M. Bonifay, 'Éléments d'évolution des céramiques de l'antiquité tardive à Marseille d'après les fouilles de la Bourse (1980–1981)', *RAN* 16 (1983), 285–346; D. Foy and M. Bonifay, 'Éléments d'évolution des verreries de l'antiquité tardive à Marseille d'après les fouilles de la Bourse (1980)', *RAN* 17 (1984), 289–308; M. Bonifay, 'Observations sur les amphores tardives à Marseille d'après les fouilles de la Bourse (1980–1984)', *RAN* 19 (1986), 269–305. The results of the various excavations within the city in the late 1980s are now conveniently assembled in L.-Fr. Gantès and M. Moliner, op. cit. (n. 4). Post-war finds in general are summarized in *Gallia* 5 (1947), 155–60; 6 (1948), 207–9; 8 (1950), 116–17; 11 (1953), 100–6; 12 (1954), 426–9; 18 (1960), 286–90; 20 (1962), 687; 22 (1964), 580–5; 25 (1967), 404–5; 27 (1969), 423–30; 30 (1972), 520–4; 32 (1974), 512–18; 35 (1977), 520–5; 44 (1986), 413–26; *Gallia Informations* (1987–88) ii, 244–9; (1990) i–ii, 168–74. For pre-War discoveries, M. Clerc, *Massalia: histoire de Marseille dans l'antiquité, des origines à la fin de l'empire romain d'occident*, 2 vols (1927–9), a comprehensive historical survey which although inevitably dated remains fundamental, and the catalogue in F. Benoit, *Forma Orbis Romani: carte archéologique de la Gaule romaine, V, Bouches-du-Rhône* (1936), 17–41 and map (hereafter *FOR*). For other major recent excavations within the city, see also G. Demians d'Archimbaud, 'Les fouilles de Saint-Victor de Marseille', *CRAI* (1971), 87–117; G. Demians d'Archimbaud, J.-M. Allais, and M. Fixot, 'Saint-Victor de Marseille: fouilles récentes et nouvelles interprétations architecturales', *CRAI* (1974), 313–46; and for early Christian topography in general (and an

excellent bibliography), J. Guyon, 'Marseille', in N. Gauthier and J.-Ch. Picard (eds), *Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule* iii (1986), 121–33. Both *Les dossiers d'archéologie* 154 (1990) and the local journal *Marseille* 160 (1991) are devoted to ancient and medieval Marseille and contain much valuable (and similar) discussion within their popular formats: in particular, both Bonifay and Guyon stress the positive aspects of the city's history in late antiquity. In a wider context, A. L. F. Rivet, *Gallia Narbonensis* (1988), provides a convenient recent consideration of the Roman province, but its discussions of the topography of individual cities require significant modification in light of the weight of archaeological material recently excavated and published in the Midi. Despite this, however, the rural archaeology of the Marseille basin remains virtually non-existent: for purposes of comparison, see e.g. the recent summary of rural settlement in the Roman period around the nearby Étang de Berre: P. Leveau, 'Villas and Roman settlement in Basse-Provence', in G. Barker and J. Lloyd (eds), *Roman Landscapes: Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Region* (1991), 169–75. Finally, P.-A. Février et al., *La Provence des origines à l'an mil* (1989), though general, is full of up-to-date analysis and insights.

<sup>9</sup> The baptistery survived in an increasingly mutilated form until modern times: J. B. B. Grosson, *Recueil des antiquités et monuments marseillois qui peuvent intéresser l'histoire et les arts* (1773), 50, 168–9, pl. 23. It was excavated in a haphazard fashion between 1850 and 1854 during the demolitions required for the building of a new cathedral: F. Roustan, *La Major et le premier baptistère de Marseille* (1905); but see also X. Barral I Altet and D. Drocourt, 'Le baptistère paléochrétien de Marseille', *Archéologia* 73 (1974), 6–19, for a critical evaluation of these excavations and of Roustan's work.

and octagons familiar in late antique baptisteries in Provence, Italy, and Spain. But the scale of the baptistery at Marseille is altogether exceptional. With dimensions of 22.90 by 22.48m, it had a floor area well over twice that of the largest of the four equivalent buildings known in Provence.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, even the baptistery at Milan, built when the city was an imperial capital, is slightly smaller.<sup>11</sup> Size, of course, is not everything, but traces of commensurately splendid decoration were revealed during the excavations. These included a series of polychrome mosaic pavements, found both inside and outside the building, which, in the absence of other archaeological criteria, provide the best available chronological evidence.<sup>12</sup> Based on stylistic comparisons, a date *c.* 400 has been suggested for the baptistery.<sup>13</sup> This falls within the broad date-range usually ascribed to the various baptisteries of this type and conveniently (perhaps all too conveniently) within the episcopate of Proculus (*c.* 381–*c.* 428), by far the most famous and redoubtable of Marseille's early bishops.<sup>14</sup> But whatever the precise date, it is clear that the will and the means existed within late antique Marseille to conceive and erect buildings on a monumental scale well beyond the logical implications of the city's position in the secular or ecclesiastical hierarchies, if not its aspirations in the latter sphere (cf. Section IV).

If the size of this individual building is suggestive, more so perhaps is the extent of the late antique city as a whole, whether this is considered in terms of the area enclosed by its walls or of the actual area under occupation. Marseille had an effective, defensible wall-circuit throughout late antiquity. Early in the fourth century, it was a *munitissima civitas*, its walls and towers strong enough for the ex-emperor Maximian to attempt to hold out there.<sup>15</sup> In 413 it was held by Count Boniface against the Visigoths, and was still thoroughly siege-proof in the late sixth century.<sup>16</sup> It is highly probable that these late antique ramparts followed similar lines to the circuit built to defend the city around or soon after the middle of the second century B.C.,<sup>17</sup> and indeed were substantially the same ramparts.

The course of the eastern side of this Hellenistic circuit can be confidently reconstructed with the aid of ancient observations and recent excavations (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> To the north, the precise line by which the walls returned from the crest of the Butte des Carmes to the Mediterranean is still a matter for speculation, but a reasonable approximation can be made on the basis of topographical imperatives and both occupation and cemeterial evidence.<sup>19</sup> Although it is not certain that the western and southern sides of the city were walled, the limits of settlement are here established by the sea and the Vieux-Port. The extent of the area enclosed by the Hellenistic circuit was therefore about fifty hectares.<sup>20</sup>

The exceptional solidity of the Hellenistic defences must have helped to ensure their substantial survival into late antiquity. The Bourse excavations revealed that they had been

<sup>10</sup> The largest of these is the baptistery at Aix (approximately 14 m a side): the others are at Fréjus, Riez, and Cimiez: J. Guyon, 'Baptistères et groupes épiscopaux de Provence: élaboration, diffusion et devenir d'un type architectural', *Actes du XI<sup>e</sup> congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne* (1989), vol. 2, 1427–49.

<sup>11</sup> M. Mirabella Roberti and A. Paredi, *Il battistero ambrosiano di San Giovanni alle fonti* (1974).

<sup>12</sup> Roustan, *op. cit.* (n. 9). The mosaics outside the baptistery must belong to the contemporary episcopal group, otherwise unknown. Besides the mosaics, four massive white marble column bases (of the sixteen dictated by the plan), and traces of wall and floor decoration in polychrome marble were among the finds.

<sup>13</sup> Dating: H. Stern, 'Mosaïques de pavement préromanes et romanes en France', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 5 (1962), 14–15, and figs 1–3, facing p. 16. Not all the excavated mosaics belong to the late antique series: *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Guyon, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 1443–6, for the difficulty of accurately dating the Provençal group. Barral I Altet and Drocourt, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 18–19, for cautious attribution to Proculus. But the dangers of attributing buildings to the famous are obvious, and there are now some archaeological grounds for dating the whole episcopal group at Aix, for example, including by implication the baptistery, as late as *c.* 500: R. Guild, J. Guyon and L. Rivet, 'Les origines

du baptistère de la cathédrale Saint-Sauveur: étude de topographie aixoise', *RAN* 16 (1983), 182–5, 213–14.

<sup>15</sup> *Pan.Lat.* vi. 18–19.

<sup>16</sup> Olympiodorus, fr. 22. Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi. 11.

<sup>17</sup> The date derives from pottery recovered from its foundation trenches: M. Euzennat, 'Fouilles de la Bourse à Marseille', *CRAI* (1976), 543.

<sup>18</sup> Ancient observations: *FOR*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 18, nos 61–2. Bourse excavations: M. Euzennat and F. Salviat, 'Les fouilles de Marseille (mars-avril 1968)', *CRAI* (1968), 144–59. See also Euzennat, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 529–52; Euzennat *et al.*, 'Les fouilles de la Bourse à Marseille (campagnes 1975–6)', *RAN* 10 (1977), 235–46. Butte des Carmes: G. Bertucchi and L.-Fr. Gantès, 'Les fortifications de Marseille et les couches archaïques sur la Butte des Carmes', *AMM* 3 (1981), 61–72; *Gallia* 44 (1986), 419–21; Gantès and Moliner, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 43–4.

<sup>19</sup> The omission of the low-lying vallon du Lazaret is implied for practical defensive reasons, and confirmed by the existence in this area of a poorly-known Roman cemeterial zone: Clerc, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 276–8; *FOR*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 24, 26, 29, 32, no. 59. The Pistoles and Phocéens sites were however occupied from the fifth century B.C. onwards (Gantès and Moliner, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 25–6, 31–5) and seem likely to have been included within the Hellenistic rampart.

<sup>20</sup> Guyon, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 126.

upgraded during the fifth century by the erection of a fore-wall in broken line. The disposition of this wall, running parallel and in close conformity to the projecting towers and re-entrant angles of the earlier circuit, shows that here the latter had undoubtedly remained the basis of the city's late antique defences. It seems likely that the wall-line had remained similarly constant throughout the circuit, whatever the scale of the repairs needed after Caesar's prolonged siege of the city in 49 B.C.<sup>21</sup> There is therefore no sign at Marseille of the erection of a reduced enceinte of the type commonly built in cities elsewhere in Gaul in late antiquity.<sup>22</sup> Nor does it seem that the old ramparts were a passive survival, inappropriate to contemporary urban realities. On the contrary, the indications implicit in the documentary sources and the building of the fore-wall that this circuit remained both defensible and relevant in late antiquity are affirmed by the contemporary occupation data. A series of excavations in the 1980s have produced late antique occupation levels from sites right across the intramural area, from the Butte Saint-Laurent to the Butte des Carmes and from the vicinity of the cathedral to the Bourse (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup> These generally show occupation continuing well into the sixth century at least, and feature some striking continuities with the Greek and Roman past in terms of structures and streets. New building was also extending onto reclaimed land on the north bank of the port in the late fifth century.<sup>24</sup>

In this respect Marseille contrasts favourably with other nearby cities. Several intramural sites recently excavated at Orange seem to have been abandoned in the third century, and have produced only minimal traces of late antique re-occupation.<sup>25</sup> Some areas within the early imperial walls of Fréjus did not continue in occupation beyond the end of the fourth century.<sup>26</sup> The abandonment of a residential quarter at Riez signals a reduction in the inhabited area, as is further implied by the intrusion of burials into what had hitherto been urban space.<sup>27</sup> The latter phenomenon is also apparent at Aix-en-Provence which, while retaining its position in the urban hierarchy as the capital of Narbonensis Secunda, has produced perhaps the clearest Provençal evidence of late antique contraction and the redefinition of the urban landscape. Between the third and the fifth centuries a series of luxury town-houses within the area of its imperial wall-circuit were completely abandoned. By the end of the fifth century parts of this circuit had clearly fallen into disuse, overlain by structures and invaded by burials, and occupation seems to have been concentrated in the western and eastern peripheries of the old city around two important early Christian foci. One of these, an episcopal group built c. 500 on the site of the forum complex, became the core of the medieval city, and was perhaps already surrounded by a reduced enceinte in late antiquity.<sup>28</sup>

Marseille, however, was apparently capable not just of resisting the trend towards urban contraction, but of reversing it. The Bourse excavations showed how an extramural suburb had developed between the fourth and the sixth centuries in the area immediately outside the east gate. By the end of the sixth century occupation had spread across the whole of the excavated area, encroaching upon and ultimately transforming the old main road into the city. The suburb was still expanding c. 600, with the extension of settlement onto the infill of the

<sup>21</sup> Siege: Caesar, *BC* 1. 34–6, 56–8; II. 1–22. Fore-wall: Bonifay (1983), op. cit. (n. 8), 287–9; *Gallia* 44 (1986), 418. Documentary, structural, and cemeterial evidence all point to the general survival of the earlier circuit: cf. M. Bonifay, 'Fouilles récentes sur le chantier de la Bourse: niveaux de l'antiquité tardive et du haut moyen-âge', *Archéologie du Midi Médiéval* 3 (1981), 42; P.-A. Février, 'Aux origines de quelques villes médiévales du Midi de la Gaule', *RSL* 49 (1983), 324–8. Evidence from the Bourse suggests that the siege of 49 B.C. caused only superficial damage: Euzennat *et al.*, op. cit. (n. 18), 245. The sum spent on the walls by Crinas in the first century A.D. (Pliny, *NH* xxxix. 5. 9–10) probably went on repairs rather than a wholesale rebuild.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. R. M. Butler, 'Late Roman town-walls in Gaul', *Arch. Journ.* 116 (1959), 25–60; P.-A. Février in G. Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine. 1. La ville antique* (1980), 399–421.

<sup>23</sup> Gantès and Moliner, op. cit. (n. 4), *passim*, and summary, 93–6. Other late antique occupation levels within the city: *Gallia* 44 (1986), 423–5 and (less certainly), 6 (1947), 156–9; 18 (1960), 267–8, 22 (1964), 583; F. Benoit, 'Topographie antique de Marseille: le théâtre et le mur antique de Crinas', *Gallia* 24 (1966), 1–12.

<sup>24</sup> Gantès and Moliner, op. cit. (n. 4), 41–2.

<sup>25</sup> *Gallia* 42 (1984), 423–6; *Gallia Informations* (1987–88) ii, 321–7.

<sup>26</sup> P.-A. Février, 'Approche de villes médiévales de Provence: réflexions à partir de deux fouilles faites à Fréjus et Aix', *Rendiconti di atti della pontificia accademia romana di archeologia* 53–4 (1980–2), 369–82, esp. 371–2, for the absence of grey stamped ware at the Clos de la Tour site, implying abandonment before the late fourth century.

<sup>27</sup> *Gallia* 28 (1970), 448–51; G. Barruol, 'Riez: un centre administratif et religieux des Alpes du Sud', *Archéologia* 21 (1968), 20–6.

<sup>28</sup> Abandonments, e.g. the Jardin du Grassi, École des Beaux Arts, Enclos Laugier, Aire du Chapitre sites: *Gallia* 16 (1958), 419; 18 (1960), 300; 35 (1977), 512; 44 (1986), 386; R. Boiron, C. Landure, and N. Nin, *Les fouilles de l'Aire du Chapitre* (1986). Disused wall-circuit and burials: F. Benoit, 'Recherches archéologiques dans la région d'Aix-en-Provence', *Gallia* 12 (1954), 294–300. Christian topography summary and full bibliography: J. Guyon, 'Aix-en-Provence', in *Topographie chrétienne*, op. cit. (n. 8) ii (1986), 17–28; medieval topography: Février, op. cit. (n. 26), 377–82.

Corne after the final failure of attempts to revive it as an inner harbour<sup>29</sup> (cf. Section II). Furthermore, the recent discovery 200 metres further north on the Puget III site (Fig. 1) of a comparable domestic structure of sixth-century date suggests that extramural occupation may have stretched right along the eastern side of the city.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere in Provence burials were invading urban areas: here at Marseille occupation was expanding into a zone which in the early Empire had been used for burials.

Although only part of the late antique suburb was fully excavated, its predominantly artisanal function emerges clearly. The outfall of the nearby springs was channelled to drive a water-wheel. One of the excavated houses contained a furnace. The assemblage of small finds — iron slag, glass scoria and crucibles, traces of bone, leather and wood-working both here and in the Corne deposits — confirms this impression of a quarter which derived an intense vitality from industrial activity. Its relationship with the port remains unclear,<sup>31</sup> but this is an altogether exceptional example of suburban development without the obvious focus of an extramural church.<sup>32</sup>

The fragmentary but coherent evidence for continuing occupation of intramural sites in the fifth and sixth centuries suggests that the new extramural development of this period is the result of genuine expansion rather than of a shift in settlement. The picture is less clear in the late sixth century, however, when the continuing extension of the suburb occurs against a background of the apparent abandonment of some intramural habitats. This prefigures a general archaeological hiatus at Marseille from the mid-seventh to the tenth centuries, a problem common to the whole of Provence.<sup>33</sup> It is impossible to be certain how far this lacuna reflects urban collapse and the real absence of the population, and how far it is an index of their archaeological invisibility, as they cease to build in durable materials, and the supply of dateable artefacts dries up. The former phenomenon is anticipated in late antique Marseille by the general deterioration in structural quality evident in the earth-bonded or dry-stone walls and beaten-earth floors of the latest suburban buildings on the Corne infill. But are these truly representative of the city as a whole? If Marseille still had a resident Gallo-Roman élite, as the documentary evidence suggests, where were they living? No trace of any *domus urbana* appropriate for members of this class (as I envisage their lifestyle) has yet been found amid the fragmentary, robbed and erased levels of the period.<sup>34</sup> The archaeology of settlement within the late antique city is unlikely ever to give definitive answers to these various questions of density, quality, and chronology of occupation. But for all its limitations, it has begun to provide indications of sustained urban prosperity, even growth, to support the evidence of other sources that Marseille was an unusually successful late antique centre.

## II

The archaeology of Marseille's late antique economy amply attests to the importance of the city's commercial role. It confirms in part the anecdotal allusions of the documentary

<sup>29</sup> For summaries of late antique occupation on the Bourse site, see Bonifay (1981), *op. cit.* (n. 21), 37–48; M. Bonifay and R. Guéry, 'L'antiquité tardive sur le chantier de la Bourse à Marseille', in *Archéologie médiévale en Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur 1970–1982* (1983), 111–14.

<sup>30</sup> For the Puget III site: Gantès and Moliner, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 53–8.

<sup>31</sup> The adjacent area of the port, the Corne, can only have been in limited use in this period (cf. Section II), and the suburb extends well away from it to the north. The road into the city, or the springs with their potential for industrial activity, may have been more significant in its development.

<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of a church in this area. A vital extramural focus of Christian funerary activity did exist, but opposite the city on the south bank of the port around an elaborate church complex at Saint-Victor. Occupation may conceivably have extended into this traditionally cemeterial zone (Gantès and Moliner, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 61–2), but it would

be very premature to claim this as part of a general phenomenon of suburban settlement around the port.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the interventions at the Bourse may belong to this period (Foy and Bonifay, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 200), but the resumption of activity here is first clearly marked by the appearance of tenth-century forms of *vetrina pesante*: M. Bonifay, L. Paroli, and J. Picon, 'Ceramiche a vetrina pesante scoperte a Roma et a Marsiglia', *Archeologia medievale* 13 (1986), esp. 85–6. For the general problem, cf. M. Fixot, 'Archéologie médiévale en Provence', *Prov. Hist.* 40 (1990), 455–64.

<sup>34</sup> Paulinus of Pella retired to a *domus urbana* at Marseille (*Eucharisticos* l. 527). Marseille still seems to have contained large houses in the late sixth century: Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi. 11 (Dynamius' house); ix. 22. But further north, Venantius Fortunatus, who regularly corresponded with the Marseille élite, could bring himself expansively to praise wooden houses (*Carm.* ix. 15), although contemporary evidence suggests that stone was still much the preferred building medium (e.g. for churches, Gregory of Tours, *GC* 71).

record, while not always consistent with it in matters of detail, and provides a context for the positive evidence of late antique occupation outlined above. Serious limitations nevertheless remain, notably in that the data available only illustrate the movement of goods via Marseille in one direction, from the Mediterranean to the interior of Gaul. This archaeological void is not altogether surprising, since none of the few commodities which sixth- and seventh-century sources indicate were travelling in the opposite direction (clothing, slaves, and perhaps timber) would show up in the archaeological record.<sup>35</sup> The total absence of Gallic amphorae confirms, predictably enough perhaps, that Gaul did not then export oil or wine around the Mediterranean.

Marseille was probably a manufacturing centre as well as a focus for goods passing through. It has long been argued that a major atelier producing the local late antique fine ware, known as 'dérivées des sigillées paléochrétiennes' (DSP) or 'grey stamped ware', lay somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the city. This remains to be confirmed archaeologically, however, and it appears from the distribution of this ware that it was largely produced to meet local or at most regional demands.<sup>36</sup> The same conclusion can reasonably be drawn for the other archaeologically attested products of Marseille such as glass.<sup>37</sup> Although Marseille had produced and marketed wine in the Roman period,<sup>38</sup> there is no evidence that it continued to do so on any significant scale in late antiquity: no locally-manufactured amphorae of this period have been identified. Unlike Carthage, local or regional commodity production and marketing on a Mediterranean exchange-network was not a major factor in the economy of Marseille.<sup>39</sup> The primary commercial function of the late antique city was that of an emporium,

facilitating and deriving much of its prosperity from interregional commodity exchange.

Our archaeological view of this exchange is therefore restricted to imports to Marseille from the Mediterranean, and this is in itself limited to archaeologically visible commodities or containers. The key site is once again the Bourse, and in particular the meticulous work on the late antique levels within the Corne, the artificial inner harbour created from the creek at the rear of the Vieux-Port in the first century A.D. The alluvium-laden outfall of the adjacent springs contributed to the progressive siltation of the Corne, to the extent that by the fifth century it was reduced to a pestilential mere beside the east gate and the beginnings of the new suburb.<sup>40</sup> But excavations showed that a plan was devised in about the middle of the fifth century to redevelop this area of the port as an operational harbour. A new quay was built in front of the old one, the ground behind infilled to create a level platform, the marsh in front dredged to restore a shallow watercourse (at least 70 cm deep). But the project succumbed to renewed silting, culminating in its abandonment in the first half of the sixth century. Despite this, another attempt, less well-preserved archaeologically but to all appearances identical to the first, followed in the second half of the sixth century. Early in the seventh century this too was abandoned, and the ensuing extension of the extramural suburb onto the silt marks the ultimate triumph of nature over artifice in the long struggle to exploit the Corne.<sup>41</sup>

This long sequence provided an abundance of well-stratified material, analysed and published in a series of expeditious and valuable articles.<sup>42</sup> The imported pottery assemblage

<sup>35</sup> Clothing: *Ep. Arelatenses* (MGH, *Ep.* III) 49, 53; Gregory I, *Reg.* vi. 10. Slaves: *Reg.* vi. 10; *Vita Eligii* 10; *Vita Boniti* 3. Only the latter source refers explicitly to Marseille rather than Provence in general. Timber was exported from the papal patrimony to Alexandria under Gregory the Great, but nothing proves that the relevant estates were those in Provence.

<sup>36</sup> Recent summaries for DSPs: Association CATHMA, 'La céramique du haut moyen-âge en France méridionale: éléments comparatifs et essai d'interprétation', in *La ceramica medievale nel mediterraneo occidentale* (1986), 27–54, esp. 40–2; Y. and J. Rigoir, 'Les dérivées des sigillées dans la moitié sud de la France', *SFECAG, Actes du Congrès de Reims* (1985), 49–56; L. Rivet in P.-A. Février and F. Leyge, *Les premiers temps chrétiens en Gaule méridionale* (1986), 176.

<sup>37</sup> Foy and Bonifay, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 308.

<sup>38</sup> In advance of his forthcoming book on the subject, see G. Bertucchi, 'Le vin de Marseille', *Dossiers d'archéologie* 154 (1990), 44–9.

<sup>39</sup> Carthage: e.g. M. G. Fulford, 'Carthage: overseas trade and the political economy, c. A.D. 400–700',

*Reading Medieval Studies* 6 (1980), 68–80.

<sup>40</sup> Euzennat, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 545–50; Bonifay (1983), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 289–90. The Corne had become a graveyard for shipping by the third century. For a graphic summary of the fifth-century environmental conditions, L. Jourdan, *La faune du site gallo-romain et paléochrétien de la Bourse* (1976), 302–4: numerous flies and various species of vulture hovered over the accumulated debris.

<sup>41</sup> For the phasing, Bonifay (1983), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 290–7; *ibid.*, 303–26 for dating, with important revisions in Bonifay (1986), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 270–1. Keyhole excavations on the other side of the Corne corroborate much of this sequence: M.-T. Cavaillès-Llopis, 'Céramiques de l'antiquité tardive à Marseille', *Documents d'Archéologie Méridionale* 9 (1986), 167–95.

<sup>42</sup> See n. 8 for full references and R. B. Hitchner, 'Meridional Gaul, trade and the Mediterranean economy in late antiquity', in J. F. Drinkwater and H. W. Elton (eds), *Fifth-Century Gaul: a Crisis of Identity?* (1992), 122–31, for an attempt to put this information in its regional economic context.

was dominated in all periods by African Red Slip (ARS), to the almost total exclusion of eastern imports.<sup>43</sup> African fine ware imports were also increasing their market-share over time at the expense of native wares, fine and common alike, peaking in levels of the late sixth century and continuing in significant quantities into the seventh (Tables 1A and 1B, see Appendix).<sup>44</sup> This trend is reflected on other sites in southern Gaul, but the Bourse has produced by far the highest proportions of ARS, which may be suggestive of Marseille's central role in its importation and distribution.<sup>45</sup> But pottery imports to Marseille were not confined to fine wares. The continuing vitality of Mediterranean exchange in the fifth and sixth centuries is also illustrated by the unexpected range of common wares from all over the Mediterranean found here, suggestive of the persistent vigour, alongside the traffic in luxury goods, of small-scale exchange by cabotage, port-hopping along the coasts.<sup>46</sup>

The pottery evidence indicates that African products were taking a growing share of the Marseille market, see the amphora data given in Table 2 (Appendix). Imports from Spain are conspicuous throughout only by their absence. Eastern amphorae of various types are present in all periods, but in steadily declining proportions. The important role of trade with the East in the economy of fifth-century Marseille is paralleled by evidence from nearby sites in the lower Rhône valley.<sup>47</sup> It also reflects the wider western Mediterranean pattern.<sup>48</sup> But in the Francia of Gregory of Tours, the commercial links between Marseille and the East, although enduring, were becoming attenuated: by the latest seventh-century phases at the Bourse they had effectively snapped. This declining sequence is again broadly consistent with evidence from other sites in the western Mediterranean. Eastern amphorae seem to peter out at Tarraconensis in Spain late in the second half of the sixth century and are present in declining proportions at Carthage c. 600.<sup>49</sup> At Naples, however, the eastern link is apparently increasing its market-share at African expense in this period.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the African connection persists throughout at Marseille, the proportion of African amphorae rising to attain a virtual monopoly in the seventh century, as their eastern counterparts finally disappear from the market-place. The endurance of the Africa-Marseille link, in apparent contrast to declining African trade with sites elsewhere in the western Mediterranean,<sup>51</sup> suggests that southern Gaul may have become a preferred market, which, if so, would tend to emphasize the lasting importance of this late antique exchange-route.

The ceramic evidence therefore shows that Marseille was integrated into a Mediterranean-wide exchange-network which retained some sort of unity until the end of the sixth century. But behind such a valuable and comforting array of statistical data, illustrative of trends both internally consistent and generally compatible with nearby sites, lurk a number of uncertain variables and unsolved (or worse, insoluble) problems which are worthy of notice. First, some problems specific to the statistics. The percentages of amphorae by region of production are potentially deceptive, because they show the relative proportions of imported containers rather than imported goods. Any calculation of market-share based on the number of containers is likely to over-estimate the actual quantity of eastern goods arriving compared to African ones, because in general the capacity of standard forms of late antique African amphorae was far greater than that of their eastern equivalents.<sup>52</sup> In Table 2 (see Appendix),

<sup>43</sup> Only twenty or so sherds of the eastern Late Roman C were found in all periods in the main Corne excavation: Bonifay (1983), op. cit. (n. 8); cf. Cavaillès-Llopis, op. cit. (n. 41), 171, fig. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Bonifay (1983), op. cit. (n. 8), 304; cf. Cavaillès-Llopis, op. cit. (n. 41), 171, fig. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Association CATHMA, op. cit. (n. 36), 34-5. Even the contemporary phase at Saint-Victor, just across the Vieux-Port, has produced far lower proportions of ARS, perhaps indicative of the particular redistributive role of the port area.

<sup>46</sup> Full publication of these and other common ware imports to southern Gaul by Bonifay *et al.* is forthcoming in *Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> congrès international sur la céramique médiévale en Méditerranée occidentale*, held at Lisbon in 1987. But Bonifay (1986), op. cit. (n. 8), 299 implies that the quantities involved are small. Cf. Fulford, op. cit. (n. 39), 72, for imported coarse wares at Carthage.

<sup>47</sup> M. Bonifay and F. Villedieu, 'Importations d'amphores orientales en Gaule (V<sup>e</sup>-VII<sup>e</sup>)', in V. Déroche

and J.-M. Speiser (eds), *Recherches sur la céramique byzantine* (1989), 17-46; M. Bonifay, G. Congès and M. Leguilloux, 'Amphores tardives (V<sup>e</sup>-VII<sup>e</sup> siècle) à Arles et à Marseille', in *Amphores romaines et histoire économique: dix ans de recherche* (1989), 660-3.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. S. J. Keay, *Late Roman Amphorae in the Western Mediterranean, a Typology and Economic Study: the Catalan Evidence*, 2 vols (1984), 428-30; C. Panella, 'Le merci: produzioni, itinerari e destini', in A. Giardina (ed.), *Società romana e impero tardoantico, iii, le merci, gli insediamenti* (1986), 451-4.

<sup>49</sup> Keay, op. cit. (n. 48), 430-1; Fulford, op. cit. (n. 39), 71.

<sup>50</sup> P. Arthur, 'Naples: notes on the economy of a Dark Age city', in C. Malone and S. Stoddart (eds), *Papers in Italian Archaeology* (1985) iv, 247-59, at 256.

<sup>51</sup> Keay, op. cit. (n. 48), 427-8; Arthur, op. cit. (n. 50), 255-6; Fulford, op. cit. (n. 39), 75-6; Hitchner, op. cit. (n. 42), 161-2.

<sup>52</sup> Bonifay (1986), op. cit. (n. 8), 300.



therefore, the apparent dominance of eastern traffic in Period 1 may seriously misrepresent what was perhaps a roughly equivalent volume of eastern and African goods arriving at the port in amphorae at that time.<sup>53</sup>

The effect of this complication on the data is consistent and at least partially controllable. It alters the absolute percentages listed in Table 2 considerably, but not the underlying trends. The most serious enigma concerns not variations in the relative volume of trade with particular regions but the *absolute* volume of trade with Marseille in any given period. It is obvious, but still bears repeating, that the massive increase in market-share achieved by African amphorae by the seventh century need not mean a commensurate rise in the real quantities of African goods reaching Marseille at that time, and could even accompany a quantitative fall (see Appendix). Excellent though the evidence from Marseille is, it cannot safely be used to show fluctuations in the absolute volume of imported goods passing through the city during late antiquity unless one accepts difficult arguments based on the level of diversification of trade.<sup>54</sup>

The contents of the African amphorae present a further difficulty. In the fifth-century levels at the Bourse the interiors of all the eastern amphorae and the majority of the African (90 per cent of the total assemblage) were coated, suggesting that in this period oil was not a major African import to Marseille. The interior coatings of the amphorae in later phases do not survive to show whether this phenomenon was constant.<sup>55</sup> The available evidence is nevertheless anomalous, given the widespread belief that oil was the major African export commodity, and the emphasis which the documentary sources consistently set on the oil trade in connection with Marseille. Oil is one of only three commodities which Gregory of Tours specifies as being imported to Marseille: papyrus and *liquamen* (probably some form of fish-sauce) are the others. The papyrus must come from Egypt, but the source of the oil and *liquamen*, which on one occasion seem to have arrived in the same shipment in 'containers commonly called *orcae*', is not stated.<sup>56</sup> Marseille is further named in a late seventh-century Merovingian formula as the port where oil for lighting purposes was normally purchased,<sup>57</sup> and oil also figures prominently in the rents on imports to Marseille and Fos granted by seventh-century Merovingian kings to northern monasteries.<sup>58</sup> This dislocation between documents and archaeology cannot readily be resolved at present. It seems either that oil was imported to Marseille from sources other than Africa, or that the fifth-century sample is not representative of the African trade of this or indeed later periods, although neither of these solutions is entirely satisfactory.<sup>59</sup>

Alongside the odd happy marriage of archaeological and historical data — Gaza wine in the Francia of Gregory of Tours, Carthage Late Roman Amphora Type 4, probably from the Gaza region, present at the Bourse in increasing amounts *c.* 600<sup>60</sup> — stand other blunt contrasts. For example, the complete failure of Spanish trade to show up archaeologically confronts Gregory's famous reference to the arrival at Marseille of a Spanish ship with its (unspecified) 'usual cargo', the only occasion on which he refers to the origin of a vessel trading with the city.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps Spanish trade to Marseille was in archaeological intangibles, such as hides, or was carried in perishable containers such as barrels, sacks, or skins.<sup>62</sup> But Spanish amphorae do form a statistically significant presence at Arles in the fifth century,<sup>63</sup> and go on

<sup>53</sup> Bonifay and Villedieu, *op. cit.* (n. 47), 37–9.

<sup>54</sup> On this basis it was suggested from the imported pottery that there might have been an increase in commercial activity between the early fifth and late sixth centuries: Bonifay (1983), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 345. But if anything the amphora data imply the opposite: Bonifay (1986), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 298. I am unconvinced that any meaningful comparisons between periods can be made for absolute volumes of trade.

<sup>55</sup> Bonifay (1986), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 300–1.

<sup>56</sup> Papyrus: *Hist.* v. 5. The same passage (quoted n. 94) highlights oil among the other (unnamed) commodities imported to Marseille. Oil and *liquamen*: *Hist.* iv. 43: 'igitur advenientibus ad cataplum Massiliensim navibus transmarinis, Vigili archidiaconi homines septuaginta vasa quas vulgo orcas vocant olei liquaminisque furati sunt'.

<sup>57</sup> Marculf, *Supplementum* 1 (*MGH Formulae*, ed. Zeumer, p. 107).

<sup>58</sup> *Gesta Dagoberti* 18; L. Levillain, *Examen critique des chartes de Corbie* (1902), no. 15, 235. Cf. Section III.

<sup>59</sup> Bonifay (1986), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 301, offers a number of alternative explanations, which are not convincing in the face of documentary evidence for the continuing importance of oil in Francia and of its storage at Marseille.

<sup>60</sup> Gaza wine at Tours: *Hist.* vii. 29; at Lyon: *GC* 64. Carthage LRA 4 at the Bourse: Bonifay and Villedieu, *op. cit.* (n. 47), 20–1; in Gaul: *ibid.*, 27–9, fig. 9, p. 30.

<sup>61</sup> *Hist.* ix. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Hides from Cordoba are mentioned in a royal grant to Corbie in 716 on imports to Fos: see Levillain, *op. cit.* (n. 58), and n. 72 below. For increasing use of perishable containers in late antiquity, see e.g. the remarks in C. Panella, 'Le anfore tardoantiche: centri di produzione e mercati preferenziali', in Giardina (ed.), *op. cit.* (n. 48), 251–72.

<sup>63</sup> Bonifay, Congès, and Leguilloux, *op. cit.* (n. 47), 662, fig. 1.

reaching the avenue A. Max site at Lyon well into the sixth,<sup>64</sup> highlighting the geographically obvious point that Spanish trade with the Frankish interior, whether conveyed by land or sea, would logically have bypassed Marseille. One wonders whether by his use of the phrase *negotio solito*, Gregory of Tours is implying the familiarity to Franks of certain forms of Spanish merchandise rather than their normal arrival via Marseille.

One final alternative is to consider that the available sample is in some way unrepresentative of the overall pattern of imports to Marseille in late antiquity. While there are no grounds for such hypercriticism, it serves as a reminder that our information comes from a potentially anomalous area of the harbour. The late antique exploitation of the Corne was only temporary and it must have been confined to vessels of shallow draught, thereby limiting its commercial scope. In short, it is very difficult to imagine that these were the main harbour facilities, which would also have required the significant ancillary storage buildings known to have been located at Marseille, from Ostrogothic granaries to the *cellaria fiscali* of the Frankish kings.<sup>65</sup> All this paraphernalia should probably be sought on the north bank of the Vieux-Port, which had housed Roman warehouses and would form the heart of the medieval port. Without any knowledge of these facilities, the motives behind the redevelopment of the Corne are impossible to discern. Was it intended to replace some part of existing installations elsewhere in the Vieux-Port or to complement them in coping with an increased volume of trade? Whatever the explanation, the repeated attempts to redevelop the Corne in the fifth and sixth centuries are a *prima facie* signal of commercial vitality which, as the persistent supply of imported goods also shows, must have endured at least until the end of the sixth century. This is something at least to place alongside the contemporary documentary evidence for economic activity, even if the sets of data rarely complement each other directly.

### III

This impression of dynamism and vitality in the late sixth century acquires further substance from contemporary documentary and numismatic evidence that, in this period and beyond, authority over Marseille and its economy was something worth having and worth taking particular measures to exploit. It is a commonplace in Frankish historiography that the Merovingian kings were especially interested in controlling Marseille. As a result of the partitions of the Frankish kingdom in the 560s, Marseille was left out on a limb at the end of the so-called 'Austrasian corridor', a continuous strip of territory in a Provence which was otherwise attached to the Burgundian kingdom.<sup>66</sup> This artificial territorial arrangement makes no obvious sense, unless it was dictated by Austrasian insistence on a Mediterranean outlet. Marseille emerges in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours as a regular bone of contention, a cockpit for the machinations of rival Frankish kings and their (more or less nominal) representatives, the local magnates. Control over the city (or at least of its revenues) was temporarily divided, an anomaly again suggestive of a centre of especial significance.<sup>67</sup> The prevailing climate of tension is exacerbated in the latter half of the sixth century by the seemingly permanent establishment at Marseille of an Austrasian appointee variously titled *patricius*, *rector (Massiliensis) provinciae* or *praefectus*.<sup>68</sup> His concern for the smooth running of the port is in one instance documented by Gregory of Tours.<sup>69</sup> A merchant reported a theft of imported oil and *liquamen* to the *rector* Albinus, who hauled the complicit archdeacon off from church to prison on Christmas Day and fined him four thousand solidi. For Gregory, the moral of the story is that King Sigibert ultimately forced Albinus to make fourfold retribution

<sup>64</sup> Bonifay and Villedieu, op. cit. (n. 47), 39, graphs 7, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 41; *Gesta Dagoberti* 18.

<sup>66</sup> Austrasian corridor: E.-H. Duprat, 'Le couloir austrasien du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Mémoires de l'Institut Historique de Provence* 20 (1943-4), 36-65 (with caution); on the partitions in general, E. Ewig, 'Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511-613)', and 'Die fränkischen Teilreiche im 7. Jahrhundert (613-714)', collected in his *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien* (1976) I, 114-230.

<sup>67</sup> Conflicts connected with Marseille and its magnates: *Hist.* IV. 43; VI. 11; VI. 24; VI. 31; VI. 33; VIII. 5; VIII. 12; VIII. 20; IX. 22. I cannot enter into the multifaceted dynamics of these disputes or the various partitions (n. 66) in this paper, although I believe that they have often been misinterpreted: I hope to return to these subjects elsewhere.

<sup>68</sup> Provençal *patricii*: R. Buchner, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit* (1933), 92-6.

<sup>69</sup> *Hist.* IV. 43.

for his impiety in interrupting the service; but its interest for us lies in the *rector's* intervention in the dispute, and the considerable fines he levied and then paid.

However, neither heavy-handed magnates nor conflicts over cities, whether royally or locally inspired, are exactly rare in the pages of Gregory of Tours, and it is never easy to put them into their proper perspective. The nature and immediacy of Merovingian royal interest in the port of Marseille emerges more clearly in seventh-century sources. King Dagobert I (629–39) granted the abbey of St-Denis an annual rent of one hundred solidi on the royal customs-dues collected at Marseille, convertible into oil which would, supplies permitting, be purchased and held there for the abbey by the *telonarii*, the royal customs-officials.<sup>70</sup> The grant was renewed by Dagobert's successors with some modifications (including the removal of the stipulation on oil) and reference to the existence of a *cellarium fisci* attached to the toll-station, from which the goods were to be supplied.<sup>71</sup> The same system was apparently in operation at nearby Fos (see Fig. 2), where the abbey of Corbie from the time of its foundation under Lothar III (657–73) was entitled to levy a similar, but much more extensive, rent in kind from another such *cellarium*. This famous catalogue of desirables, remarkable for both the range and quantity of imported goods, may well have been a meaningless wish-list by 716, the date of the surviving privilege.<sup>72</sup> But, even if so, the list is surely an anachronism rather than a complete invention, and as such at least shows what the commercial possibilities of the Provençal ports had once been, as well as the mechanisms of royal interest in their exploitation.<sup>73</sup>

The numismatic evidence highlights the importance of this regional economy, and makes it all the more likely that the power-struggles concerning Marseille were economically motivated. Marseille was never an imperial mint. However, it seems that tiny silver coins, *minuti argentei*, and a copper coinage began to be struck there under the Ostrogoths in the early sixth century.<sup>74</sup> These must be low-value coinages, for small-scale retail trade, and as such indicate the existence at Marseille of a money economy vigorous enough to require such denominations. This is confirmed by the presence in late fifth- and early sixth-century archaeological contexts of an assortment of copper coins, either products of earlier centuries, often cut up to provide smaller denominations, or contemporary Vandal and Byzantine issues.<sup>75</sup> The new issues may well have been intended to provide an agreed basis for local monetary exchange. Some similar silver coinages were produced at one or two other cities in Gaul,<sup>76</sup> but Marseille is the only Gallic mint known to have struck a copper coinage after the early fifth century, and a century after at that.

These coinages were retained in production by the Frankish rulers of Provence, with an apparent burst of activity in the middle of the sixth century under Theudebert I.<sup>77</sup> They appear to have been moribund by the 570s, when the rest of Francia was abandoning its pseudo-imperial gold coinage in favour of new gold issues of lighter weight, struck in the name of neither king nor emperor, but with mint and moneyer's marks.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, gold coinage also began to be struck at Marseille for the first time, but its issues were very different. It became one of four main mints in southern Gaul producing a new quasi-imperial gold

<sup>70</sup> *Gesta Dagoberti* 18.

<sup>71</sup> *MGHDipl.* no. 61 (Clovis III, 691); no. 67 (Childebert III, 695); n. 82 (Chilperic II, 716). Childebert's diploma records the abbey's concession of the right in return for land in Berry, but the diploma of 716 repeats the terms of the *tractoria* of Clovis III. It is impossible to know what underlies this exchange and its apparent repudiation: cf. D. Ganz and W. Goffart, 'Charters earlier than 800 from French collections', *Speculum* 65 (1990), 906–32, at 914.

<sup>72</sup> Levillain, *op. cit.* (n. 58). Chilperic II here confirms grants of his predecessors, now lost. See the translation and discussion of this document by Pirenne, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 71–3.

<sup>73</sup> H. Pirenne, 'Le *cellarium fisci*: une institution économique des temps mérovingiens', reprinted in his *Histoire économique de l'occident médiéval* (1951), 104–12; F.-L. Ganshof, 'Les bureaux de tonlieu de Marseille et de Fos. Contribution à l'histoire des institutions financières de la monarchie franque', *Études historiques à la mémoire de N. Didier* (1960), 125–33.

<sup>74</sup> J. Lafaurie, 'Monnaies de bronze marseillaises du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *BSFN* (1973), 480–2; C. Brenot, 'Rapport préliminaire sur les monnaies des fouilles de Marseille', *Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> congrès international de numismatique* (1976), 217–26; C. Brenot, 'Monnaies en cuivre du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle frappées à Marseille', in *Mélanges de numismatique, d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à Jean Lafaurie* (1980), 181–8; J. Lafaurie, 'Les monnaies de Marseille du VI<sup>e</sup> au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *BSFN* 36 (1981), 68–73; J. Lafaurie, 'Deux monnaies en argent du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle trouvées à Saint-Blaise', *BSFN* 38 (1983), 411–13. The copper coinage has now turned up on sites in Provence besides Marseille, but the city remains by far the most likely mint site.

<sup>75</sup> Brenot (1980), *op. cit.* (n. 74), 185. See also her summary in Février and Leyge, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 197–8.

<sup>76</sup> P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage. 1. The Early Middle Ages* (1986), 115–16.

<sup>77</sup> Brenot (1960), *op. cit.* (n. 74), 185–6.

<sup>78</sup> Grierson and Blackburn, *op. cit.* (n. 76), 111–14, 117–28.

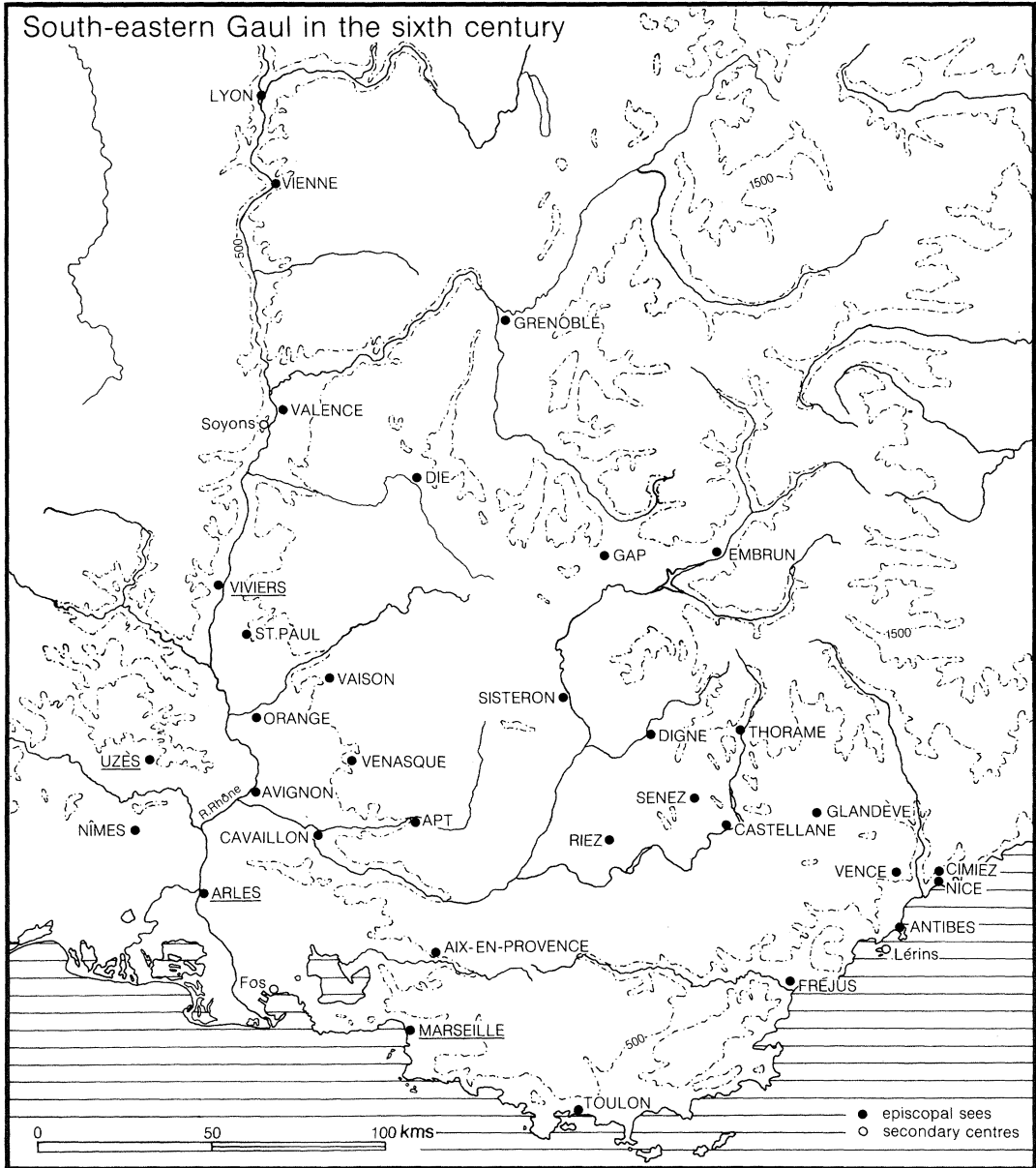


FIG. 2. PROVENCE AND THE RHÔNE VALLEY IN LATE ANTIQUITY. MINTS ISSUING QUASI-IMPERIAL AND ROYAL GOLD COINAGES ARE UNDERLINED.

coinage.<sup>79</sup> This was struck in the name of the eastern emperor, but conformed to the lighter Germanic weight standard rather than its imperial counterpart.<sup>80</sup> The simultaneous and die-linked appearance of this coinage *c.* 575 at centres identifiable from mint-marks as Marseille, Arles, Viviers, and Uzès argues strongly for its direction by a central authority,<sup>81</sup> an impression conclusively strengthened by its unusual regularity of weight, the absence of moneymen's names and its restriction of minting to cities, all exceptional among Frankish coinages of this period. If this key question of authority could be settled, it might go some way to answering the secondary problem of why these coins were struck in the name of the emperor. But it cannot: there is no obvious power, royal, aristocratic, or ecclesiastical, which could have held authority in all the cities in question in the late sixth century. The quasi-imperials have justly been called 'the most puzzling group of coins struck in Merovingian Gaul'.<sup>82</sup>

The emergence and history of this coinage does nevertheless carry some clear implications for late sixth- and seventh-century Marseille. The fact that the four main mints comprise the two major centres of authority in late sixth-century Provence, Marseille and Arles, and two politically and commercially strategic inland cities, Viviers and Uzès, both recently promoted up the urban hierarchy (Fig. 2),<sup>83</sup> highlights the direct relationship between this coinage and the regional economy. It further suggests that controlling the money supply of this economy was sufficiently lucrative to make the issuing of a distinct, carefully-managed coinage worthwhile, something which was not the case elsewhere in Francia. The subsequent history of this coinage then emphasizes the regional economic hegemony of Marseille, the source of the majority of known quasi-imperials. Its typology suggests that Marseille assumed a directing role in its production from an early stage.<sup>84</sup> It retained this through a transition which saw the name of the emperor replaced by that of the Frankish king, probably early in the reign of Lothar II, who in 613 had united the whole of Francia under his rule.<sup>85</sup> This equally anomalous royal issue, directly derived from its quasi-imperial antecedent, was sporadically struck at all four mints, suggesting the persistence of the economic circumstances which had given rise to the original minting programme. But Marseille continued to dominate and from around the middle of the century became the sole known source of a coinage of deteriorating quality and fineness.<sup>86</sup> This process concluded late in the 670s, when Marseille followed the rest of Francia over to a silver coinage.<sup>87</sup>

The function of these extraordinary quasi-imperial and royal coinages must have been limited in two ways. Firstly, they were intended for major transactions, because of their high value. In this connection, it should be noted that while minters in the rest of Francia were abandoning the solidus in favour of the tremissis, solidi continued to be struck at Marseille throughout the history of its gold coinages, showing that there was a specific local demand for higher denominations.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, the clearly marked deficiency in weight of the quasi-imperials in relation to the imperial gold standard, would have made them unacceptable around the Mediterranean.<sup>89</sup> They were therefore minted for use within Francia. Their

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 128–31; S. E. Rigold, 'An imperial coinage in southern Gaul in the sixth and seventh centuries', *Num.Chron.*<sup>6</sup> 14 (1954), 93–133, including the fullest catalogue; P. Grierson, 'The *patrimonium Petri in illis partibus* and the pseudo-imperial coinage in Frankish Gaul', *Revue belge de numismatique* 105 (1959), 95–111; J. Lafaurie (1981), *op. cit.* (n. 74), 70–3.

<sup>80</sup> Hence the coinage is now generally called quasi-rather than pseudo-imperial, because it was not intended to pass as a genuine imperial issue.

<sup>81</sup> Isolated coins are known from other southern centres, but only on a very irregular or imitative basis: Rigold, *op. cit.* (n. 79), 103. All four main mints struck their first quasi-imperials in the name of Justin II: Grierson, *op. cit.* (n. 79), 97.

<sup>82</sup> Grierson, *op. cit.* (n. 79), 95. This article provides the most closely argued review of the problem, but its contentions are retracted in Grierson and Blackburn, *op. cit.* (n. 76), 130, which broadly follows Lafaurie (1981), *op. cit.* (n. 74), in attributing the introduction of the coinage to some sort of royal numismatic compromise. If this is so, it would emphasize further the importance of Marseille in an integrated Merovingian economy, but the theory begs several questions, which I cannot develop here.

<sup>83</sup> For the emergence in the fifth century of episcopal sees at these hitherto secondary centres, see e.g. S. T. Loseby, 'Bishops and cathedrals, order and diversity in the fifth-century urban landscape of southern Gaul', in Drinkwater and Elton, *op. cit.* (n. 42), 144–55. Viviers overlooks the Rhône and controls the Défile de Donzère. Uzès lies on the overland route to Aquitaine, and close to the border with Visigothic Septimania.

<sup>84</sup> e.g. Rigold, *op. cit.* (n. 79), 103–22.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> The activity of the royal master-minter Eligius at Marseille and Arles (and the superior fineness he temporarily maintained in his issues there) nevertheless implies the enduring significance of this coinage: see J. Lafaurie, 'Eligius monetarius', *Rev.Num.*<sup>6</sup> 19 (1977), 111–51.

<sup>87</sup> Grierson and Blackburn, *op. cit.* (n. 76), 130–1, for a summary account of the royal coinage.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>89</sup> Explicit in Gregory I, *Reg.* vi. 10, requesting payments in kind, not coin, from the director of the papal estates in the Marseille–Arles region because Gallic solidi were not legal tender in Italy. The Pope had however accepted them previously: *Reg.* iii. 33.

movement north is confirmed by the findspot distribution of gold issues of Marseille along the Rhône-Saône corridor and up the river-systems of the Seine, Meuse, and Rhine to Frisia and Britain.<sup>90</sup> They are by contrast rare west of the Rhône and south of the Loire, suggesting that this area was peripheral to the trading-system of which Marseille was a part.<sup>91</sup>

This pattern mirrors the trading- and communication-systems implied in contemporary documentary sources. To give some examples; in 601, to facilitate the journey of Lawrence and the monks with him from Rome to England, Pope Gregory wrote letters of recommendation to the bishops of Toulon, Marseille, Arles, Gap, Vienna, Chalon-sur-Saône, Metz, Paris, Rouen, and Angers.<sup>92</sup> A seventh-century Merovingian formulary lists toll-stations at Marseille, Toulon, Fos, Arles, Avignon, Soyons (?), Valence, Vienne, Lyon, and Chalon-sur-Saône, four of which, Marseille, Valence, Fos, and Lyon, are also specified in Dagobert's grant to St-Denis of remission on tolls (Fig. 2).<sup>93</sup> All the evidence suggests that for a hundred years between the last quarter of the sixth century and the last quarter of the seventh, the Rhône valley and its associated river-systems formed the bridge between the northern world and the Mediterranean. And, in various anecdotal references, Gregory of Tours in particular emphasizes that the key link in this communication chain was Marseille. Where these concern real events this could just conceivably be coincidental, but twice in the *Histories* Gregory's personal world-view finds instinctive expression. Stung by an accusatory letter from his suffragan, Bishop Felix of Nantes, Gregory sarcastically observes that if only his enemy was bishop of Marseille and not Nantes, why its ships would bring nothing but papyrus, in quantities sufficient to supply his prolix defamations.<sup>94</sup> Again, when a Frankish embassy to Constantinople returns to obtain a somewhat involuntary landfall by way of Agde, in Visigothic Septimania, Gregory feels the need to explain why the ambassadors had not landed at Marseille.<sup>95</sup> Seen from Gregory's perspective at the heart of Frankia, Marseille was the obvious port of call for political travellers, just as it was the natural context for a jibe at Felix's need for imported papyrus.

Marseille emerges in the pages of Gregory of Tours as a thriving, cosmopolitan city, perpetually invigorated by the flow of ambassadors, merchants, churchmen, even the odd pretender, travelling to and fro between northern Europe and the Mediterranean world. And it could count among its permanent inhabitants, alongside an enduring Gallo-Roman élite and the artisans of the Bourse suburb, an important community of Jews,<sup>96</sup> perhaps suggestive in itself of commercial vigour. In one of his most evocative images of life in the cities of Merovingian Gaul (surpassed only by Guntram's entry into Orléans, and Leudast swanning around the shops of Paris),<sup>97</sup> Gregory describes the sights and sounds in Marseille as Bishop Theodore, after one of his many tribulations at the hands of the secular power, is restored to his city to the ringing of bells, the cheering of the crowd and the waving of banners.<sup>98</sup> The emergence of the quasi-imperial coinage at Marseille and the exceptional persistence of imports in the archaeological record in precisely the period when Gregory is writing suggests that the apparent dynamism of late sixth-century Marseille is not just the chance by-product of an unusually well-recorded period of the city's history, but rather a reflection of the genuine prosperity and importance of the city in this period.

<sup>90</sup> Distribution map of Marseille issues and discussion in Lafaurie (1981), op. cit. (n. 74), 70–3: it is significant that the quasi-imperials appear to have influenced contemporary Frisian issues.

<sup>91</sup> cf. E. James, *The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul* (1977), 230–4. But there remains insufficient information to hypothesize sensibly about the workings of this system, especially given the dangers of extrapolating the dynamics of trade from coin finds: P. Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages: a critique of the evidence', *TRHS* 9 (1959), 123–40.

<sup>92</sup> *Reg.* xi. 34, 38, 40–2. Note that Gap and Angers are not on any direct route north and indeed the letter to Gap seems to have been dictated by other imperatives, while the identification of Licinius as bishop of Angers is not entirely certain. For routes, cf. the letters Gregory wrote for Augustine in 596 to Lérins, Marseille, Aix, Arles, Vienne, Lyon, Autun, Tours: *Reg.* vi. 49–54, 56–7.

<sup>93</sup> Marculf, op. cit. (n. 57), *Suppl.* 1: *Gesta Dagoberti* 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Hist.* v. 5: 'O si te [Felix] habuisset Massilia sacer — dotem! Numquam naves oleum aut reliquas

species detulissent, nisi cartam tantum, quo maiorem opportunitatem scribendi ad bonos infamandos haberes.'

<sup>95</sup> *Hist.* vi. 2: 'Nam cum Marsiliensim portum propter regum discordias adire ausi non essent, Agathae urbem . . . advenerunt.'

<sup>96</sup> The Jews who preferred to leave Clermont rather than accept baptism returned to Marseille, suggesting the city already housed a significant Jewish community: *Hist.* v. 11: see W. Goffart, 'The conversion of Avitus of Clermont and similar passages in Gregory of Tours', in J. Neusner and E. R. Freriches (eds), *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, and 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (1985), 473–97. They faced similar attempts at forcible conversion there: *Reg.* i. 47, a letter in which Pope Gregory refers to Jews travelling in the region of Marseille *pro diversis negotiis*. See also Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi. 17: *GC* 95.

<sup>97</sup> *Hist.* viii. 1; vi. 32.

<sup>98</sup> *Hist.* vi. 11: 'cum signis et laudibus diversisque honorum vexillis'.

There are obviously no hard and fast explanations to account for Marseille's late antique vitality, but a number of possible factors can be identified. The city's commercial fortunes need first of all to be considered in tandem with those of Arles, some seventy-five kilometres to the north-west, beside the Rhône (Fig. 2). In the imperial period Marseille had forfeited to Arles its pre-Roman status as the primary gateway port of south-eastern Gaul.<sup>99</sup> This transformation was initiated by the critical events of 49 B.C., when Marseille backed the wrong side in the Civil War.<sup>100</sup> Caesar commissioned the warships with which to besiege it from Arles,<sup>101</sup> already an important emporium,<sup>102</sup> and it was the colony subsequently founded at Arles which duly received the lion's share of the territorial spoils. Marseille became probably the smallest *civitas* in Gaul, reduced to its tiny, isolated hinterland and one or two outlying coastal enclaves, such as Nice.<sup>103</sup> If Marseille thrived commercially under the Empire, then it has largely contrived to conceal this from posterity. Instead, early imperial sources emphasize the city's cultural and intellectual side.<sup>104</sup> Marseille emerges primarily as something of a heritage centre, the Athens of the West, a suitable place for *exsilium delicatum*<sup>105</sup> or the completion of Agricola's education.<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, although it must have remained an active port, its economic role in this period is deeply obscure and hardly features at all in the written or epigraphic records.<sup>107</sup> Arles, by contrast, became an *annona* port, its nodal role in the regional and interregional economies highlighted in a series of inscriptions among which, for example, the city's *navicularii marini* figure prominently.<sup>108</sup> There is no sign of a slow-down here in late antiquity, quite the opposite: Arles becomes an important mint and several fourth- and early fifth-century sources wax lyrical on its commercial function,<sup>109</sup> reaching a rhetorical apogee in a constitution of the Emperor Honorius in 418 which describes how goods from the Roman world and beyond converge on this perfectly situated port, now the administrative capital of the Gauls.<sup>110</sup>

Arles remains an extremely important administrative centre throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, and almost certainly a commercial centre too: full analysis of the important late antique material found in several recent excavations should clarify this,<sup>111</sup> and provide a vital point of comparison with the contemporary economy of Marseille. But archaeology does suggest some decline, with sites on the periphery of Arles going out of occupation during the sixth century<sup>112</sup> (although it would be premature to lay too much emphasis on this).

<sup>99</sup> For pre-Roman Marseille, M. Clavel-Lévêque, *Marseille grecque* (1977), supplemented by recent excavation data (summary in Gantès and Moliner, op. cit. (n. 4), 67–84) and the forthcoming proceedings of two recent conferences devoted to 'Marseille grecque' and 'Marseille et la Gaule'.

<sup>100</sup> Caesar, *BC* I. 34–6; Velleius Paterculus II. 50. 3 and Dio XLI. 19 for less jaundiced accounts of the city's actions.

<sup>101</sup> *BC* I. 36.

<sup>102</sup> Strabo IV. I. 6. Archaeology has begun to confirm this: e.g. P. Arcelin, 'Arles protohistorique', and 'Les fouilles du Jardin d'Hiver', in C. Sintès (ed.), *Du nouveau sur l'Arles antique* (*Revue d'Arles* 1) (1987), 17–31.

<sup>103</sup> Maps of Gallic *civitates* in *Histoire de la France urbaine* I, op. cit. (n. 22), 9, 97. Summary of territory left to Marseille: Rivet, op. cit. (n. 8), 222–4.

<sup>104</sup> Especially Strabo IV. I. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Seneca, *de Clem* I. 15. Clerc, op. cit. (n. 8), II, 313–36 for an account of the cultural role of the early imperial city.

<sup>106</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola* 4.

<sup>107</sup> The documents do give mixed reviews of its wine: see e.g. Bertucchi, op. cit. (n. 38). Marseille is singularly deficient in surviving inscriptions in all periods, but the lack of inscriptions in other cities referring to its inhabitants or associates also tends to emphasize its isolation within the regional economy, compared for example to Arles, Nîmes, or even Aix.

<sup>108</sup> A. Grenier, 'La Gaule romaine', in T. Frank, *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* III (1959), 473–9,

assembles the economic data for Arles in summary form. For the *navicularii* in particular, see *CIL* XII. 672, 692, 704, 718, 853, 982 and esp. *CIL* III. 14165<sup>8</sup>, and the articles by M. Christol, 'Remarques sur les naviculaires d'Arles', *Latomus* 30 (1971), 643–63 and 'Les naviculaires d'Arles et les structures du grand commerce maritime sous l'empire romain', *Prov. Hist.* 32 (1982), 5–14.

<sup>109</sup> e.g. *Expositio totius mundi* 58; Ausonius, *Ordo urbium nobilium* 10.

<sup>110</sup> *Ep. Arl.*, op. cit. (n. 35), 8.

<sup>111</sup> For recent excavations in Arles, see summaries in *Gallia* 44 (1986), 388–402; *Gallia Informations* (1987–88) II, 229–39; (1990) I–II, 229–39; C. Sintès et al. (1987), op. cit. (n. 102), and C. Sintès et al., *Carnets de fouilles d'une presqu'île* (*Revue d'Arles* 2) (1990). Preliminary pottery analysis: J. Piton, 'Étude comparative entre les importations africaines et les productions de la Vallée du Rhône, fin III<sup>e</sup>–début IV<sup>e</sup> siècle', *SFECAG, Actes du congrès d'Orange* (1988), 81–90.

<sup>112</sup> e.g. the mid-sixth-century abandonments of the circus and the late antique occupation around it, and the seemingly related sequence nearer the city on the Hôpital Van Gogh site, with structures and the road leading to the circus going out of use around this time: Sintès et al. (1990), op. cit. (n. 111), 59–62; (1987), op. cit. (n. 102), 44–8. Occupation of the Esplanade site in the southern suburbs had also ceased by this time (*ibid.*, 37). The luxury houses in the Trinquetaille suburb across the Rhône had already been deserted after some fifth-century reoccupations (*ibid.*, 80–8).

Meanwhile, the documentary and numismatic evidence concurs in showing that, by the end of the sixth century, Marseille had recovered its long-lost commercial pre-eminence. Marseille, not Arles, was the focal passenger and trading port. Marseille was the primary producer of quasi-imperial and royal coinages, Arles a subsidiary mint. This swing of the commercial pendulum back in favour of Marseille and the impulses behind it are by no means as clear-cut as the momentum generated by the events of 49 B.C. But one or two lines of enquiry can be suggested.

If Marseille was something of a backwater in the early imperial period (which I confess is an *e silentio* argument, but to my mind a convincing one), then Christianity put it back on the map. Christian communities had been established by 314 at Marseille and at Nice, its one remaining daughter-city.<sup>113</sup> By the end of the fourth century Bishop Proculus of Marseille was acting as metropolitan of Narbonensis II, although his see was actually in Viennensis. A compromise solution had to be found to this organizational anomaly, which had apparently arisen because the Church of Marseille in general, and Proculus in particular, stood *in loco parentis* to the churches of Narbonensis II.<sup>114</sup> But Proculus also had a reputation outside Provence as a holy man.<sup>115</sup> This was presumably one factor in the sudden arrival around 416 of John Cassian at Marseille, where he founded two monasteries.<sup>116</sup> His presence, combined with an influx of refugees from the troubles engulfing much of Gaul,<sup>117</sup> made Provence in general and Marseille in particular a forcing-house of Christian thought, a new 'theological bear-garden'<sup>118</sup> for the likes of Salvian and Prosper. Some, like Paulinus of Pella, were drawn in turn to Marseille because of the presence there of so many renowned *sancti*.<sup>119</sup>

Christianity was thus a context in which Marseille's enduring Greek cultural and intellectual tradition (still acknowledged in many ways under the Empire) could be revived,<sup>120</sup> its links with the interior fostered, and its special relationship with the East reinvigorated.<sup>121</sup> Its significance as a Christian centre contributed to demographic growth and could potentially have combined with it to stimulate an upturn in the city's economy, to judge by the splendour of the baptistery (cf. Section 1) and the wealth and connections expressed in a high-status burial of the late fifth century recently excavated at Saint-Victor, rich in eastern objects and influences.<sup>122</sup> Christianity gave Marseille a new source of energy and renown, pulling in people (and ideas) from inland and overseas, and riches and trade in turn. While it would be nonsensical, of course, to claim that Arles was not also a dynamic Christian centre, Christianity did provide a new arena for the expression of power and status ideal for *Massilia Graecorum* to take advantage of its heritage and compete more effectively with *Gallula Roma Arelas*, the establishment city.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Conc. Gall.* i (CCSL 148), 14.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 54-5. cf. E. Griffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine* (1964-66), i, 336-40. For Proculus' aspirations see also n. 123 below.

<sup>115</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 125.

<sup>116</sup> Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 62. H.-I. Marrou, 'Le fondateur de Saint-Victor de Marseille, Jean Cassien', *Prov.Hist.* 16 (1966), 297-308; H. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1967). The sites of these monasteries remain unknown, despite the force of local historiographic tradition.

<sup>117</sup> Refugees: F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich* (1965), 47-58.

<sup>118</sup> P. R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (1967), 356, where the phrase is applied to early fifth-century Palestine.

<sup>119</sup> *Euch.* II. 520-1. For some of these holy men, Gennadius, *De vir.ill.* 68, 80, 81, 100, 101.

<sup>120</sup> Marseille appears as *Massilia Graecorum* on the Peutinger Table (K. Miller, *Die Peutingersche Tafel* (1962), Segm. II, 1) and in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Not.Dig.Occ.* XLII, 16). The city's Greek heritage is reflected under the Empire in the names of its buildings, officials, and individuals (e.g. *CIL* XII. 410; v. 7914). Greek was still used in the early third century to record the career of a high-ranking imperial functionary from Marseille (a rare bird) (*CIG* III. 6771). Like Naples, Marseille was never 'typically Roman': Arthur, *op. cit.* (n. 50), 247.

<sup>121</sup> Marseille remained a vital interface between late sixth-century Gaul and the eastern Mediterranean world

on numerous levels. I will not enter into the political manifestations of this here, but as far as *mentalités* are concerned, Bishop Serenus of Marseille's precocious reaction against icons illustrates how his city continued to hold intellectual tensions in common with the East, but alien to the western Church: see Gregory I, *Reg.* IX. 208; XI. 10; R. Markus, 'The cult of icons in sixth-century Gaul', *JTS* 29 (1978), 151-7.

<sup>122</sup> Notably in the clothing and the elaborate manner of the burial: see R. Boyer, *Vie et mort à Marseille à la fin de l'antiquité* (1987), 45-93. The body was laid in one of the finest sarcophagi produced by a local sculptural atelier, the late fourth- and fifth-century activity of which is another important index of local Christian wealth: G. Drocourt-Dubreuil, *Saint-Victor de Marseille: art funéraire et prière des morts aux temps paléochrétiens (IV<sup>e</sup>-V<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (1989), esp. 80-7.

<sup>123</sup> For the efforts of the fifth-century bishops of Marseille to rival Arles (and Aix) in the evolving ecclesiastical hierarchy, their success in maintaining some sort of anomalous status within it well after Proculus' death, and the city's importance as a nexus of power within the Church of southern Gaul at this time, see the recent detailed analysis by R. W. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul* (1989), *passim*, esp. 22-5, 28-30, 51-60, 117-22, 187-8, 213-14, 219-20, 224-8. In this highly competitive context, the remarkable scale of the baptistery at Marseille makes perfect sense (cf. Section 1, above).



Christianity can logically have played a part only in Marseille's renaissance, and not in any related decline in the fortunes of Arles. Similarly, while it is possible to argue that in the fifth century Arles would have suffered more than Marseille from the ravages of war — it endured five sieges between 425 and 472 — too little is known of these events to assess the damage they caused. (It is nevertheless interesting to see that in the 470s a would-be entrepreneur from the Auvergne was preferring to seek his commercial fortune at Marseille rather than at Arles.)<sup>124</sup> Marseille may have been better placed strategically to withstand (or indeed to avoid) assault, but Arles clearly endured, and these incidents seem unlikely in themselves to have been decisive in the decline of the city. The key may lie not in any direct assault upon Arles, but in a much more insidious breakdown of the mechanisms which had enabled it to operate as a seaport in the imperial period.

Unlike Marseille, Arles is not a natural seaport. It lies a considerable distance from the sea at the head of a Rhône delta, which, although navigable, has always been notorious for silting and the build-up of sandbars at its mouths.<sup>125</sup> Attempts were certainly made in antiquity to alleviate this problem. Among the possessions forfeited to Arles by Marseille after 49 B.C. were the *Fossae Marianae*, channels dug by Marius' troops in 102 B.C. to enable shipping to bypass the mouths of the river. The exact course of the *Fossae Marianae* is as obscure as their subsequent history.<sup>126</sup> But there is every reason to think that they branched off eastwards from the Grand Rhône to emerge into the Mediterranean in the immediate vicinity of what is now the town of Fos-sur-Mer (Fig. 2). Here, just to the east of three Rhône mouths and linked directly to Arles by road, the Peutinger Table shows a large semicircular building terminating in towers, around the curve of which runs the legend *Fossis Marianis*. The only comparable vignette is that used for Ostia, with additional embellishments in the form of jetties and a lighthouse. If we accept that the Peutinger Table, despite its manifest idiosyncracies, is far from random in its use of symbols, then it provides a graphic representation of the importance of Fos in perhaps the third century.<sup>127</sup>

The site of ancient Fos is now largely under the Mediterranean in the Anse St-Gervais, but underwater archaeology and aerial photography amply confirm that this was the site of an extensive ancient settlement,<sup>128</sup> even if it is obviously impossible to be precise about its extent, development, and demise. The abundance of amphorae found in the bay shows that this was an important off-loading and trans-shipment centre in antiquity, which would seem to confirm the implication of the Peutinger Table that Fos served primarily as a fore-port for Arles. Although we lack the information to understand the workings of what must have been a complex system, the movement of merchandise to and from Arles via the Rhône estuary can only have been possible with regular river and perhaps canal maintenance.<sup>129</sup> Most estuarine ports need infrastructural support to function effectively, but the capricious nature of the Rhône and the apparent failure of Fos-Arles to rival Marseille as a seaport in the sixth and seventh centuries suggests that in this case a particularly high level of servicing may periodically have been necessary. With the breakdown of the machinery of the Roman Empire, this would no longer have been practicable, and the system may have been allowed to decay, a

<sup>124</sup> Amantius of Clermont: Sidonius, *Ep.* vi. 8; vii. 2; vii. 7; vii. 10; ix. 4.

<sup>125</sup> e.g. A. Grenier, *Manuel d'archéologie gallo-romaine* ii (1934), 499–509. See also R. J. Russell, 'Geomorphology of the Rhône delta', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 32 (1942), 149–254.

<sup>126</sup> For the *Fossae*, Pliny, *NH* iii. 4. 34; Mela ii. 5. 78 and esp. Strabo iv. 1. 8, recording the profit to Marseille of tolls on canal shipping and the handover to Arles, but also the resumption of silting and the general difficulties of entry. The *Fossae* are not recorded thereafter. For theories as to their course, see e.g. Grenier, *op. cit.* (n. 125), and L.-A. Constans, *Arles antique* (1921), 195–205.

<sup>127</sup> Peutinger Table: Miller, *op. cit.* (n. 120), Fos-Segm. 1, 5; Ostia-Segm. v, 1. A. and M. Levi, *Itineraria Picta: contributo allo studio della Tabula Peutingeriana* (1967), 124–30; L. Bosio, *La Tabula Peutingeriana: una descrizione pittorica del mondo antico* (1983), 149–62.

<sup>128</sup> For the settlement and the geomorphological problem of its disappearance, see e.g. R. Beaucaire, 'Les fouilles

sous-marines de Fos', *Prov.Hist.* 14 (1964), 16–25; L. Monguilan, 'Un port romain dans le golfe de Fos', *Caesarodunum* 12 (1977), ii, 359–70; B. Liou, 'Les découvertes archéologiques du Golfe de Fos et le tracé du littoral antique', in *Déplacements des lignes de rivage en Méditerranée*, C.N.R.S. (1987), 59–65; R. D. Oldham, 'Historic changes of level in the delta of the Rhône', *Quarterly Journ. Geological Soc.* 86 (1930), 64–92. The underwater remains have sadly been much disturbed in the modern redevelopment of the Fos gulf by the petrochemical industry. See also *Gallia Informations* (1990), i–ii, 292–3, for recent survey data showing considerable late antique and early medieval rural settlement in the Fos area, another pointer to regional vitality in this period.

<sup>129</sup> This is not to deny that Arles functioned as a seaport in the Roman period (although significant archaeological traces of its port are still lacking), simply that this operation can never have been straightforward.

sequence paralleled on other harbour sites around the Mediterranean.<sup>130</sup> This argument is speculative, and not without its difficulties. Documentary evidence does show that Fos continued to operate as a port and toll-station under the Merovingians (Section III). But Marseille, which combined its natural deep-sea port with established religious and defensive functions, may have had clear commercial advantages over Fos-Arles, where conditions were more difficult and those functions had always been distinct. The Rhône must have remained central to all commercial activity in the area, but possibly it became more practical to transfer goods onto river-boats at Marseille rather than at Fos, or even to transport people and goods across the difficult delta area by land.<sup>131</sup> The sites of Merovingian mints and toll-stations show that Fos and Arles continued to play an important role, but now as part of a secondary chain of communication from the major port, Marseille.

The prosperity of Marseille in the sixth century could therefore in part be derived from a shift in the focus of regional commercial activity. As such it would represent only relative growth, and not the absolute expansion of the role of Provence in long-distance trade. But it is nevertheless possible to suggest three sixth-century events which could have interacted to enhance temporarily the existing function of the region and its leading port as a social and economic gateway. The first of these is the extension of Frankish authority to the Mediterranean in the late 530s.<sup>132</sup> The collapse of the Burgundian kingdom and the Ostrogothic withdrawal from Provence re-established a political unity between the Mediterranean and northern Gaul for the first time since the collapse of the Rhine frontier over a century before.<sup>133</sup> The intricate subdivisions of Provence show that the Merovingian kings were mindful of the potential of their newly-acquired Mediterranean outlet. The close economic and political integration of the south-east with the Frankish heartlands in the north is illustrated for example by the involvement of southern magnates in the intrigues of the Frankish courts,<sup>134</sup> or in the privileges granted to northern monasteries from the royal warehouses on the Provençal coast (cf. Section III). The renewed unity of Gaul can only have facilitated the movement of goods via Marseille, by fully restoring its classic emporial role as the link between two geographically distinct zones.

The arrival of the Lombards in northern Italy (568–9) may have been a second factor in the rising significance of Marseille as a gateway. Recurrent strife and the prevailing insecurity of the Alpine passes cut off the transalpine link between north-western Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Although this route cannot have been practicable for bulk trade, small-scale luxury traffic and gift-exchange had passed this way.<sup>135</sup> But for a century between c. 575 and c. 675, the sources show that the standard highway between Anglo-Saxon and northern Francia on the one hand and Italy and the East on the other was via the Rhône corridor and the sea, a journey which, in all specified cases, meant taking ship to or from Marseille. The Alpine route predominates thereafter, except when specific circumstances dictated that the Lombard kingdom was best avoided.<sup>136</sup> But the temporary interruption of this axis channelled all types of communication via Provence in general and Marseille in particular.

The Lombard incursions prolonged the devastating effects on Italy of the protracted Gothic War (535–54), possibly a third influence on the late sixth-century prosperity of Marseille. During the late sixth century the export of African ceramics to the western Mediterranean seems to be in general decline. But the picture from Marseille is very different. African amphorae increasingly predominate, and, perhaps more strikingly, African fine wares are gaining an increasing share of the market from indigenous products. One possible

<sup>130</sup> e.g. Portus: R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*<sup>2</sup> (1973), 170–1; Luni: C. Delano Smith, D. Gadd, N. Mills, and B. Ward-Perkins, 'Luni and the *Ager Lunensis*', *PBSR* 54 (1986), esp. 123–41; Ephesus: C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: a Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (1979), 185–7.

<sup>131</sup> Bede, *HE* IV. 1, refers to Theodore and Hadrian, en route to England in 668, taking ship to Marseille and then travelling by land to Arles.

<sup>132</sup> Procopius, *Bella* v. xiii. 14–29.

<sup>133</sup> Despite recurrent internecine conflicts, it seems that in normal circumstances passage between Frankish kingdoms was uninhibited on due payment of tolls: Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* IX. 32, for an exception which proves the rule.

<sup>134</sup> See e.g. the machinations of Bishop Theodore of Marseille, arraigned by Guntram not just for his part in the Gundovald affair, but as one of those chiefly responsible for arranging the assassination of his brother Chilperic. Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* VIII. 5. The works of Venantius Fortunatus also highlight on a cultural level the integration of the southern élite into the social milieu of the royal courts in the North: J. W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus, a Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (1992), 141–50.

<sup>135</sup> J. Werner, 'Fernhandel und Naturalwirtschaft im östlichen Merowingerreich nach archäologischen und numismatischen Zeugnissen', *Bericht der römisch-germanisch Kommission* 42 (1961), 307–46.

<sup>136</sup> See Buchner, op. cit. (n. 68), 37–9, n. 24.

explanation for this anomaly is that the crises which the Byzantine reconquest and the Lombard invasion provoked in sixth-century Italy may have led to the redirecting of any available African surplus to a less impoverished Frankish market. For the wars which brought strife to Italy were a recurring moneyspinner for Gaul. The Merovingian kings exploited them to extort huge bribes from all sides for their non-existent or ineffectual support. Against this background southern Gaul plausibly emerges as a much more stable, viable market for long-distance African exports to the western Mediterranean than the beleaguered, war-torn cities of the west coast of Italy.<sup>137</sup>

These suggestions remain working hypotheses, but cumulatively they show how in the late sixth century Marseille may have been particularly well-placed to ride, even to turn back, a tide of events which elsewhere in the western Mediterranean was pushing ahead the process of urban and economic decline. Pirenne was right to emphasize the vitality of Marseille in his pioneering analysis of the post-Roman persistence of long-distance trade.<sup>138</sup> The commercial demise of Arles may well have been a contributory factor in the prosperity of Marseille, but the volume of long-distance trade clearly also remained sufficient to sustain one vigorous gateway community in the region and to give that community a crucial role in the Merovingian economy. Even if it is impossible to tell if this was a genuine boom, Marseille was certainly capable of standing still, and in the context of the late sixth-century western Mediterranean, this is remarkable in itself. Writing in this very period at Constantinople, Agathias lamented the passing of a once great Greek city into barbarian hands, but he conceded that Marseille had lost little of its ancient renown in the process.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, I would conclude that in late antiquity it had regained it.

<sup>137</sup> For the condition of Italy in this period, see e.g. T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554–800* (1984); N. J. Christie, 'The archaeology of Byzantine Italy: a synthesis of recent research', *Journ. Mediterranean Arch.* 2/2 (1989), 249–93, esp. 259–63,

which interestingly highlights the relative abundance of imports in western Liguria, the adjacent region to Provence.

<sup>138</sup> cf. introduction and n. 6. His interpretation of the demise of Marseille is another matter.

<sup>139</sup> Agathias, *Hist.* 1. 2. 1–3.

## APPENDIX. ORIGINS OF POTTERY IN THE CORNE MAIN EXCAVATION

TABLE IA. CORNE, MAIN EXCAVATION: PROPORTIONS OF POTTERY IN ANALYSED LEVELS

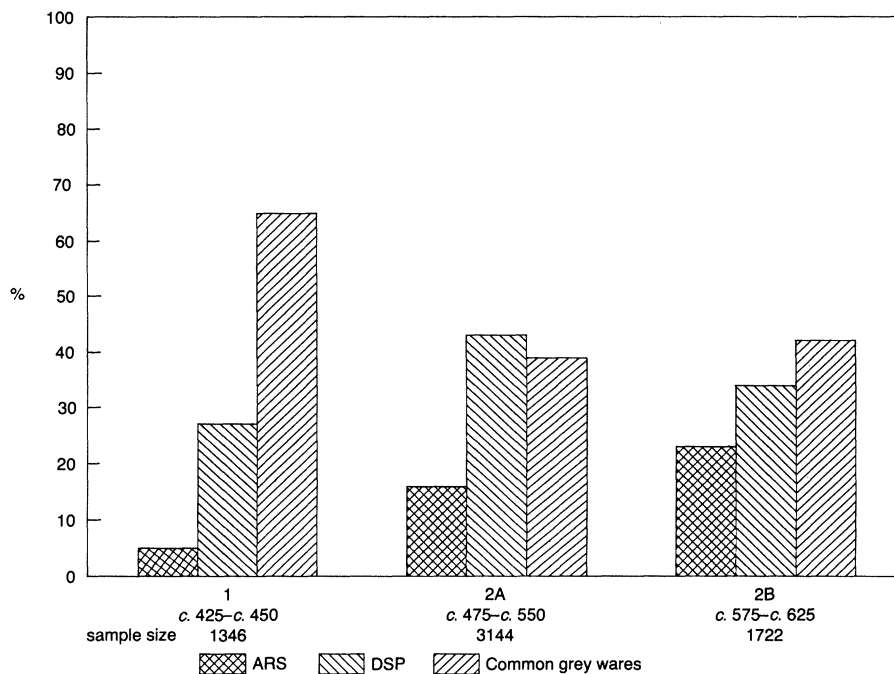
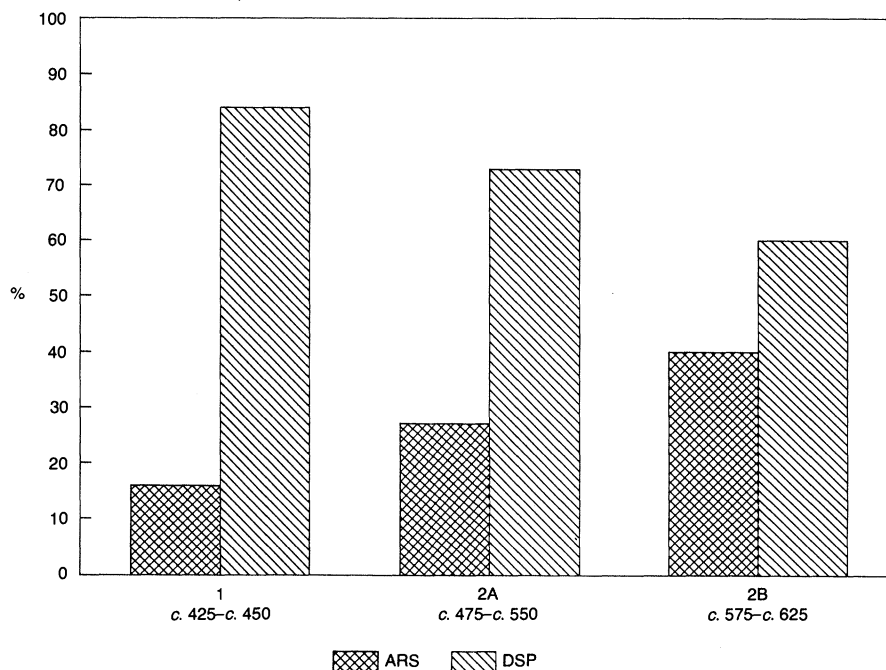


TABLE IB. CORNE, MAIN EXCAVATION: RELATIVE PROPORTIONS OF FINE WARES



ARS = African red slip

DSP = dérivées des sigillées paléochrétiennes/grey stamped ware

Percentages derived from sherd counts. Only statistically significant categories are shown. All dates are necessarily approximations, based on the periodization established by Bonifay (1983) and (1986), *op. cit.* (n. 8). (After Bonifay (1983), *op. cit.* (n. 8), 304, figs 13-14).

TABLE 2. CORNE, MAIN EXCAVATION: PERCENTAGES OF AMPHORAE BY REGION OF PRODUCTION.

	c. 425–c. 450 (Period 1)		c. 575–c. 625 (Period 2B)		seventh-century (Period 3)	
	all frags	r/h/b	all frags	r/h/b	all frags	r/h/b
African:	20%	22%	61%	47%	97%	90%
Eastern:	43%	37%	23%	24%	2%	10%
Spanish:	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Keay LII/Italian(?):	10%	15%				
Indeterminate:	25%	21%	15%	12%	1%	0%
Residual:	2%	4%	1%	17%	0%	0%
Sample size:	4749	424	2333	138	2085	42

(Source: Data tables in Bonifay (1986), op. cit. (n. 8), 297 and 302–4, adjusted and recalculated on a slightly different basis).

*Note:* I have preferred to separate the Keay LII amphorae present in Period 1 out from the 'indeterminate' category firstly because they represent such a significant element of this total, secondly because unlike the bulk of the sherds in this group they can be readily classified, and thirdly because a likely Italian provenance for them has since been shown: P. Arthur, 'Some observations on the economy of Bruttium under the late Roman empire', *JRA* 2 (1989), 133–42 (I am grateful to Simon Keay for this reference). Except in Period 1, no distinction is made in the data tables between Keay LII and other indeterminate amphorae, so no separate calculation could be made of the percentages of Keay LII present in Periods 2B and 3: these are accordingly subsumed within the indeterminate category but do not appear to have been present in any significant quantity (implicit in Bonifay (1986), op. cit. (n. 8), 298).

Two figures are shown in each analysed assemblage for each source of amphorae, the first based on all sherds, the second on the smaller sample of rims, handles, and bases only (r/h/b). The larger sample has the greater statistical significance, the smaller the better chance of reflecting the actual proportion of whole amphorae arriving. *In percentage terms* the results from both methods are closely comparable, but the only serious anomaly — the proportions of residual amphorae present in Period 2B — highlights a wider problem of interpretation. The only fragments classified as residual were those indubitably out of their archaeological context (Bonifay (1986), op. cit. (n. 8), 304), which, because of the difficulty of differentiating between residual African amphorae body sherds and contemporary vessels in any given time period, tends to encourage such discrepancies as that present in Period 2B, where every fragment identified as residual was a rim, handle, or base (so providing the 1 per cent of residual material in the total sample).

The effect of this problem on the Period 3 data is not clear, since none of the (admittedly smaller) sample of r/h/b were classified as residual. But looking at the *numbers of fragments* which underlie the percentages given for African amphorae in the above table, the two methods of counting result in diametrically opposed trends:

	c. 425–c. 450 (Period 1)	c. 575–c. 625 (Period 2B)	seventh-century (Period 3)
all frags	950	1423	2022
r/h/b	93	65	38

This would seem to show that some proportion of the African 'all frags' sample in Periods 2B and 3 may indeed be made up of residual body sherds, but it also serves to highlight the difficulty of using this data to estimate fluctuations between periods in the quantity of imported African amphorae. But whatever the overall trend, it should not detract from the fact that here imports from Africa were continuing in the late sixth, even the seventh century, on a remarkable level in comparison with other western Mediterranean sites.