

Fabrizio Vanni – Centro Studi Romei <Firenze>
**OVERLAND BALKAN ROUTES IN
THE MIDDLE AGES¹**

Summary, with a special focus on cultural-political implications.

Summarising a subject such as overland Balkan routes in the middle ages in only fifteen minutes is an arduous task. This topic has been the focus of very little literature and would certainly merit a more in-depth discussion on all the points raised. Some of these points may appear controversial at the very least, such as for example the concept itself of **the continuity** of these roads over time.

After having meditated on it for a long time, I became even more convinced of this, following the international meeting held two months ago at Le Puy-en-Velay to celebrate the Council of Europe's recognition of the first European cultural itinerary 20 years ago - the route to Santiago di Compostela. The meeting was an opportunity which fuelled further reflection on how Council of Europe cultural itineraries are set to evolve in the future. I therefore decided to limit myself to a few references to the scientific part of my presentation. This will nevertheless be handed to the Congress Secretariat to be included in its Documentation in full and is already available in Italian on the Centro Studi Romei website (www.centrostudiromei.eu).

In fact, I believe it is my duty to participants from Greece, the Balkans and Western Europe in general to express a need which is highly felt by the Centro Studi Romei and shared by many cultural operators from around Europe.

The time has come to bridge a gap. Up until today, politics, languages and reciprocal diffidence have stopped countries from the Balkan Peninsula from constructing their own logic and aspirations in terms of exchanges; something which is common in the western part of the Continent.

Today, the wisest, most culturally prepared and intellectually open parties - that is historians and scholars in general - can contribute to filling this void.

The idea is that **overland Balkan routes to Constantinople**, and thence to Jerusalem, **should become a new and important European cultural-historical itinerary**. I am not just thinking of the via Egnatia or the via Diagonalis, but of both of these roads together, including all the many side roads which were created to provide intra-local connections at different times and for different reasons. The reason behind this coupling is that both roads share the same destination – Constantinople - and through it a passage towards Asia Minor and to the Holy Land.

Those who are familiar with the myriad of itineraries which take the traveller to Santiago de Compostela know that these are part of a network of roads from alternative directions which join up in the final part of the journey. The same must be true for Constantinople itineraries in order to add value to them. Any other logic, apart from contradicting **the reason why these roads and their branches were created and developed**, would also be limited and counterproductive.

What do the via Egnatia and the Via Diagonalis have that is so important when **taken together**? First of all, they are cultural symbol of great magnitude. The logic behind my presentation is summarised here in an extremely succinct form.

During those times when the Balkans were **undivided by ethnic and ideological cleavages**, these roads represented the nerve centres of this unity, this ecumene.

The anonymous pilgrim who described in 333 AD the Itinerarium Burdigalense found organised roads in the Balkans, complete with places where he could rest, refresh himself and change mounts. As such, he **preferred it** to more famous alternatives, such as the route which passed through Rome and the ports of Puglia.

Cyril-Constantine and Methodius's mission to Moravia in 863 AD set out from Thessalonica because "the inhabitants of this city could not but know the Slavic language well", as the Emperor Michael himself told Cyril. Their mission later took them all over the Balkans and to the Italian peninsula when they were summoned to Rome by the Pope. None of the protagonists met with any difficulties during their travels, although they did face a series of religious problems as well as problems connected to diocesan administrative competences.

¹ This is the second time that the Centro Studi Romei of Florence discusses overland Balkan routes in the Middle Ages. The first time was back in 2006 when, as a result of a strange set of circumstances, Renato Stopani (The Chairman of the Centro Studi) and I (Scientific Secretary) found ourselves - albeit in the company of Bulgarian friends - having to organise and manage a conference in Sophia in Bulgaria without speaking a single word of Bulgarian. We had excellent simultaneous interpreters and a focused and interested public. The texts were published at the Centro Studi Romei, «De strata francigena. Studi e ricerche sulle vie di pellegrinaggio del medioevo» journal of the Year XIV (2006/1), as well as in a special, abridged, edition handed out to participants at the Sophia conference complete with a Bulgarian translation. To further underline the importance of rediscovering these roads, the texts have been published in their entirety on the Centro Studi Romei website <http://www.centrostudiromei.eu>.

When Georg Ostrogorsky summarised relevant events which took place during the **sixth decade of the 9th century**, he focused on those which had not just local repercussions, but had effects which continue to be felt today. When reading his paper one cannot but congratulate him on his ability to be succinct. However, he also forces the reader to deduce that **everything becomes possible, easy and acceptable the moment when a foreigner is no longer considered the enemy - and this was one of those moments** - including the use of a new language as a vehicle to spread religion in the ecumene.

With Hungary's conversion to Christianity at the end of the 10th century, an **increasing number of even high ranking pilgrims from the west**, such as German and French bishops, began employing these roads to travel to Jerusalem, starting from the first few years of the 11th century. A number of scholars have stressed **the affordable nature of overland routes** as opposed to maritime routes. I do not believe that this factor would have been a real problem for bishops from rich provinces in the West. Theirs was cultural, diplomatic and human choice. **Overland routes allowed them to develop potentially durable human relations while maritime travel did not - or at least not in such an immediate manner.**

I have willingly ignored the highly important **crusade aspect** in terms of the use of both Balkan roads even if the role played by armed pilgrims is adequately discussed in the scientific text. I also intend to willingly ignore the use of the via Egnatia by Normans to undermine the stability of the Byzantine Empire.

I would instead like to stress that overland Balkan routes have been a vehicle of primary importance for cultural exchanges. Now scholars of a certain level have proven the continuity, as well as the contiguity, of **heretic dualistic beliefs** amongst the Bogomils in the Balkans, the Patarines in Italy and the Catharists in southern France, then it follows that we must assume that these exchanges have taken place **by means of overland routes**. A Bogomil missionary would have found it very difficult to escape attention within the confines of a ship, since both his ascetic behaviour and his religious rituals would have been easily recognised and denounced.

This is proof that, in general, **we do not easily give up on the use of a road** as a means of communication. Although there may have been times when local potentates or Arab marauders may have abducted an ambassador or captured the inhabitants of a city and sold them into slavery, in the long run these episodes can be written off as occasional incidents. The roads continued to be used, just as Bertrandon de la Broquière did in 1433 and the Hungarian bishop Veratius did in 1553.

What must also be noted is that the Byzantine Empire - throughout its extended duration - almost always made an attempt to settle disputes. Pride did not stop the Basileus from paying tribute to the Bulgarians, if it meant ensuring supplies for the capital, which needed Thrace's agricultural and animal products, amongst other things.

However, I believe that if we dig deeper, we will inevitably discover that the merit of this search for collectivism and interdependence and for a **non-belligerent proximity** must be extended both vertically to include the city's authorities and spatially to include almost all the areas in which the major Balkan roads developed.

Ambassadors took on the roll of scouts. Their high rank, and therefore the respect the Byzantine Empire accorded to Bulgarian and Serbian ambassadors - and even more so to those from the Western Empire - is renowned.

The ambassadors, and their missions were soon followed by **merchants**, who used roads when maritime transport was not possible, both because they were less risky and because they were cheaper. The merchants were in turn followed by **pilgrims**.

At this point, mention must be made of the armed pilgrimages of the the first, second and third **Crusades**. Sources describe at times even harsh conflicts during these long overland journeys. These clashes were primarily the result of mental reserves on both parts; but they are irrelevant, **if we think of the number of people involved** and the novelty of travel for such large masses of people. In historical terms, a reckoning of the balance of Balkan crossings during the first Crusades cannot but **be predominately positive**. Passages through territories which - if not hostile - were at least worrisome, took place without significant incidents. In some parts of Bulgaria, the memory of the crusaders is still tinged with romanticism. There are some who believe that the blond-haired inhabitants of a number of isolated valleys are the descendants of German crusaders. Who knows, genetics might yet prove them right.

Penetrating and conquering the Balkans has always been said to be easier **from the continent** as opposed to the sea. However, we cannot blame the roads for certain ethnic and political divisions which have facilitated wave upon wave of invasions in the region. Today, after more than one thousand years, the feast of Cyril and Methodius is celebrated in at least seven different countries. However, none of the politicians who give speeches in remembrance of the two evangelists of the Slavs ever mentions that **both worked to unite all those people under a single sovereign**.

It is easier to remember - as the young translator who accompanied our "mission" said to us after the Sophia Convention last year - **that enemies and invaders travel by road**, as young children are still taught in schools in Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and perhaps even Greece.

We must combat this erroneous logic today. The roads are not at fault. They have always carried out their function with an overwhelming indifference to the destiny of mankind. Blaming them is both blind and in bad faith.

In the scientific report included in the Documentation, I tried to reconstruct the attempts made by Balkan roads over the centuries to work, in spite of the fact that men - or a significant number of these - did all they could to limit them or stop them from functioning.

I once visited a bridge in the Rodhopes in Bulgaria. It was lost amongst the mountains and almost isolated. It also had no access roads and was as beautiful as the defunct bridge of Mostar. The bridge had clearly been built in the late medieval period, and therefore had Turkish origins. I was told it was Roman. Why **do we still persist in thinking that our enemies could not possibly have done anything good** or useful? The Mostar bridge had no strategic significance, but perhaps it suffered from the same defect of origin.

If we want to stop acts of barbarity from being committed, we must work to ensure that these beliefs are replaced by other objectives.

My friend Thomas Szabò, who spoke before me here, knows that his work - as well as the years spent on researching historical Italian roads - together with the work carried out by Renato Stopani and others, is important not just to the progress of history as a discipline, but to also rehabilitate the via Francigena as a cultural itinerary in Europe.

I know that the work which needs to be carried out on the Balkan roads is more complicated both from a scientific point of view and in terms of their cultural and functional recovery. However, I have no intention of giving up.

You will therefore forgive me if, instead of an incomplete summary of my scientific work - which, I repeat, you will find in the Documentation and on the Centro Studi Romaei website - I launch **appeal** instead: if we channel all our best efforts into a European Cultural Itinerary, we will also have space for scientific and historical research in the territory and even this variation on the theme will not have been useless and misleading.

1. Constantinople and the Balkans. A second Rome, without a second Lazio.²

In the 4th century, the Empire's primary duty was defending the integrity of the ecumene. The choice of location for a new capital for the Emperor Constantine was undoubtedly based on easy access to the sea. However, overland connections were also taken seriously into consideration. Of these, the *via Egnatia*³ was the umbilical cord connecting Durrës (*Dyrrachium*) and Thessalonica - the two most important ports of the Eastern Roman Empire - to the capital. The second road, the so-called *via Militaris* or better, the *via Diagonalis*,⁴ (both names are modern, but the second is more indicative as well as more practical) was instead a strategic road leading to the strongholds in the North along the Danube and the Balkan mountains. They were the Empire's first line of defence. Its second line of defence was on the Rodhopes, while the **Long Walls** were the Empire's third and last line of defence. These were the lengthy defence walls which separated the suburbs of

² Business and cultural exchanges between Byzantium and the West are the subjects of a vast literature. Special mention must be made here of the XI Settimana di Studio of the Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (18-23 April 1963), and in particular the lectures given by Agostino Pertusi ("Bisanzio e l'irradiazione della sua civiltà in Occidente nell'alto medioevo"), and Ivan Dujčev ("Bisanzio ed il mondo slavo") as well as the discussion which followed each of the lectures and which is contained in the same volume of the Papers.

³ An announcement on a volume on the Via Egnatia printed by an important Italian publishing house appeared on the Internet. When I made a request through a trusted librarian, he was told that the volume had not been printed due to a lack of demand on the market. This means that the work exists and that it is ready, but that there are very few people interested in it. This is why the authoritative study on these roads remains «Itineraria romana» / K. Miller. – Stuttgart, 1916, which is also useful when studying other Balkan routes.

⁴ Cfr. «Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel und die Balkanpässe» / Constantin Jos. Jireček. – Amsterdam: Verlag Hamer, 1967. – [Nachdruck der Ausgabe Prag, 1877]. A work of primary importance on the road in question.

A transcription of the *mansiones et mutationes* of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, from '*Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*', and '*Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum*' as well as two other post-medieval sources can be found in the appendix.

Please find the **stops of the Peutinger Table** (in parenthesis the stops of the **Ravenna Cosmography** – *Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia et Guidonis geographia*. Edd. M. Pinder et G. Parthey. – Berolini 1860, pg. 183, 191) which are more difficult to decipher for those who do not have a copy at hand and for those who are not expert palaeographers.

Singiduno XIII / Tricornio XII / Monte aureo XIII / Margum fl. X / Viminatio XVIII / Municipio X / Iovis pago XII (Pago) / Idimo XVI / Horrea Margi XVII (Orea Margi) / Presidio Dasmini XV (Dasmiani) / Presidio Pompei XII (PoVpeg is) / Gramrianis XIII (Crambianis) / Naisso XXIII (Naison) / Romesiana XXV (Romessiana) / Turribus XXIII (Turribus) / Meldiis XXVIII (Meldis) / Sertica XX / Sarto XVIII (Sparthon) / Egirca XIII (Egerica) / Zyrmis XXIII (Zirmis) / Philipopolis XXVII / Ranilum XXV (Ranilum) / Pizo XII / Arzum XVIII / Castris Rubris XVI / Burdenis XX / Hadrianopoli XVIII / Hostizo XVIII / Burtizo XVIII (Burtizon) / Bergule XII (Bergule) / Drysiporo XII (Drusipara) / Syrallo X (Surallon) / Perintus XVI / Ad statuas XVIII (Statuas) / Melintiana XXIII (Melantiada) / Regio XII / Constantinopolis.

Constantinople from the rest of Europe. Its system of defence was simple and practical to the south as well: the Sea of Marmara acted as a natural barrier against the enemy as well as an ally to the feet at Thessalonica - which was able to make relatively speedy interventions.

However, Constantine's decision was all but a given. After all, before his choice for a new capital fell on Byzantium, **Naissus** (Nisch), where Constantine - the descendent of a powerful family from Mesia - was born, was taken into consideration, as was **Sardica** (Sophia). Both are located on the *Via Diagonalis*. He also thought of **Thessalonica** as a capital. His choice therefore was neither obvious nor a given. Tax, commercial exemptions and the *foederati* workforce did the rest.⁵

Even before that, Galerius was granted a large slice of the Balkan Peninsula during the Tetrarchy under Diocletian. The administrative capital of his *imperium* was **Sirmium** (near Mitrovitz today), which was also on the *Via Diagonalis*. This is a strong point underlining the fact that the entire Balkan Peninsula began to play a pivotal and strategic role once the Empire started to undergo its military-defensive transformation.

The first line of defence described earlier, had **Philippopolis** (now Plovdiv in Bulgaria) as its focal point, while **Adrianople** (now Edirne in Turkey) was the key to the second line of defence. Both are located along the *Via Diagonalis* and the latter is found at the point where this road meets a side road from the *Via Egnatia*. The violent and tragic Battle of Adrianople (9 August 378) was fought on the spot where these two important military roads met and is a clear sign of the strategic importance of this place. The safety of the Empire in that particular case depended on the walls of the city and on the Goths' inability to handle a siege.⁶

The dire situation seen at the edges of the Empire after the Slavic invasion of Greece in the 7th century is proof of the importance of Thessalonica and of its links to the capital, including its overland connections. It also shows us that Thessalonica was capable of rebuilding inter-ethnic and diplomatic relations by means of its overland connections with Sophia, Ohrid, Skopje and Belgrade as well as with its links to the south (Methoni, Larissa, Thebes, Athens and the Peloponnesian).

As such, starting from the 4th century we have a second Rome, without however being able to say that we have a "second Lazio". This is because the political conditions of the Balkan Peninsula and its security were much more precarious than those the builders of the new Rome expected.

Therefore, these connections and the inter-ethnic relations with Thessalonica at its centre must have appeared relatively soon, with obvious repercussions on the Balkan road network.⁷

2. The Peutinger Table. Differences between dreams and reality.

Even modern cartographic representations of the traditional road network in the Balkan are few and often imprecise. The reason for this might be that the Balkan chessboard does not boast first rate cities (such as Rome, Constantinople and Antioch). However, two second level cities - **Aquileia** and **Thessalonica** - are located at either of its ends.⁸

Classical literature is not much help in this respect. Unfortunately, Pliny the Elder does not describe roads, if not in a circumstantial manner. What is obvious is that when he notes the distance in miles between two cities, he alludes to the fact that these were connected by an important, and almost always consular, road. This is true for **Dyrrachium** (Durrës) for example, which Pliny describes as being 711 miles from Byzantium.⁹ Martianus Capella contributes almost nothing to this meagre information.¹⁰

What has been proven is that the *Via Diagonalis* from **Carnuntum** on the Austrian Danube was connected directly to the amber road which led to Aquileia, passing through **Scarbantia** (Sopron), **Savaria** (Szombathely), **Poetovio** (Ptuj), **Celia** (Celje) and **Emona** (Ljubljana).¹¹ **Sirmium**, which was chosen by Galerius as his capital, was the archdiocese of the church and therefore played a significant administrative role as well. Furthermore, up until 379 - date of a decree by Gratian - civil administrations in Dacia and Macedonia were part of the Western Empire and were only effectively separated from the West during the partition between Valentinian II and Theodosius, son of the same Gratian. The result was that the archbishop of

⁵ «Historia del Imperio Bizantino» / A. A. Vasiliev. – In: www.holytrinitymission.org.

⁶ «Il mondo bizantino. I. L'impero romano d'Oriente (330-641)» / edited by Cécile Morisson. – Turin: Einaudi, 2007. – Scil. pg. 16.

⁷ What is curious, and perhaps even significant, is that in one of its very few references to travel the *De administrando imperio* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, traces the distance (eight days of travelling not under a forced march) between Thessalonica and Belgrade (scil. chapter 42).

⁸ Other relevant cities are Ravenna, Nicomedia and Nicaea.

⁹ «Naturalis Historiae Libri» / Plinius Secundus. - Liber IV, 46.

¹⁰ «De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii» / Martianus Capella. – Liber VI, 657.

¹¹ Cfr. «Roma sul Danubio. Da Aquileia a Carnuntum lungo la via dell'ambra»: exhibition catalogue, Castello di Udine, October 2002- March 2003 / Maurizio Buora and Werner Jobst (editors). – Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002. (6, Catalogues and Archaeological monographs from the Civici Musei of Udine).

Thessalonica was granted vast powers by the Papacy in Rome on all issues to be settled in Illyria.¹² In any case, anyone who has ever touched upon relations between the Church in Rome and the Balkan is aware of the interest that the *Sedes Petri* had in the area¹³ - to the extent of justifying its "linguistic" opening towards Cyril and Methodius. We will be discussing this topic again further on.

On the other hand, the *Peutinger Table* – a document dating originally back to the Late Classical Period which was copied in the 12th century - is extremely rich in information on Balkan roads. The Tabula's almost two-dimensional flattening gives it the advantage of mentioning and representing each *statio* regardless of the actual length of the road and stretches out the Balkan table, which ends up occupying more **than half of the map** from Tergeste (Trieste) to Constantinople. The road which runs parallel the right bank of the Danube from *Singidunum* (Belgrade) to the delta of the river is now known as the "**road of the roman legions**" because eight legions had been posted along it,¹⁴ at least until the Danube *limes* has remained in the same place. The quasi-coastal road between Aquileia and Dyrrachium is also marked on the *Tabula*, but this does not mean that it could be travelled during the Middle Ages. The story of the contingent of crusaders headed by the Count of Toulouse leads us to suspect that no trace of it remained at the time, or that the crusaders were kept well away from it by treacherous local guides.¹⁵ However the Arab geographer and traveller Al-Idrisi - who dedicated his geographical book to the King of Sicily¹⁶ - describes the stops made by his Third Compartment along the coastal road between Aquileia and Durrës.¹⁷

¹² Cfr. «Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance» / par Fr. Dvornik. – Prague: Imprimerie de l'État a Prague, 1933. – Scil. pg. 250.

¹³ In the *De rebus gestis Ottonis Imperatoris*, Liutprand, the bishop of Cremona recalls the presence of Papal *entourage* in two passages "Saleccum, natione Bulgarium, educatione Ungarium, domni papae familiarissimum, et Zacheum virum reprobatum, divinarum atque humanarum inscium litterarum, a domno papa episcopum noviter consecratum, et Ungariis ad praedicandum, ut super nos irruant, destinatum..." giving us a glimpse of the tight bonds forged by the Roman Curia with the Balkan region in the X century. Furthermore, in the *De administrando imperio* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1967) Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus himself expresses an awareness not just of the interest of the Roman church but of its territorial competencies in Dalmatia and Croatia on more than one occasion (scil. chapters 30 and 31).

¹⁴ "Tabula Peutingeriana" / Annalina and Mario Levi. – Bologna: Edizioni Edison, 1978. – Scil., pg. 60.

¹⁵ "Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis" / Guillelmus Tyrensis (Patrologia Latina = henceforth PL 201) "CAPUT XVII. Comes Tolosanus, et episcopus Podiensis cum suis agminibus per **Dalmatiam** properant, multam difficultatem itineris in ea regione perpessi. (...) Hi omnes, praedictos venerabiles viros cum omni reverentia secuti, in **Italiam** descenderunt, transcuraque **Lombardia**, per eam regionem quae **forum Julii** appellatur, juxta **Aquileiam** transeuntes in **Istriam**, inde tandem in **Dalmatiam** descenderunt. Est autem **Dalmatia** longe patens regio inter Hungariam et Adriaticum mare sita, quatuor habens metropoles, **Iazaram** et **Salonam**, quae alio nomine dicitur **Spaletum**, **Antibarim** et **Ragusam**; populo ferocissimo, rapinis et caedibus assueti inhabitata: montibus et silvis, magnis quoque fluminibus, pascuis etiam longe lateque diffusis occupata penitus, ita ut raram habeat agrorum culturam, locorum incolis in gregibus et armentis omnem vivendi habentibus fiduciam: exceptis paucis, qui in oris maritimis habitant, qui ab aliis et moribus et lingua dissimiles, Latinum habent idioma; reliquis Sclavonico sermone utentibus et habitu barbarorum. Hanc igitur ingressi provinciam, **multam invenerunt itineris difficultatem, maxime propter hiemis instantiam et locorum nimiam inaequalitatem; sed et victus et alimentorum sustinentes gravem defectum, periculose satis per dies aliquot laboraverunt inedia.**"

¹⁶ «Il libro di Ruggero : il diletto di chi è appassionato per le peregrinazioni attraverso il mondo» / Idrisi ; translation and notes by Umberto Rizzitano. – Palermo: Flaccovio, 1994.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 99 and successive: "Questa [**Laurana**], ultima città della circoscrizione di Aquileia, è grande, popolata e in continua attività di costruzioni navali. Riprendiamo il discorso da questo punto per descrivere le città sistemate sulla costa orientale del Golfo. Diciamo dunque che dalla città di Laurana a quella di **Buccari** vi sono dieci miglia. Buccari, che si adagia sul mare ed è una città bella e popolata, è il primo centro urbano del territorio croato cui si dà il nome di Dalmazia. Da Buccari sedici miglia per **Bribir**, località ragguardevole per estensione e popolazione, posta sulle falde di un monte. Da Bribir trenta miglia per **Segna**, città bella, opulenta e prospera; i suoi abitanti, di razza slava, hanno un considerevole numero di navi. Da Segna a **Q.stil.sqah** (?), cittadina con popolazione slava dotata di poche imbarcazioni, quindici miglia. Da qui a **Castel Muschio** (?), che appartiene ai Dalmati, corrono venti miglia. Da quest'ultima città corrono quindici miglia per **Arbe** (?), località di media grandezza che appartiene ai Dalmati e possiede un consistente numero di imbarcazioni. Da qui alla città di **Zatton** (?) trenta miglia; anche questa appartiene ai Dalmati ed è provvoluta di legni da guerra. Da Zatton alla città di **Nona** – che altri chiamano Nin – corrono venti miglia. Nona è città grande, bella e considerevole e situata altresì in luogo atto alla difesa. Da Nona a **Zara**... Si tratta di una città con popolazione dalmata, territorio di notevole estensione e fornita di una serie ininterrotta di colture e vigneti. Zara è situata in luogo ameno in riva al mare le cui onde si infrangono sulle sue mura. Da Zara trenta miglia per **Biograd [Zara Vecchia]**, da annoverare fra le città capitali dei Rum; essa è popolata di Dalmati e di Slavi, tutta gente valorosa. Sa Zara a **Sebenico** venti miglia. Sebenico, bella e grande città ricca di terre coltivabili, è mèta ambita dei mercanti che ad essa accorrono per terra e per mare. Sebenico dista cinquanta miglia da

The Via Egnatia is well marked out in terms of the symbols which represent *stationes*. It has no primacy compared to other roads which - given the way in which the paper is stretched lengthwise - appear to run almost parallel to it. This tells us that all roads were equally important and equally cared for during the Roman period. According to the Table, the via Egnatia connected back to the via Diagonalis at a common end point and had no direct links with Constantinople. In fact **Perinto** on the Sea of Marmara is considered the end point of both roads before the Costantinian choice, as the historian Procopius narrates in a famous passage.¹⁸

It is hard to imagine the *Tabula Peutingeriana* as a "golden age" for Balkan roads. That is, it is difficult to imagine such a rich, homogenous and capillary network of roads. Yet, at the end of the 18th century, Jireček noted that unexpected clues of such a vast richness and diffusion remained a century and a half before.¹⁹ Historians, and even more so Balkan archaeologists, are invited to make an effort to have the dream (the *Tabula*) mirror the reality (the remains of these Roman roads).

3. Religious relations. Saints, pilgrims, heretics.

The anonymous pilgrim of Burdigala (Bordeaux) who began his voyage to the Holy Land in 333 by passing through Toulouse, Arles, Moncenisio, Turin and later Aquileia, did not take a ship from one of the Adriatic ports - as we would have expected - nor did he travel down the Italian peninsula to go to Rome - which at the time could already have been seen as a place of religious interest - but chose instead to travel by road across the Balkans, leaving us a detailed description of his stops on the Via Diagonalis along with the relative distances he travelled. The only personal note in his account is found after the *civitas Viminacio* and marks the place in which Diocletian killed Carinus. The description of the regions and the summary of the distances which interrupt a dull list of the *mansiones* and the *mutationes* show us that **Aquileia**, **Sirmium** and **Sardica** are considered to be important cities and that Constantinople had to be one of the destinations of the trip, because it merited a summary distances and stops, starting from Burdigala itself.²⁰

Traù Vecchia che è una città illustre e capitale fra le più belle e le più munite. La popolazione – gente dalmata – è dedita ai viaggi e al commercio ed è ben provvista di legni da guerra. Essa dista sei miglia dalla città di **Traù**, località abitata da Dalmati dediti soprattutto alle costruzioni navali, alle scorrerie e ai viaggi. Dodici miglia da Traù a **Spalato**, città ben popolata di Dalmati, vasta e fiorente di commerci. Spalato ha strade tutte lastricate e un considerevole numero di legni da guerra. Spalato dista venticinque miglia da **Stagno**, città con popolazione slava che ha un territorio molto esteso, coltivazioni a perdita d'occhio e un consistente numero di navi. Da Stagno a **Ragusa** vi sono trenta miglia. Ragusa, che è abitata da Dalmati – gente intrepida, risoluta e fornita di mezzi per le proprie incursioni navali – è l'ultima città della Croazia. Da Ragusa corrono venti miglia per **Cattaro**, città tanto bella quanto prospera, abitata da Dalmati i quali, ben provvisti di navi sono dediti alle scorrerie e ai viaggi. Cattaro dista trenta miglia da **Antivari**; questa città, abitata da Slavi, ha un'estensione considerevole, è ben popolata e può essere considerata fra le capitali celebri. Da Antivari a **Dolcigno**, terra abitata da gente di Laodicea e una delle principali della Schiavonia, corrono settanta miglia. Da Dolcigno a **Durazzo**, che appartiene ai Franchi, ottanta miglia. Durazzo è situata sul tratto del litorale più vicino (sic) ad Otranto, che sorge all'imboccatura del golfo dei veneziani, largo in questo punto settanta miglia. Da Durazzo alla città di **Chimara** – il cui antico nome era Butrinto – corrono duecentoventicinque miglia lungo la costa.”

¹⁸ Procopius, Aed. IV, 9,14.

¹⁹ Op. cit., pg. 149: “Bošković sah hier [the road from Prêslav to the valley of Čalykavak] 1762 an der ersten und zweiten Wasserscheide die Reste einer Römerstrasse, die ihn an die Via Appia erinnerten. Kein antikes Itinerar und keine Quellschrift enthält eine Erwähnung dieser Strasse.”

²⁰ This is a transcription of the part which describes the Balkan peninsula crossing:

“...**Fines italiae et norci**. / Mutatio ad medias milia xiii / ciuitas celeia milia xiii / mutatio lotodos milia xii / mansio ragindone milia xii / mutatio pultouia milia xii / ciuitas poetouione milia xii. / **Transis pontem, intras pannoniam inferiorem**. / Mutatio ramista milia viiii / mansio aqua viua milia viiii / mutatio populis milia x / ciuitas iouia milia viiii / mutatio sunista milia viiii / mutatio peritur milia xii / mansio lentolis milia xii / mutatio cardono milia x / mutatio cocconis milia xii / mansio serota milia x / mutatio boletia milia x / mansio maurianis milia viiii. / **Intras pannoniam superiorem**. / Mutatio serena milia viiii / mansio vereis milia x / mansio vereis milia x / mutatio ioualia milia viiii / mutatio mersella milia viiii / ciuitas mursa milia x / mutatio leutuoano milia xii / ciuitas cibalis milia xii / mutatio caelena milia xi / mansio vlmo milia xi / mutatio spaneta milia x / mutatio vedulia milia viiii / ciuitas sirmium milia viiii. / **Fit ab aquileia, sirmium usque milia ccccxxii, mansiones xvii, mutationes xxxviii**. / Mutatio fossis milia viiii / ciuitas bassianis milia x / mutatio nouiciani milia xii / mutatio altina milia xi / ciuitas singiduno milia viiii. / **Fines pannoniae et misiae**. / Mutatio ad sextum milia vi / mutatio tricornia castra milia vi / mutatio ad sextum miliarem milia vii / ciuitas aureo monte milia vi / mutatio vingeio milia vi / ciuitas margo milia viiii / ciuitas viminacio milia x. / **Ubi diocletianus occidit carinum**. / Mutatio ad nonum milia viiii / mansio munecipio milia viiii / mutatio iouis pago milia x / mutatio bao milia vii / mansio idomo milia viiii / mutatio ad octauum milia viiii / mansio oromago milia viiii. / **Finis myssiae et asiae**. / Mutatio sarmatorum milia xii / mutatio caminitas milia xi / mansio ipompeis milia viiii / mutatio rampiana milia xii / ciuitas naisso milia xii / mutatio redicibus milia xii /

“You are from Thessalonica. All people from there speak slavic language fluently”. The Basileus Michael dismissed Constantine-Cyril, the philosopher, and his brother the Abbot Methodius with these words as they commenced their mission amongst the Slavs of Moravia.²¹ Constantine-Cyril (†869, in Rome) and his brother Methodius did not actually travel down the via Diagonalis in 863. Instead, they took the road which goes from Thessalonica to **Skopje - Nyssa - Sirmio** and up to **Belgrade**. They then journeyed up the Danube before travelling first to Venice and then to Rome - where they had been summoned by the Pope Nicolas I.

The brothers' first mission amongst the Slavs took place during a period of great political turmoil as the Empire opened up for the first time to a world which had previously been regarded with diffidence, if not outright hostility. Ostrogorsky provides an excellent description of this climate.²² This cannot but give us the idea that anyone who lived along the great roads in the Balkans was **mentally open to exchanges** and only needed the bare minimum in terms of vital guarantees before opening up to others.

The monk Blaise of Amorion (†911-912) instead travelled down the via Diagonalis on his way to Rome. On his return journey however, he took a boat from Pozzuoli and stopped at **Methoni** in the Peloponnesian and **Demetriad** in Thessaly before arriving in Constantinople.²³

In 903 Saint Elias of Enna in Sicily²⁴ travelled by boat from Reggio Calabria to **Naupatto** in front of Corfu, before continuing his travels by land on the same road which Liutprand of Cremona took in 968-969 on his journey back from his ambassadorship to Constantinople on the behalf of Otto the Great.

The Greek names carved into the caves dedicated to Saint Michael in the Gargano, on the other hand, tell us very little²⁵ because they could hail from any of the Byzantine territories in Southern Italy. The three *folles* from the mint in Constantinople found in the same caves instead tell us a bit more,²⁶ even if we cannot definitively connect them back to the via Egnatia.

The inscriptions found in the surviving part of the *Codex Aquileiensis* - also known as the Gospel of Cividale – contain the names of Balkan pilgrims from Bulgaria to Moldavia as well as from Serbia to Croatia. They were written by the

mutatio vlmo milia vii / mansio romansiana milia viiii / mutatio latina milia viiii / mansio turribus milia viiii / mutatio translitis milia xii / mutatio ballanstra milia x / mansio meldia milia viiii / mutatio scretisca milia xii / ciuitas serdica milia xi. / **Fit a sirmium serdica usque milia cccxiiii, mutationes xxiiii, mansiones xiii.** / Mutatio extuomne milia viii / mansio buragara milia viiii / mutatio sparata milia viii / mansio hilica milia x / mutatio soneio milia viiii. / **Fines daciae et traciae.** / Mutatio ponte vcasti milia vi / mansio bona mansio milia vi / mutatio alusore milia viiii / mansio basapare milia xii / mutatio tugugero milia viiii / ciuitas filopopuli milia xii / mutatio sernota milia x / mutatio paramuole milia viii / mansio cillio milia xii / mutatio carassura milia viiii / mansio arzo milia xi / mutatio palae milia vii / mansio castozobra milia xi / mutatio rhamis milia vii / mansio burdista milia xi / mutatio daphabae milia xi / mansio niceae milia viiii / mutatio tarpodizo milia x / mutatio vrisio milia vii / mansio virgoles milia vii / mutatio narco milia viii / mansio drizupara milia viiii / mutatio tipso milia viii / mansio tunorullo milia viii / mutatio beodizo milia viii / ciuitas heraclea milia viiii / mutatio baunne milia xii / mansio salambria milia x / mutatio callum milia x / mansio atyra milia x / mansio regio milia xii. / Ciuitas constantinopoli milia xii. / **Fit a serdica constantinopoli milia cccxiii, mutationes xii, mansiones xx.** / **Fit omnis summa a burdigala constantinopolim uicies bis centena uiginti unum milia, mutationes cxxx, mansiones cxii.** / Item ambulauimus dalmatico et zenophilo cons- iiii kal- iun- a calcedonia et reuersi sumus constantinopolim vii kal- ian- cons- suprascripto. / A constantinopoli transis pontum, uenis calcedoniam, ambulas prouinciam bithyniam. (...)

²¹ Cfr. Vita sancti Methodi, V, 8.

²² “In a short interval of time – a single decade – very important contacts were cemented between the Byzantine Empire and the various Slavic countries, southern, eastern, and western. These contacts had widespread consequences both for the Slavs and for Byzantium. After the Russian attack on Constantinople in 860, Byzantine missionary activity began in the young Russian state. In 863 the Moravian prince Rastislav requested Byzantium to send missionaries to his country. The next year saw Bulgaria officially accept Christianity. A few years later, the Serbian lands turned to Byzantine Orthodox Christianity. In 869-70 the problem of the Bulgarian Church was finally settled at the Council of Constantinople: Bulgaria together with Macedonia – which was soon to become the main center of Slavic culture – was included within the religious and cultural orbit of Byzantium. All these events occurred in the course of a single decade, the sixties of the ninth century. It was indeed a great decade in the history of the Byzantine empire.” In «Byzanz und die Welt der Slawen: Beiträge zur Geschichte der byzantinisch-slawischen Beziehungen» / Georg Ostrogorsky. – Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974. – Scil. S. 1-2.

²³ Acta SS. Nov. IV 660-666.

²⁴ Cfr. «Vita di sant’Elia il giovane» / G. Rossi Tarbii (ed.). – Palermo, 1962 (7, Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Testi e monumenti, Testi).

²⁵ «Il santuario di s. Michele sul Gargano dal VI al IX secolo. Contributo alla storia della langobardia meridionale»: from the conference held at Monte Sant’Angelo, 9-10 December 1978 / edited by Carlo Carletti and Giorgio Otranto. – Bari: Edipuglia, 1980. In particular, the papers by Carlo Carletti and Maria Giovanna Arcamone.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 365 and note.

pilgrims themselves or by others for them for apotropaic purposes. The Gospel of Mark in the Codex was believed to have been penned by the Saint itself and as such was considered a relic of the first order.²⁷

But, in spite of these clues, we cannot but acknowledge that any traces of overland pilgrimages before the conversion of the Hungarians in the Balkans are virtually inconsistent.

On the other hand, what should be surprising - and therefore an inducement for reflection and further research - is the fact that, just a few years after the conversion of the Hungarian Sovereigns, a determined series of pilgrimages began down this recovered - and perhaps never lost - road for Constantinople and the Holy Land.²⁸

One of the first to reopen the overland route to Jerusalem was Count William d'Angoulême in 1026, as the texts by Ademar of Chabanne and the *Gesta episcoporum et comitum Engolismensium*,²⁹ note, adding that no one had ventured down that road before "*quia novella adhuc christianitas per Ungariam et Sclavoniam erat*".³⁰

In those years the Hospital of Saint Samson in Constantinople was dedicated to caring for pilgrims.

In 1054 the Byzantine Governor of Laodicea forbade Saint Liebert, the Bishop of Cambrai, from continuing on his travels with the pretext that the roads were unsafe. On reaching Cyprus, the bishop discovered that three hundred pilgrims had been expelled from Jerusalem.³¹

In 1064 four German bishops from Bamberg, Mainz, Raton and Utrecht travelled together to the Holy Land.

In 1086 Pope Victor III asked the Empress to exonerate pilgrims from paying taxes in order for permission to travel across the country.³²

We cannot talk of warning signs for the crusades, nor do I believe it is true to state that overland Balkan routes were favoured because they were cheaper than maritime routes.³³ Important bishops from cities in Germany and France could not possibly have had economic problems. If anything - considering that their parties would have been large - they would have probably saved on money and food by travelling by sea.

If I may put forward a non-supportable theory: namely, that it was the reopening of overland Balkan routes themselves which convinced large numbers of people that there was a **concrete possibility for a "mass armed pilgrimage" to Jerusalem**. The more "spontaneous" and popular components of the first crusade travelled overland so that would not have run the risk becoming separated from fellow travellers as well as in order to avoid having to place themselves in the hands of helmsmen and their crews - who may have been dedicated to piracy and the slave trade.

In terms of **heresies** and in particular the relationship between the dualism practiced by the **Bogomils** and that practiced by dualist sects in northern Italy and southern France, many believe them to be proof of continuity and of exchanges between the different areas. The most ardent supporters of this theory of links between the Bogomils, the Patarines and the Catharists are such accredited scholars that we cannot but take their deductions into account. In his two works, *The Bogomils*³⁴ and *Le*

²⁷ "Revisione dei nomi slavi nell'antico Codex Aquileiensis" / Arturo Cronia. – In: «Studi aquileiesi offerti a Giovanni Brusin» / AA.VV. – Aquileia: Associazione nazionale per Aquileia, 1953. – Scil., pg. 357-371.

²⁸ "Dalla fine del X secolo, personaggi di rilievo intraprendono il viaggio per Gerusalemme: un abate di Flavigny, un vescovo di Costanza, un conte di Périgord, e il conte d'Arcis, Ilduino, che parte in compagnia di Adso di Montiérender. I grandi nomi si ritrovano con sempre maggiore frequenza: un visconte di Limoges, un conte di Rouergue, un vescovo di Périgueux, il conte di Angoulême; Guglielmo Tagliaferro, il vescovo di Auxerre Ugo di Chalon partono tra l'anno Mille e il 1030. Il duca di Normandia Roberto il Magnifico, nel 1035, incontra Folco Nerra, conte di Angiò, che compie il pellegrinaggio per la seconda e lo ripeterà nel 1039." As Jean Richard summaries in «La grande storia delle Crociate». – Rome: Newton Compton, 1999. It is a pity that references to individual sources are missing.

²⁹ *Gesta episcoporum et comitum Engolismensium*, addit. Ad Ademarum MGH Scriptorum, 4.

³⁰ "Les Balkans aux yeux des voyageurs occidentaux au Moyen Age" / Nenad Fejic. - In: «Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age: XXVIe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S. (Limoges – Aubazine, mai 1995)» / Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public. – Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996. – Scilicet, pg.281-289. A very useful and highly documented work, even if it seems to fully support the theory of the non-continuity of overland Balkan routes.

³¹ "Chronicon santi Andreae Castri Cameracensis Lib. II De profectioe domini episcopi Lietberti in Jerusalem." – In: MGH Scriptorum 7.

³² "Epistolae" / Victor III (PL 149) : "Unde, cupiens tuam dignitatem in futuro non condemnari pro temporali oppressione peregrinorum et pauperum, sed glorificari pro relevatione eorum, denuntiamus et obsecramus in Domino Jesu ubi ab oratoribus et visitatoribus sancti et gloriosi Sepulcri ejus facias cessare gravissimum et importabile tributum quod eis imponitur a tuis officialibus."

³³ This may be true for preserved foods. A. H. M. Jones («Il tardo impero romano, 284-602 d.C.» – Milan, 1973-81) claims that transporting corn by sea cost 17 to 22 times less than by land. I do not believe the same could be said for the transport of small groups of individuals.

³⁴ Previously published in *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, October-December 1945 and now republished in «Byzantium and the Slavs: collected studies» / Ivan Dujčev. – London: Variorum Reprints, 1971, from which we quote.

Christianisme oriental et les doctrines dualistes,³⁵ Ivan Dujčev claims that a certain degree of scepticism regarding the connections between Manichaeism and neo-manicheist heretic movements (Bogomils, Patarines and Catharists) is not justified. Our primary source on Paulicianism, the Treaty by Peter of Sicily,³⁶ reports that the Paulicianists had planned a mission to Bulgaria to spread their doctrine. In his book, *The Origins of the Dualist Church of Dragunthia*³⁷ Bernard Hamilton also supports the theory that western heretics considered theirs and the Balkans to be “*a single communion*”. If anything, the real dichotomy was between moderate dualists and absolute dualists. In any case, both can be traced back to the Balkans. The Chronicles of Theophane itself attributes the movement of Asian troupes in Thrace to the spread of Paulicianism in the Balkans, since this was the original absolute dualist sect.³⁸

The link between the Bogomils and western *girovagi* was first made by the priest Cosmas in his anti-heretic lecture³⁹ with the aim of highlighting the parasitical aspects of the “perfects”. This implies that an active part of the sect was anxious to proselytise and was continuously moving from one village to the next, both to ensure that they were not a burden on the same group of believers and to spread the Bogomil credo in a more capillary manner. An inference which is reinforced by the fact that many homonyms in Macedonia still echo the names and nicknames bestowed on the sect's followers by people.⁴⁰ The diffusion of the Patarine faith in Bosnia starting in the 11th century gives us a glimpse into future links with the West, underlined by the arrival of the first crusaders and their return overland. The Bulgarian Council of Trnovo in 1211 was held in concomitance with the initiatives sponsored by Pope Innocent the II against the Albigensians. This is further proof of a common reaction against dualistic heresies. Dujčev, in order further to reinforce the hypothesis of such a bond, rightly reminds us that a Roman cardinal had been sent to the capital and to the Bulgarian court in 1206 to strengthen the ties between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Holy See.⁴¹ The fact that a number of orthodox opposers called the Catharist heresy the “**Bulgarian heresy**” can also be seen as evidence of the influence of Bogomil rites on Catharist rites. The Bulgarian origin of the *Liber Sancti Johannis* - one of the primary doctrines of the Catharists - and the diffused conviction amongst heretics in the West that their faith originated from Bulgaria, as well as the escape route taken by the Montaillou heretics⁴² when they went to Lombardy are all clues of a spatial continuity in terms of the roads, which branch out from Aquileia to the Balkans.

In spite of the obvious efforts made to disguise it,⁴³ the spread of the Bogomil faith cannot but have taken place by overland routes. Extended periods of time saw missionary activities which, when combined with the escape routes, the support network and the need for daily *exempla* and for constant debates with the converts all induce us to surmise that the heretics normally travelled by foot. The enclosed promiscuity of a boat would have attracted attention and curiosity, which would have had to be satisfied in the long run.

Suspensions against pilgrims, especially those who manifested their religious fervour in unusual ways, were also expressed in Rome during the second half of the 10th century. On one occasion, while the Pope was presiding over a Synod at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, an Armenian pilgrim entered the Basilica and began praying in an unusual manner - so much so as to raise the suspicion of being a heretic. Luckily “*aderat tum ibi quidam religiosus et reverendus episcopus, qui ab Armeniae finibus peregre Romam petens... habebatur egregius.*” He translated the Nicene Creed recited by his fellow pilgrim, putting the fears of the entire curia at rest.⁴⁴

³⁵ Previously published amongst the Papers of the international conference on “L’Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà”. Rome 1964, and now republished in «Byzantium and the Slavs: collected studies», cit.

³⁶ “Historia Manichaeorum qui et Pauliciani dicuntur”, in *Patrologia Graeca* CIV, col. 1239-1304.

³⁷ Previously published in «Eastern Churches Review» IV, Oxford 1974. – Now published in «Monastic Reform, Catharism and the Crusades...», cit. pg. 1115-124.

³⁸ Theophanes C.S.H.B. I, 662.

³⁹ “Ideo quidam ex ereticis otiosi remanent, nolentes aliquid sibi manibus propriis providere, et transeuntes de domo in domum, alienum devorant, id est deceptorum ab eis hominum, patrimonium.” from : «Theologia antibogomilistica Cosme presbyteri bulgari (sec. 10.)» / Giuseppe Gagov. – Rome: Off. Libri Catholici, 1942.

⁴⁰ «The Bogomils» / Ivan Dujčev. - Cit. pg. 20.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pg. 21.

⁴² «Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324» / Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. – Paris : Gallimard, 1975. – Passim, ad vocem Lombardie.

⁴³ “Studente heretici exterius veluti oves incedere: mansueti, humiles et taciturni, et aspectu facies eorum pallescunt propter simulatum jejunium. Ne verbum quidem proferunt, non cachinnant, cavent a curiositate et student ne videantur ab aliis. Exterius omnia adimplent ut non distinguantur a ceteris rectae fidei christianis.” *Theologia antibogomilistica etc.*, cit. pg. 53.

⁴⁴ De sancto Simeone monacho et eremita, ch. 16, *Acta Sanctorum*, Jul. VI, pg. 327. This anecdote is also narrated in the study “The city of Rome and the Eastern Churches in the Tenth Century” / Bernard Hamilton. – Formerly in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica» XXVII. Rome, 1961. – Now in «Monastic Reform, Catharism and the Crusades (900-1300) » / Bernard Hamilton. - London: Variorum Reprints, 1979.

Apparently, a number of presumed heretics were hanged during the reign of Henry the II in Goslar, in the centre of Germany, solely because they refused to eat chicken. In fact, this was seen as a clear sign of dualistic heresy since the "perfects" refused all contacts with meat.⁴⁵

What is most surprising - and what should make us think - is that pilgrimages on Balkan roads continued **to take place during the late middle ages and into the modern era**. These were individual cases of pilgrims who were, in their own way, an anomaly. However, they do help us understand that Balkan roads were never lost and that their life has continued, even though we have little evidence of this.

Bertrandon de la Broquière, councillor to Philip the Good, Duke of Bourgogne crossed the Balkans using the via Diagonalis on his return trip from the Holy Land in 1433.⁴⁶

After a detailed description of Constantinople being held hostage by the Turks - who played an important role in Balkans (Sophia had become Turkish in 1389 and Thessalonica fell to the Turks in 1387 before being conquered by the Venetians in 1423) - and about to fall into their hands, the traveller from Bourgogne left the city on 23 January 1433 travelling in the company of an Italian who had acted as an ambassador for the Duke of Milan.⁴⁷

After a prolonged journey on the farthest points of the Via Egnatia, he returned to **Adrianople** accompanied by the Turkish gentlemen who had dealt with the Milanese Ambassador, before taking a sharp turn onto the Via Diagonalis and going to **Philippopolis**. At this point, he continued on to **Sophia**, and later made his way to **Nyssa** and **Belgrade**.

Lastly, in 1553 the Hungarian bishop Veratius transcribed the stops along the road between Belgrade and Constantinople. Some of the names had been changed and had become Turkish, but the most important stops mentioned were: **Nys**, **Sophia**, **Philippopolis**, **Harianoples**, **Selymbria**, confirming that it was still the Via Diagonalis.⁴⁸

4. Foreign affairs. Embassies and royal weddings.

Not even the doctrinal conflict between Constantinople and Rome at the beginning of the 9th century were able put an end to embassies between the Papal State and the Orient.⁴⁹

The Serbs and Croats also sent Ambassadors to Byzantium⁵⁰ and Bulgarian embassies were established with the Kings and Emperors of the West.⁵¹

In 911-912 Petrus, son of the Doge of Venice Ursus Particiacus returned home from an embassy to the courts of Constantinople. For reasons unknown to us, he decided to travel by land. During his trip, he was captured and held prisoner by the Serbian regent of **Zeta**. According to the sources available, he could have travelled on the Via Diagonalis to Sardica and then turned towards the coast. More credibly however, given the events that followed, he probably travelled on the via

⁴⁵ In my notes the source is a Chronicle by the Bishop of Liege which I did not have a chance to consult for confirmation.

⁴⁶ «Le Voyage d'Outremer de Bertrandon de la Broquière» / publié et annoté par Ch. Schefer. – Paris: Ernest Leroux editeur, MDCCCXCII. – Now available online (www.gallica.fr).

⁴⁷ The following are stops between Constantinople and Adrianople with their Latin or pre-Turkish name in parenthesis: **Rigory** (Rhegium), **Athyra** (Ponte grande), **Salubrie** (Selembria), **Chourley** (Tzurullum), **Misterio** (Drizipera), **Pirgasi** (Bergolae), **Zambri** and **Edirne** (Adrianopoli).

⁴⁸ In «Monumenta Hungariae Historica». Scriptores. XXXII. But we refer to the appendix of the cited work by Jireček (Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel...).

⁴⁹ “Even after the Pope’s name had been removed from the diptychs in Constantinople during the pontificate of Sergius IV (1009-12) and the Patriarchate of Sergius (998-1019), Western legates and Byzantine envoys were often entrusted by their masters with delicate political and ecclesiastical missions to the Sacred Palace and the Lateran, although no successful attempt at reconciliation between the Greek and Latin Churches was made until the pontificate of Urban II.” As Bernard Hamilton summarises in “Orientale lumen et magistra latinitas. Greek Influences on Western Monastics (900-1100)”, Formerly in «Le Millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963» Etudes et Mélanges I. – Chevetogne, 1963. – Now in: «Monastic Reform, ...», cit.. – Scil. pg. 189-90.

⁵⁰ Cfr. “Une ambassade serbe auprès de l’empereur Basile II” / Georg Ostrogorsky. – Formerly in «Byzantion» XIX (1949), pg. 187-194. – Now in: «Byzanz und die Welt der Slawen» / Georg Ostrogorsky. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974. – S. 65-72.

⁵¹ “Alio anno (825) erat Aquis palatio cum magno exercitu, et ibi venerunt legati Bulgarorum portantes dona: quos benigne suscipiens, dimisit ire ad propria.” Vita Ludovici / Thaganus Treverensis (PL 106). “824. Rex Vulgarorum Omortag pro pace ad imperatorem Ludovicum misit. (...) 825. Item rex Vulgarorum legatos pro terminis regnorum dirimendis imperatori mittit. (...) 826. Item Vulgarorum rex legatos insolentius pro terminis sine mora statuendis imperatori mittit; quos imperator negligenter remisit.” Chronicon / Hermannus Contractus (PL 143). “848. Ludowico imperatori Aquis legati Vulgarorum munera portant.” Chronicon / Marianus Scottus (PL 147).

Egnatia and then continued in the direction of the Valley of the Vardar after Thessalonica. The Bulgarian prince delivered him to Tsar Simenon of Bulgaria.⁵²

Ambassadors bring and look for peace. What better way to seal a peace agreement than a royal wedding? The story of the niece of the basileus Romanos who took on the name Irene (Peace) and was given in marriage to Peter, son of Simon of Bulgaria to seal such an agreement is well known.⁵³

When Romanos I imposed a Frankish bride - Bertha, daughter of Hugo of Provence - on Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the embassy from the west arrived in Constantinople during the course of a *coupe d'état* led by Romanos's sons against their own father. Siegfried, the bishop of Parma accompanied the bride. He declared his support for the legitimate powers with the help of the Amalfitans, the Gaetans and the Romans who lived in the city.⁵⁴ It is highly probable that the Amalfitans and the Gaetans were in the city for business and that they had their own ships with them. The Romans however, who were there for political and religious regions instead, could have also travelled by land. In particular, they could have taken the *via Diagonalis* which connected Aquileia to Croatia, Bosnia and Bulgaria, all of which had close ties with the Roman papacy.

A rich literature exists on the three embassies headed by the bishop Liutprand of Cremona. The first of these took place in 949-51 under the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. The second was sent to Nikephoros Foca in 968 to ask for the hand of Princess Theophane for Otto II, while the third was carried out in 971. This is partly because Liutprand, albeit partisan and acrimonious, was also one of the most reliable and wide-ranging sources of his times.⁵⁵ As Liutprand himself tells us, he only employed the road network in the Balkans in part (on his return trip from his second voyage to Constantinople, "dopo quarantanove giorni di marcia a dorso d'asino, a piedi, a cavallo, digiunando, patendo la sete, sospirando, piangendo e gemendo, arrivai a **Naupacto**, città della Nicopolis", before proceeding to **Patras**, **Lefkada** and **Corfù**), instead preferring, when circumstances and the weather permitted it, to travel by sea. However, a reading of the *Antapodosis* and the *Relatio Constantinopolitana* shows us that the byzantine court was constantly under siege from delegations and embassies from all the cardinal points. As such, we cannot exclude that some of these - or at least those from continental Europe - had travelled by road in the Balkans.

Liutprand's father had also been invited to Constantinople by Hugo of Provence to negotiate with the Basileus Romanos (934-935). Unfortunately, he was assaulted by a band of Slavs in revolt near **Thessalonica** – and therefore while he was on the *via Egnatia*.⁵⁶

The crusader William of Tyre also headed an embassy to the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, who was busy campaigning in Serbia near **Ochrida** in 1169. The description of the territory underlines its difficult access and lack of agriculture as well as the richness of the mines, herds, cheeses and honey in the area.⁵⁷

⁵² The event was described by Giovanni Diacono as follows: "(Ursus cognomento Particiacus), qui mox ut dux effectus est suum filium, Petrum nomine, Constantinopolim ad Leonem imperatorem destinavit; quem imperator cum honore suscipiens, protospatharium fecit, ditatumque maximis donis ad propria redire permisit. Qui dum Chroatorum fines rediens transire vellet, a Michahela Sclavorum duce fraude receptus, omnibusque bonis privatus, atque Vulgarico regi, Simeone nomine, exilii pena transmissus est. Quem pater perditum acriter dolens, minime acquirere quivit, interim per suum internuncium, Dominicum videlicet Metamaucensem archidiaconem, qui postea episcopus effectus est, suis donis redimeret" Cfr. "Chronica" / Diaconus Johannes. - In: «Cronache veneziane antichissime» / G. Monticalo (ed.). Rome, 1890. Scil., pg. 32. I do not want to go conspiracy hunting but what struck me during the course of the *Chronica* was the verb used to recall the event in question, when describing the nomination of Petrus himself, son of Ursus Particiacus as doge: "Quem successit Petrus Ursonis ducis filius, is qui apud Vulgaricum regem fuerat **exulatus**." Describing the condition of a hostage ransomed by his father as "exultare" seems strange.

⁵³ "Eodem tempore Simeon Bulgarius agros coepit vehementer afligi. Quem Romanos, filii sui Christofori filia filio illius Petro, qui nunc superest, uxore data, ab incepto furore conpescuit, sibi que foedere placito sociavit. Unde et puella mutato nomine est Irini, id est pax, vocata, eo quod per eam inter Bulgarios et Grecos pax sit firmissima constituta." *Antapodosis* / Liutprandus Cremonensis. – Chapter 38.

⁵⁴ Cfr. «Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World» / Arnold Toynbee, cit. – Scil. pg. 39.

⁵⁵ "Liutprandi Cremonensis Opera" / J. Becker (ed.). – In: «Monumenta Germaniae Historica (MGH) Script. Rerr. Germ. In usu schol.» – Hannover-Liepzig: MGH, 1915. A comfortable Italian version is found in «Italia e Bisanzio alle soglie dell'anno Mille» / Liutprando di Cremona; edited by Massimo Oldoni, Pierangelo Ariatta. – [Novara]: Europa, 1987.

⁵⁶ «Antapodosis», cit. III, 24.

⁵⁷ "Detinebatur porro eo temporis articulo imperator in Servia quae regio montosa et nemoribus obsita, difficiles habens aditus, inter Dalmatiam et Hungariam et Illyricum media jacet, rebellantibus Serviis et confidentibus de introitu ad se angustiis et de impervia eorum regione. Habent vetustae traditiones hunc omnem populum, ex deportatis et deputatis exsilio, qui in partibus illis ad secunda marmora et effodienda metalla damnati fuerant, originem habuisse, et inde etiam nomen traxisse servitutis. Est autem populus incultus, absque disciplina, montium et silvarum habitator, agriculturae ignarus: gregibus et armentis copiosi, lacte, caseo, butyro, carnibus, melle et cera uberius abundantes. Hi magistratus habent, quos suppanos vocant; et domino imperatori aliquando serviunt; aliquando de montibus et silvis egredientes, omnem circa se regionem, ut sunt audaces et bellicosi viri, depopulantur. Ob haec ergo intolerabilia vicinis eorum maleficia, ingressus erat ad eos in virtute multa et innumera manu dominus imperator. Quibus subactis et praecipuo eorum principe mancipato,

Lastly, in 1299 Theodore Metochite's caravan to Serbia left from Byzantium, touched upon **Thessalonica** and reached **Skopje**, where he performed his diplomatic duty. The fact that Serbian ambassadors on their way back home travelled with Metochite must also be noted.⁵⁸

All the ambassadors were touchy, whiny, and - when given the chance - made very undiplomatic comments against each other. Their role however, is proof that the roads existed and that they were travelled. The difficulties they faced, whether they were real or embroidered by a certain, well diffused, classist snobbishness do not change the actual facts: Balkan roads worked, and worked well.

5. The role played by the Bulgarians.

In the beginning, the Slavs were nomads looking for lands on which to settle. With the invasion of Greece in the 7th century and with the establishment of the state of Bulgaria in 685, they cut off the via Egnatia and isolated Thessalonica and Durrës from the rest of the empire.⁵⁹ But not for long.

We have two separate accounts from different time periods which describe the methods used to re-establish normal inter-ethnic relations. The first source is John Caminiata, who wrote at the beginning of the 10th century. He described how a public road bisected the city of **Thessalonica** from west to east, inviting travellers to stop and purchase the goods they needed in the city in exchange for beautiful, useful things. It was as if there were always huge crowds of people - including the Slavic inhabitants of the area - there; so much so that it would have been easier to count grains of sand in the sea compared to those who frequented the market.⁶⁰

The second account comes from Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish-Spanish traveller of the 13th century who travelled on foot from Corinth to the North of Greece.⁶¹ He met 50 Jews at *Sinon Potamo* (perhaps **Lamia** in Thessaly) who lived near the mountains of Wallachia, where the Valack populations - perhaps the descendants of an ancient roman settlement of Dacians or the remnants of an old Slavonia - usually robbed Jewish merchants, without however killing them, as they did with the Greeks. Obviously, "rob" must be translated as "demanded a tax," which was illegally levied to allow trade in the area.

I believe that this would have been the most obvious way to have intermediaries who would manage all normal dealings with areas under Slav and Greek control in the Balkans during the Middle Ages.

redeunti domino imperatori, **post multiplices viarum labores**, in provincia **Pelagonia**, in civitate quae vulgo dicitur **Butella**, occurrimus, juxta illam antiquam et domini felicissimi et invictissimi et prudentis Augusti patriam, domini Justiniani civitatem, videlicet **Justiniam primam**, quae vulgo hodie dicitur **Acreda**; ubi a domino imperatore honorifice suscepti, benigne et imperiali clementia tractati, legationis et viae causam, formamque pactorum diligenter exposuimus; quae omnia laeta mente suscipiens et granter amplectens, quod praeordinatum, fuerat approbavit. Praebitis ergo corporaliter hinc inde juramentis, ejus auctoritate interposita, confirmata sunt quae prius per nuntios fuerunt ordinata. Receptis ergo imperialibus litteris, pactorum formam ex integro continentibus et consummata feliciter legatione, munificentissime de more solito dimissi, Kal. Octobr. iter ad reditum arripuimus." *Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis* / Guillelmus Tyrensis (PL 201).

⁵⁸ "Sur la route de Theodore Métochite en Serbie en 1299" / Elisabeth Malamut. - In: «Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age: XXVIe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S. (Limoges – Aubazine, mai 1995)» / Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public. – Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996. – Scil. pg. 165-175.

⁵⁹ "Les liaisons maritimes et continentales dans le monde byzantin / Hélène Ahrweiler. – In: «Navigazioni mediterranee e connessioni continentali (secoli XI-XVI)» / edited by Rosalba Ragosta. – Naples: Pironti editore, 1983.

⁶⁰ «Ioannis Caminiatae De Expugnatione Thessalonicae» / recensuit Gertrudis Böbling. – Berolini et Novi Eboraci : Apud Walter de Gruyter et socios, MCMLXXIII. – Scil. § IX, 74-87 (S. 11). "Λεωφόρου γὰρ δημοσίας τῆς πρὸς ἀνατολὴν ἀγούσης ἀπὸ τῆς δύσεως διὰ μέσου τῆσδε χωρούσης τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἀναγκαίως πειθούσης τοὺς παροδεύοντας πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐνδιατρίβειν καὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν πορίζεσθαι, πᾶν οἷον ἂν εἴποι τις τῶν καλῶν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐκαρπούμεθ' αὐτὰ καὶ προσεκτώμεθα. Ἐνθεν καὶ παμμιγῆς τις ὄχλος αἰεὶ περιεστοίχει τὰς ἀγυῖας τῶν τε αὐτοχθόνων καὶ τῶν ἄλλως ἐπιξενουμένων, ὡς εὐχερέστερον εἶναι ψάμμον παράλιον ἐξαρθῆναι ἢ τοὺς τὴν ἀγορὰν διοδεύοντας καὶ τῶν συναλλαγμάτων ποιουμένους τὴν μέθοδον. Ἐνθεὺθεν χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργυρίου καὶ λίθων τιμῶν παμπληθεῖς θησαυροὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐγίνοντο, καὶ τὰ ἐκ Σηρῶν υφάσματα ὡς τὰ ἐξ ἐρίων τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπινενόητο. = Poiché una via maestra pubblica (la via Egnatia) conduceva da ovest verso est e procedeva in mezzo alla città (di Tessalonica), e induceva necessariamente coloro che passavano vicino a fermarsi da noi e a procurarsi ciò di cui abbisognavano, si può ben dire che noi da costoro ottenevamo tutto quanto vi è di bello. Così grande era la massa di gente del luogo e di forestieri che affollavano le strade, che sarebbe più facile contare i granelli di sabbia vicino al mare piuttosto che le persone che percorrevano la piazza del mercato e concludevano affari. In seguito a ciò molti accumulavano in grande quantità tesori di oro, argento e pietre preziose, altri tessuti di seta e di lana."

⁶¹ «Sefer Massa'ot» / Benjamin of Tudela. Italian translation: «Libro di viaggi» / Benjamin da Tudela; Laura Minervini (ed.). – Palermo: Sellerio, 1989. – Scil. pg. 49.

The second "invasion" – in other words, the expansionistic phase of the Bulgarian Empire in the first half of the 10th century - is marked by two aspects: 1. we can attempt to read this expansion as a reunification of the Slavines, that is the western Balkan regions and Slavic speaking Greece; 2. or we can interpret it as a struggle between states following a failed attempt to enthrone a Bulgarian dynasty in Constantinople.

The second invasion carefully avoided the via Diagonalis, almost as if to avoid a direct confrontation with Byzantine lines of defence. However, it did not manage to avoid the via Egnatia - or what remained of it - and its northern and southern branches.⁶²

If it is true that western Bulgaria did not yet have a monetary economy at the time,⁶³ we must also assume that commerce - which was certainly limited – must have taken place by land, exclusively using overland routes. Exchanges entailing the use of commercial ships also require the use of commonly accepted currencies.

Naturally, other elements highlighting these cultural exchanges also exist: the Royal Palace of the King of the Bulgarians at Pilska was built by Greek architects, as a number of Greek inscriptions remind us.

I believe that the final part of the via Diagonalis - which was directly involved in the defence of the Byzantine Empire - was, at least in certain periods, off limits to commercial and civilian exchanges. This was the tract from Adrianople to Philippopolis, at least while the latter remained under Byzantine control.

Furthermore, once it was obvious that direct attacks were bound for failure, it also became clear that the aim of the Bulgarian Tsar was not the destruction of the other state, but a high ranking marriage which would allow him to install himself in Byzantium with a Bulgarian Imperial dynasty at the right moment. As such, civilians, travellers and traders with the right credentials must and could for the most part have felt safe when taking an overland route which crossed the border between the two Empires.

Foreign ambassadors had to feel somewhat less safe for the same reasons. They instead could represent potentially dangerous alliances between the bordering powers on opposing ends, perhaps through an appropriate matrimonial *combine*.

In 865, all Bulgarian officials became Christians by decision of Prince Boris (852-889) and soon could count on their own liturgical language and hierarchy, as well as their own archbishop, who became Patriarch in 927. The patriarchate was abolished in 972, but re-established in 1235 until the kingdom fell into the hands of the Turks (1393-21396). The controversial events regarding the patriarchal competencies of Bulgaria - oscillating between Rome and Constantinople - are of little interest here, even if we must deduce that a regular flow of delegations between the two cities and the Bulgarian capital were probably seen.⁶⁴

Many scholars believe that the Balkan re-conquests of Basil II Bulgaroctonus and the conversion of Hungary are two of the elements which brought about a reopening of the overland routes to Jerusalem through the Balkans.⁶⁵ I believe this should be the subject of further discussion and study. Although it is true that once the battles between the Bulgarians and the Byzantine Empire began afresh, they created a fear of infiltrations and of spying which did not favour the transit of pilgrims in the Balkans. However, we cannot ignore all the attempts made by Bulgarian sovereigns during their first Empire to set up diplomatic relations with the West and the Papacy in order to obtain recognition and status as a Christian power, which - in their more farfetched dreams – would have opened the doors to a dynastic substitution at the helm of the Byzantine Empire.

Indubitably, the conversion of Hungary and its sovereigns represented an important source of reassurance for all those who desired the opening of new, even commercial routes, through the Balkans, especially from Germany. However, I firmly believe that if we look at it more closely and make Slav sources available to the West, and if we read those texts which failed ideologies have prevented us from reading in a more hodoeporic key, we will certainly find more substantial proof of this continuity in commercial terms - at least in the area where the Danube remains the main and most economic vector for trade.

6. The role of the merchants.⁶⁶

⁶² Cfr. «Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World», cit. – Scil. pg. 400.

⁶³ Ibidem, and see note 6 as well.

⁶⁴ A good summary of this can be found in “The Empire and its northern neighbours, 565-1018” / Dimitri Obolensky. – Formerly in «Cambridge Medieval History, IV part I». - Cambridge, 1966. – Now in: «Byzantium and the Slavs: collected studies», cit.

⁶⁵ “The reconquest of the imperial territories in the Balkans by Basil II Bulgaroctonus and the conversion of Hungary in the early years of the century opened up a new and cheaper land-route to Asia Minor, and pilgrimages took on a more official character, being organized and led by such distinguished clerics as Richard, Abbot of St. Vanne at Verdun, and Siegfried, Archbishop of Mainz, and subsidised by the generosity of devout laymen like Richard II of Normandy.” As Bernard Hamilton summarises in “Orientale lumen et magistra latinitas...”, cit. pg. 192-193.

⁶⁶ On this theme, I would like to remind Jadran Ferlaga's essays. Particularly, “Mercati e mercanti fra Mar Nero e Adriatico : il commercio nei Balcani dal VII all'XI secolo”, which is his contribute for the XL Settimana di Studio del

There is a type of traveller that nothing and no one can stop; not even war, or even worse, invasions. They are merchants, or if we want to be even clearer, slave merchants. We can find accounts of the presence of Spanish merchants in the Rhineland and Bavaria in 848 from late medieval sources. They must have traded in slaves captured during the eastern expansion of the Carolingian Empire.

However, if we go even further back in time to even more warlike eras we can also see how the Danube - like many of the other great rivers in Europe - appears to have been one of the main channels used for this type of trade. The same Havarian and Hungarian hordes who returned to their lands to fully enjoy the fruits of their pillaging could count on this type of merchant, who would indubitably have developed specific strategies to render themselves known as accepted.⁶⁷

The Byzantine Empire, once the wars had come to an end and hopefully lengthy truces had been negotiated, signed trade agreements with the powerful Slavs in order to ensure the supply of raw materials and foodstuffs for the enormous and populous *enclave* of its capital.⁶⁸

Upon signing its peace treaties, the Bulgarian State could not help but remember its position as a bridge between the manufacturers of rare raw materials and the artisans who worked these.⁶⁹

We also asked ourselves whether slaves were a good which could be made to transit over overland routes. What is indubitable is that these "goods" travelled prevalently by sea to Italy or to be sold to Arab potentates. Seaside cities - and Genoa in particular - were a primary source of supply. The only overland route which could have been used to move these unfortunate souls is the one that would have taken them from Slavonia to the ports on the Black or Adriatic seas, where they would have been loaded onto ships to meet their unhappy destinies.⁷⁰

Where ambassadors travel, merchants soon follow. I know that this is a very unscientific statement, but it is logical. If nothing more, it reminds us not to lose faith when dealing with such difficult topics as medieval hodoeporics.

During the Middle Ages, trade in the Balkans took place predominantly **within the coasts**. If the historical roads were used for trade, it was done so for because of the cities they connected to the ports: the capital Constantinople, followed by Thessalonica, Durrës, Salona and Costanza and all the ports along the Danube.

Ragusa and **Kotor** rose to prominence because they were the two Adriatic end points on the road to northern Serbia, which was rich in mines and raw materials.⁷¹

However, smaller cities which were apparently less important because they were not located on the coast, such as **Adrianople**, were also well populated with people and goods. However, what is more significant is that during Bertrandon de la Broquière's time, this city was also full of Venetian, Catalan, Genoese and Florentine merchants.⁷² I do not think we can claim that a division between the roles played by Greek merchants - who specialised in the interior of the Balkans - and Western merchants - who specialised in trade on a wider scale - can be made in terms of travel.⁷³

Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo(23-29 aprile 1992), published by the Centre in 1993; and also "Gli Slavi del Sud e altri gruppi etnici di fronte a Bisanzio", his contribute for the XXX Settimana of the same Centre, published in 1983.

⁶⁷ Grierson's superb provocation during one of the debates held in the XI Settimana di Studi di Spoleto is transcribed below. Unfortunately, it does not appear to have been used as a point for reflection or further study: "Mr. Arbman a noté que les missionnaires ont très souvent suivi les marchands. Moi, et ce n'est pas seulement pour le taquiner, je me demande si les marchands n'ont pas peut-être suivi les pillards. Les premiers pillages des Normands en Angleterre datent précisément de 790-800, à Lindisfarne dans le nord et à Dorchester dans le sud, et vers la même époque en Irlande. Il arrive assez souvent, quand par l'activité des pirates il y a une concentration de richesses dans un endroit, que le pillards sont suivis par des marchands pour le alléger d'une façon paisible de l'or et de l'argent accumulés de cette façon. On le voit très bien à la fin de l'empire romain quand l'historien Priscus décrit le camp d'Attila comme fréquenté par le marchands de l'empire romain. Leur but était de regagner pour l'empire la plus grande partie possible de l'or et de l'argent que les Huns avaient reçu en tribut des empereurs." (Op. Cit. p. 416-417).

⁶⁸ Cfr. Ivan Dujčev, Op. Cit. p. 143 and relative notes.

⁶⁹ Cfr. «Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel...», cit., p. 75. "Mit dem Tode des furchtbaren Krum (815) begann eine fast 80jährige Friedensperiode mit wenigen kurzen Störungen. Die Strassen des Binnenlandes öffneten sich wieder dem Handel und Bulgarien wurde der Hauptstapelplatz für den Verkehr zwischen dem byzantinischen Reiche, Russland und Gross-Mähren; in den bulgarischen Städten wurden die Rohprodukte des Nordens gegen die Maniefakturwaren Griechenlands und die Erzeugnisse Asiens und Afrika's umgetauscht. Bulgarische Kaufleute und Karawanen belebten die Märkte von Constantinopel und Thessalonich."

⁷⁰ Cfr. «L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale» / Charles Verlinden. – Brugge: De Tempel, 1955.

⁷¹ "Bari, Cattaro ed i dinasti serbi dei secoli XII-XIV" / Slavko Mijušković. – In: «Navigazioni mediterranee e connessioni continentali (secoli XI-XVI)», cit.

⁷² "Et demeurent en ceste ville plusieurs marchans Venissiens, Cathelans, Jenevois et Flourentins." Op. cit., pg. 171.

Meaning that, in other words, although the great merchants would have preferred the sea, the vast majority must have travelled inland to find their goods. That is, they would have taken the most important roads available as well as those which could guarantee points where they could stop, rest and feed animals and goods - because the slaves needed to arrive in the markets in the West and Southern Mediterranean in good condition. Bertrandon de La Broquière provides us with constant proof of this during his description of his journey as well.

However, it is the slave trade itself which allows us to go back once again and take a look at the darkest ages in the Balkans. Venetians and Amalfitans “erano attivi in questo ramo di commercio nella seconda metà dell’ottavo secolo”, wrote Ashtor,⁷⁴ citing the letter written by Pope Hadrian I to Charlemagne in 776 where he complained of this regrettable trade.⁷⁵ And who better to provide the raw material than those territories afflicted by ethnic conflicts? It is therefore logical for us to think of the Greek and Dalmatian coasts as well as the mouth of the Danube as natural points where Venetians and Amalfitans could go to stock up on their goods.

Apart from slaves, the famed iron from Carinthia - as mentioned by Ashtor - also rendered **Aquileia** a hub where the material was collected and sorted before it was supplanted by Venice.⁷⁶ Given the frequency of wars at the time, how can we help but think that there was a certain level of demand for this raw material, which was even perhaps even semi-worked in Friuli, inland in the Balkans?

The Amalfitans, Venetians, Gaetans and Genoese were all well represented in Constantinople during the first half of the 10th century. In fact, as Ashtor notes, they took part in an armed conflict in the city in 944.⁷⁷ The most highly prized goods at the time were indubitably silks and spices, which were in demand everywhere in western markets and were not available in the Balkans. However, if we take a look at where the colonies and emporiums of the *Repubbliche Marinare* were located along the coast of the Black Sea, we can see that a goodly portion of their trade took place inland with the Balkans.

7. Soldiers from the West.

“E’ sempre stato più facile penetrare e conquistare i Balcani dalla parte del continente che dal mare”, said Jorjo Tadic during a presentation at a conference held a long time ago.⁷⁸ Although true, a statement such as this can be completely misleading. In other words, if we do not dig deeper, we could even end up accusing the roads of “colluding with the enemy.” Instead, it is obvious that an attack by sea on the greatest maritime power of the ancient world would have required great organisational, logistical and even cultural commitment. This is something which the semi-barbaric hordes which travelled the Danube did not have. A first, unsuccessful maritime attack on Constantinople was launched by the Arabs and a second was launched by the Latins - who were instead successful.

As such, looking at the issue of soldiers who travelled on Balkan roads, we must also take into account the fact that in the vast majority of cases overland routes were the only roads available to knights, great numbers of soldiers, and armies comprised of people who did not have an advanced maritime culture.

Even before the Crusades, the Empire's defensive efforts against Arab attacks on Dalmatian coasts and its offensive moves against a weak Bulgarian Empire required the presence of **mercenaries**. Western knights made top quality mercenaries, even if they were often reluctant to join the Byzantine military system.

Hervé the knight was captured by the Turks near the lake of Van in Asia Minor in 1057.⁷⁹ Together with the Norman Roussel de Bailleul,⁸⁰ they were part of the defensive system on the eastern Byzantine front. They probably took the most direct overland routes available to reach Constantinople and offer their services to the Emperor.

Once the Normans had expelled the Byzantines from Southern Italy, they began to look at the Balkan territory as an area for further expansion. Between 1070 and 1185 - and almost always in concomitance with attacks by other powers on the Empire - the **via Egnatia** was steadily used by Norman contingents who pushed their way into the heart of Greece. The peak

⁷³ Unless I misunderstood, that is, if it does not solely limit itself to stating that Greek merchants did not have as wide a range of action as Western merchants, a similar thesis appears to be found in «Hommes d’affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIIIe-XVe siècles)» / par Nicolas Oikonomidès. – Montréal-Paris: Institut d’études médiévales Albert-Le-Grand – Librairie J. Vrin, 1979. - (Conférence Albert-Le-Grand, 1977). – Scil. pg. 148 and pg. 88-91.

⁷⁴ “Gli Ebrei nel commercio mediterraneo nell’alto medioevo (sec. X-XI)” / Elyahu Ashtor. – Formerly published as a speech given during the XXVI Settimana di Studi del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’alto medioevo (Spoleto, 1978). – Now in «The Jews and the Mediterranean Economy, 10th-15th Century» / Elyahu Ashtor. - London: Variorum Reprints, 1983.

⁷⁵ MGH Ep. III, p. 585.

⁷⁶ Op.cit., pg. 412.

⁷⁷ Op. cit., pg. 417.

⁷⁸ “La cote occidentale des Balkans et ses liaisons maritimes et continentales (XIe-XVIe siècles)” / Jorjo Tadic. – In : «Navigazioni mediterranee e connessioni continentali (secoli XI-XVI)» / edited by Rosalba Ragosta, cit.

⁷⁹ «La società feudale» / Marc Bloch. – Turin: Einaudi, 1994.

⁸⁰ «Storia delle crociate» / Steven Runciman. – Turin: Einaudi, 1966.

in their expansion and was reached in 1185 with the conquest of Thessalonica in August, followed by their defeat near Dimitrica on November 7 of the same year. This marked the end of the eastern expansions, at least until the fourth crusade.⁸¹

The only roads available at the start of the great crusading march towards the Holy Land were the ones across the Balkans. Large groups of - more or less armed - people, some of which were travelling on horseback, would have found it impossible to locate a fleet big enough not just to transport them, but to handle all the problems connected to the prolonged transport of men and animals as well.⁸² All the scholars who have studied the crusades have described at least the main stops along the diagonal military road to Byzantium. The crusading armies faced difficulties either at the start of their voyage, when they left the German Empire and entered transdanubian Hungary, or after their crossing, near the Imperial capital.

The stops mentioned in the sources are always more or less the same: **Malevilla** (on the border between Hungary and Bulgaria), **Bellegrava** (Belgrade), the river **Maroc** (or Maroam), the cities of **Nicz** (Naissus), **Sternitz**, **Philippopolis** (sometimes spelled Phinopoli) and **Adrianople**, before finally arriving in Constantinople.⁸³

The *deserta Bulgarorum* - that is, the almost uninterrupted tract forest between Belgrade and Niczh which took eight days to cross - was the main feature of this route.⁸⁴ If we take into account the fact that the Bulgarians also deserted their cities in fear of the damages wrecked by such a large and composite army, the sense of abandonment must have been absolute. Only faith and the art of making did manage to propel the first waves of crusaders (those of Walterus and Glaterus Sensavier and of Peter the Hermit) to Constantinople.

The first practical consequence of the *loca deserta* was that food was often scarce, especially for an army with a lot of mouths to feed.⁸⁵

The crusading followers of the count of Toulouse and the bishop of Le Puy who crossed the Balkans travelling from Aquileia and Slavonia to Durrës fared no better.⁸⁶

The Count of Normandy and Stefano of Bois instead crossed the sea from Brindisi to Durrës and travelled down the via Egnatia without encountering too many problems.⁸⁷

⁸¹ «Storia dei paesi balcanici dalle origini ai giorni nostri» / Edgar Hösch. – Turin: Sellerio, 2005. – Scil. pg. 55-57.

⁸² In terms of the size of armies transported by ship, approximately 50,000 men and 7,000 horsemen were cited by Agostino Pertusi in the debate which followed his presentation (quoted previously) during the XI Settimana di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (ibidem, p. 175-176). What may be clearly inferred here is that none of the Repubbliche Mariane were ready to take on such a challenge in 1096.

⁸³ I checked the following sources: *Historia expeditionis Hierosolymitanae* / Albericus Aquensis (PL 166), *Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis* / Guillelmus Tyrensis (PL 201), *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem* / Raimondus de Agiles (PL 155), *Historia Hierosolimitana* / Robertus Sancti Remigii (PL 155), *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere* / Petrus Tudebodus sacerdos Suriacensis (PL 155), *Historia Hierosolymitana* / Fulcherius Carnotensis (PL 155), *De Ludovici VII Francorum regis cognomento juniores profectio in Orientem cui ipse interfuit* / Odo de Deogilo (PL 185), *Historia ecclesiastica* / Ordericus Vitalis (PL 188), *Pantheon* / Godefridus Viterbensis (PL 198), *Historia Hierosolymitana* / Baldricus Dolensis (PL 166), *Liber IV (g)* / Petrus Diaconus (PL 173), *Chronicon* / Helinardus Frigidi Montis (PL 212), *Chronicon* / Sicardus Cremonensis (PL 213), *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regi Ricardi* / auctore Ricardo, canonico Sanctae Trinitatis Londoniensis (edited by William Stubbs in *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I. Volume I*. – Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint, 1964 – *Rerum Britannicarum Scriptores*).

⁸⁴ Albericus Aquensis, cit. Chapter VII: “silvas Bulgarorum per octo dies exsuperans, ad civitatem ditissimam, quae vocatur **Nicz** in medio Bulgarorum regno secessit.” Ibidem, Cap. IX : “per silvers et montana ac deserta loca”. Ibidem, Chapter XIII: “per opacum et spatiosum nemus, pars per abrupta montium, pars per deserta loca dispersi” and “per montes et silvas ac loca deserta” and furthermore “minime alimenta in locis desertis reperire aut investigare potuerunt”.

⁸⁵ Guillelmus Tyrensis, cit. Chapter IV: “nemora deserta et invia, et alimentis carentia”.

⁸⁶ Raimondus de Agiles, cit. Chapter I: “**Sclavonia** etenim est tellus deserta, et invia et montuosa, ubi nec feras nec volucres per tres hebdomadas vidimus. Incolae regionis adeo agrestes et rudes sunt ut nec commercium nobis, nec ducatum praebere voluerint, sed fugientes de vicis et castellis suis, debiles, anus, pauperes et infirmos, qui a longe prae infirmitate sua sequebantur exercitum, ac si multum nocuissent, ut pecora trucidabant, nec facile nostris militibus erat latrones inermes, locorum scientes, per abrupta montium et condensa silvarum persequi, sed assidue eos sustinebant; nec pugnare valentes, nec sine pugna esse poterant. ”

⁸⁷ “Cumque per tres dies vento deficiente in fluctibus altis detineremur, in quarto die juxta **urbem Duratum**, quasi decem milliariis interstantibus, portui sani applicuimus. Duo tamen portus classem nostram susceperunt. Tunc autem quidem iter siccum laetabundi resumpsimus, et ante urbem praefatam transivimus. Itaque Bulgarorum regiones, per montium praerupta, et loca satis deserta perreximus. **Daemonis ad flumen** rapidum tunc venimus omnes... Tunc juxta ripam castra nostra metati sunt, et ubi nocte una pausavimus. Montes vasti nobis undique praeerant, in quibus nemo incola parebat. Mane autem aurora clarescente, classicis sonantibus, iter nostrum arripuimus conscendendo **montem**, quem **Bagulatum** nuncupant. Postea, montanis postpositis urbibusque **Lucretia**, **Botella**, **Bofinat**, **Stella**, pervenimus ad **flumen**, quod vocatur **Bardarium**. Et quod antea nisi navigio transiri solitum erat, opitulante Deo, qui suis semper ubique praesens subvenit, laetanter vadando transmeavimus. Quo transitu, sequenti die **ante urbem Thessalonicam**, bonis omnibus

The crusade of 1147 was also comprised of two main waves: the first of Germans belonging to Conrad II, and the second of crusaders belonging to Louis VII of France. Both travelled down the *via Diagonalis*.⁸⁸ In this case as well, the locals and crusaders reciprocally denounced cruelties and betrayals. The most worrying conflict at the time took place in **Adrianople** and was partly triggered by uncontrolled elements under Byzantium's pay. Nevertheless, drunkenness and the inability to communicate played a much more decisive role. The agreement which followed with the Basileus Manuel I Komnenos provided permission to travel in Asia Minor.

The **knights-hospitalier orders** often played an active and crucial role during these overland journeys⁸⁹. They seem to stand out in this case by their absence, at least in the historical documentation available in western languages, with the exception of a few archaeological discoveries described on the internet on non-scientific websites.⁹⁰ As far as I am aware, mention of the capillarity of their settlements and the control the Templars and the hospitaliers had over roads in the west appear to be missing.⁹¹

The Order of the Knights Templar owned a province in the northern part of the Balkans peninsula - Hungary - until 1170.⁹² The episode involving Pope Gregory IX, Colman of Ruthenia and the Duke of Slavonia as well as various religious and hospitalier orders (the Cistercians and the Templars as well as the Knights Hospitaller, the monks of the Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus, the Hospital of Saint Samson in Constantinople and the Order of the Teutonic Knights, who were expelled from the lands of the Borza, without the possibility of return, in 1225) and the attempt made by him to obtain

abundantem, tentoria tetendimus nostra. Mora autem per quatuor dies ibi facta, deinde Macedonia transeuntes, per vallem **Philippensium**, et per **Crisopolim**, atque **Christopolim**, **Messinopolim**, **Macram**, **Trajanopolim**, **Neapolim** et **Panados**, **Rodosto** et **Eracleam**, **Salumbriam** et **Naturam**, **Constantinopolim** pervenimus. Ante quam urbem tentoriis nostris extensis, per quatuordecim dies lassitudinem nostram alleviavimus..." Historia Hierosolymitana / Fulcherius Carnotensis.

⁸⁸ "Deinde Bogaria in ingressu castrum attollit quod **Bellagrava** dicitur Bogarensis, respectu cuiusdam quae in Hungaria est, ejusdem nominis civitatis. Inde ad unam dietam interposito quodam fluvio, **Brundusium** civitatem pauperulam. Quod de illa superest, ut ita dixerim, pratum est nemorosum, vel nemus pabulosum. Bonis abundat quae sponte nascuntur, et caeteris est habilis, si colonos haberet. Non plana jacet, nec montibus asperatur, sed inter colles vineis et segetibus habiles, rivis et fontibus lucidissimis irrigatur. Caret fluviis, sed usque Constantinopolim exinde nobis navibus opus fuit. Haec ad quintam dietam, primam sed modicam, ex hoc parte Graeciae civitatem Nit ostendit. **Nit**, **Hesternit**, **Philippopolis**, **Andrinopolis** civitates sunt, quatuor dictis ab invicem dissidentes, et ab ultima usque Constantinopolim sunt quinque. Quae interjacent plana sunt, villis et castellis, omnibusque bonis redundantia. Dextra laevaue montes sunt, tam prope ut videantur, et tam longe ut lata, dives et jucunda planities includatur. Hactenus haec." Odo de Deogilo, cit.

⁸⁹ The Grand Master of the Knights Templar Evrard des Barres was one of the abassadors who was sent to bargain for the passage of French crusaders with the Basileus Manuel I Komnenos. Cfr. «I Templari: un ordine cavalleresco cristiano nel medioevo» / Alain Demurger. – Milan: Garzanti, 2006. – Scil. pg. 201.

⁹⁰ "Misteriosi ritrovamenti accreditano l'ipotesi di una presenza dei Cavalieri Templari nel Medio Evo in Bulgaria, durante il periodo delle Crociate cristiane. L'attenzione di studiosi, archeologi e curiosi è rivolta alla scoperta di una antica necropoli rinvenuta vicino al Danubio. "Dispongo di prove documentali della presenza di Cavalieri Templari nelle terre bulgare nel Medioevo, che con ogni probabilità saranno convalidate anche dai reperti archeologici", ha detto all'ANSA il professor Nikolay Ovcharov, il noto archeologo bulgaro che il 20-23 aprile scorsi ha fatto un primo sopralluogo nella necropoli nei pressi del paese di Nissovo, vicino al porto di Ruse sul Danubio, dove comincerà gli scavi in grande stile nell'estate del 2008. A un primo esame si tratterebbe di un cimitero di Templari del XIII-XIV secolo mai esplorato finora ma palesemente "visitato" dai tombaroli. Presenta una cinquantina di croci di pietra alte fino a due metri e di circa una tonnellata di peso ciascuna, che probabilmente sovrastano le rispettive lapidi delle tombe, rimaste sotto terra. Al centro delle croci si vede inciso un cerchio con dentro la caratteristica croce dei Cavalieri Templari. "Non abbiamo trovato iscrizioni sulle croci di pietra ma su alcune abbiamo identificato strani e sconosciuti simboli che dobbiamo studiare", ha aggiunto Ovcharov. Nella necropoli ci sarebbero un'altra trentina di croci di pietra cadute e rimaste interrato. La sua equipe ha già accertato - confrontando manoscritti medievali bulgari, francesi e ungheresi - il fatto storico della presenza dei Templari nella Bulgaria settentrionale. (...)." Source: ANSA, Author: Atanas Tsenov from the website www.bulgaria-italia.com.

⁹¹ I saw an advertisement for a volume entitled «The Crusades and the Military Orders expanding the Frontiers of Medieval Latin Christianity» on the internet. It was edited by Zsolt Hunyadi and József Laszlosvzky and included a comprehensive section dedicated to "The Military Orders in Central and East-Central Europe" as well as contributions from Karl Borchardt, Balász Stossek, Zsolt Hunyadi, Anthony Luttrell, Neven Budak, Libor Jan, József Laszlosvzky, Martin Wihoda. However, looking at the titles of the papers, the book does not appear to discuss areas south of the Danube or, in any case, areas connected to the *via Diagonalis*.

⁹² "La leggenda templare e la realtà storica" / Marco Tangheroni. – In: AA.VV. «I Templari. Una vita tra riti cavallereschi e fedeltà alla chiesa»: Conference Papers "I Templari e san Bernardo di Chiaravalle": Certosa di Firenze, 23-24 October 1992 / edited by Goffredo Viti. - Florence: Certosa di Firenze, 1995. – Scil. pg. 131.

certain goods which had been unjustly sequestrated is well known. Mediation for the restitution was entrusted to abbot Czikádor from the diocese of Pécs.⁹³

The Grand Master of the Knights Templar of the Kingdom of Hungary granted the Cistercians of Toplica (diocese of Zagreb) lands in Senj in Dalmatia *ad domum edificandam* and signed an agreement to reciprocally discourage the escape of members from one order to the other.⁹⁴

Very few, late sightings of the Knights in the southern Balkans give them the appearance of being **mercenaries** hired by the Emperors to fight the Turks,⁹⁵ who were in retreat by then.⁹⁶

8. Temporary conclusions.

I made a conscious choice to base my research on larger themes in spite of losing the advantage of sequencing events. This is because each issue has specialists which are more valid and prepared than me. I hope that my inadequate recklessness will inspire them to make a contribution and to widen the horizon - of which we have but a glimpse now - with the final aim of confirming, or perhaps negating, the continuity of overland Balkan routes in time.

The summary at the beginning of my paper contains the presentation I gave at the Conference and explains the non-scientific reasons behind my research. Specialists will surely understand why I wanted explore a topic which, because of my lack of knowledge of Balkan languages, should have been off limits for me and I hope that they will be indulgent.

The Italian journalist Massimo Mucchetti⁹⁷ wrote that the European Union was born of the concept that where goods transited soldiers would not. We have seen that goods, pilgrims and soldiers all travelled on the via Diagonalis and the via Egnatia, but not all at the same time.

Let us make sure that from now on these roads will once again see increasing numbers of goods and pilgrims.

Fabrizio VANNI
Centro Studi Romei <Firenze>
www.centrostudiromei.eu
fabriziovanni@alice.it

⁹³ Cfr. “Per i rapporti tra templari e cistercensi. Orientamenti e indirizzi di ricerca” / Francesco Tommasi. – In: AA.VV. «I Templari. Una vita tra riti cavallereschi e fedeltà alla chiesa» cit. – Scil., pg. 232-233 and notes.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, pg. 237 and note 29; pg. 268 and note 141.

⁹⁵ The development of medieval chivalry: ill caso di Firenze attraverso i riti cavallereschi / Lucia Ricciardi. – In: AA.VV. «I Templari. Una vita tra riti cavallereschi e fedeltà alla chiesa» cit. – Scil. pg. 155 note 19.

⁹⁶ Roger de Flor was a Templar who fought against the Turks in the name of the Basileus Andronikos II. He died during a surprise attack on Adrianople in 1305 launched by the son of the Basileus. Cfr. «I Templari: un ordine cavalleresco cristiano nel medioevo» / Alain Demurger, cit. – Scil. pg. 344.

⁹⁷ From the column, “A conti fatti” in «Corriere della Sera» Sunday, 29 July 2007, pg.26.