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TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



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Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
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THE SARACEN RAID OF ROME IN 846: AN EXAMPLE OF MARITIME *GHAZW*

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INTRODUCTION

Ultiores misit Deus paganos – ‘God sent the avenging pagans’ – was the Christian explanation for the Saracen attack of Rome, as is found in *Liber Pontificalis*.¹ The church was corrupt and God enacted his revenge through the hands of the Saracens. Although the term “Sack of Rome” is often used to describe the Saracen attack on the city in 846, this is actually slightly misleading, as the assault was not directed against the city of Rome itself, but against its two wealthy churches, the Basilicas of St Peter and St Paul. The pillage must be understood in the larger context of Arab maritime raiding expeditions that occurred in the Early Middle Ages, and it serves as an excellent example of the type of raiding warfare, *ghazw*, of which the Arabs had a long history.

Next, we must briefly study the concept of the raid itself. The Arabic term for it is *ghazw* (غزو), and the term has become widely used in many European languages; *razzia* (French), *razzia* (Italian), *razia* (Portuguese), *ràtzia* (Catalan), *Razzia* (German), *razzia* (Swedish), and *ratsia* (Finnish), to name a few. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* defines the term *ghazw* as an “expedition, usually of limited scope, conducted with the aim of gaining plunder”.² *Ghazw* itself was an ancient Bedouin institution that was established well before Islam. Camel raiding amongst the Bedouin tribes was an important means for the Bedouins to gain camels and maintain their camel herds, a necessity for desert living. Bedouins also raided sedentary peoples who lived on the desert fringes in order to gain booty and economic wealth.³ Therefore, nomadic raiding was well known among the peoples residing next to the desert sands, such as the Romans. For example, in the *Life of*

1 *LP* Sergius II 43: [...] *propterea placuit Deo ut tantum opprobrium Ecclesia sua non sustineret, et quod neglexerunt christiani emendare, ultores misit Deus paganos.*

2 Johnstone 1991: 1055.

3 Sweet 1965: 1140, 1146–1147.

Crassus, Plutarch (d. 120) refers to the desert nomads as robbers,⁴ and Ammianus Marcellinus (d. after 391) describes the Arabic habit of raiding by comparing the Arabs to birds of prey, which swiftly snatch their target and flee immediately.⁵

The raids were usually well planned in advance, with the use of spies or scouts, and then executed systematically. The raid of Badr launched by the Prophet Muḥammad in 624 is a good example. When Muḥammad learned that there was a rich Meccan caravan returning from Syria, he wanted to deliver a severe blow to the Meccans and gain booty. He ordered his companions to scout the caravan in advance in order to discover the number of men accompanying it and what goods it carried.⁶ Once the reconnaissance mission was conducted and information was received, it was finally time to commence the ambush of the caravan. The trip to the battleground was usually covered on camels, which were generally ridden, like in Badr, by two to four men sharing every camel.⁷ The attacks were then conducted on foot or mounted on horses. Therefore, the camels' purpose was mainly to carry the men to the battle and let the horses rest.

The Saracen raids in the Mediterranean followed the old patterns of desert raiding, as their purpose was to gain spoils and prisoners, who were either sold into slavery or ransomed. The biggest difference was in the method of transportation. In Arabic poetry, camels were known as the “ship of the desert”,⁸ but for oversea raiding the marauders had to use what I would like to call the “camel of the sea” – the ship. Therefore, it seems that the institution remained the same despite the change in means and location – from desert to sea. In the case of the Saracen raid of Rome, the aggressors never managed to breach the city and, seemingly, that was not even their intention, as the main targets, the churches, were outside the city walls. The raiders simply wanted to take their spoils without endangering their own lives; thus there was no reason to attack the city itself. Therefore, the attack was not as destructive as the earlier sacks, which the city had faced some hundreds of years before. Even so, Rome did not

4 Plutarch, *Life of Crassus* 22.3. *τίς σε δαίμων πονηρός, ὃ κάκιστε ἀνθρώπων, ἠγαγεπρός ἡμᾶς; τίσι δὲ φαρμάκοις ἢ γοητείας ἐπεισας Κράσσον εἰς ἐρημίαν ἀχανῆ καὶ βύθιον ἐκχέαντα τὴν στρατιανόδεν' εἰν ὁδοὺς Νομάδι ληστάρχη μᾶλλον ἢ Ρωμαίων ἀντο-κράτορι προσηκούσας.* Here, *Νομάδι*, refers to Arab Bedouins instead of Numidians.

5 Ammianus 14.4. *Saraceni tamen nec amici nobis umquam nec hostes optandi ultro citroque discursantes, quidquid inveniri poterat, momento temporis parvi vastabant milvorum rapacium similes, qui, si praedam dispexerint celsius, volatu rapiunt celeri ac, si impetraverint, non immorantur.*

6 al-Wāqidi 19. وبعث رسول الله صل الله عليه وسلم طلحة بن عبيد الله وسعيد بن زيد، قبل خروجه من المدينة بعشر ليال، يتحسسان خبر العير... فرقع طلحة وسعيد على نثر من الارض، فنظرا الى القوم، والى ما تحمل العير.

7 al-Wāqidi 25. خرجنا الى بدر مع رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ومعنا سبعون بعيرا، فكانوا يتعاقبون: الثلاثة. العريضة، والاثنان، على بعير.

8 Agius 2008: 269–270.

survive without damage, the greatest of which was perhaps more mental than physical. The Romans and their Frankish allies did not expect such an outrageous attack on the city.

My intention is to scrutinize the primary sources and compare their diverging narratives in order to trace the origin of the attackers and to understand the nature of the raid and its results. This is crucial; otherwise it is impossible to understand the expedition en bloc. By doing so, I am able to describe how Arabian maritime *ghazw* warfare worked in this case of the raid of Rome, and we can extend this to an enhanced overall understanding of Saracen naval operations in the Mediterranean.

THE SARACENS' ENTRANCE INTO THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

After the expansion of the Islamic realm, which spread rapidly to the east and to the west in the century following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632, the Arabic Islamic conquests decelerated in the eighth century and warfare transformed into endemic raiding. At first, the new religious power did not present any direct threats to the Christian central Mediterranean, Italy and its nearby islands, apart from a few raids in the seventh century. The first raid of Sicily has been generally dated to year 652, but according to new research this seems to be a misinterpretation of the sources, and thus the first Arab attack more likely would have been in the year 667.⁹ After the Arabs had established themselves in the lands of North Africa at the beginning of the eighth century, their raids became more common throughout Italy and its neighboring major islands, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica.¹⁰ The North Africans were not the only ones responsible for raiding, but their brothers in arms from Andalusia also plundered the islands and especially the southern coast of the Frankish kingdom.¹¹ The importance of these raids lies in the fact that the central Mediterranean islands provided an excellent source for booty. Later, when some of the islands were taken by the Muslims, they served as safe havens and berths for launching attacks even further, to the mainland of Europe. For navigational reasons, it was crucial to control major islands in the Mediterranean so that the fleets could have moorages in the case of bad weather, as well as places to repair vessels and refill provisions. Thus, for example, the Balearics, Sicily, and Crete functioned as key points for

9 Woods 2003: 262–263; Stratos 1976: 63–73.

10 Ahmad 1975: 2–4. For example, a series of looting expeditions were executed in the years 704, 710, 727, 729, 730, 732, 733, 734, 735, 740, and 753.

11 Sénac 2002: 79–81.

crossing the sea and controlling maritime routes and, therefore, their possession drastically extended the operational sphere of navies.¹²

North African Muslims, under the Aghlabid dynasty, began their conquest of Sicily in June 827, and after years of arduous fighting they achieved a firmer grip on the island by capturing Palermo with the aid of the Spanish Muslims in 831.¹³ Capturing the whole island was not an easy task due to the fierce resistance of the Byzantines, and the struggle over Sicily continued until 902 when Aghlabids invaded the last Byzantine strongholds.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the island's conquest took around seventy-five years to complete, it did not hinder further Islamic attacks on the Italian mainland. Brindisi was sacked in 838 and Bari in 840–841.¹⁵ The island of Ischia, which lies in the vicinity of Naples, was looted before the beginning of the conquest of Sicily in 812, and Saracens were hired as mercenaries by the Neapolitans themselves in 835.¹⁶ They were slowly making their progress to the mainland.

COMPARISON OF THE ITALIAN AND FRANKISH SOURCES

Unfortunately, no Greek or Arabic sources are known concerning the raid and, therefore, we must rely on Latin writings, such as *gesta*, *annales*, and *chronica*.¹⁷ In general, the main purpose of *gesta* was to inform a reader about the acts and deeds accomplished by the featured people, in chronological and biographical form. *Annales*, on the other hand, usually consisted of dry and short regional facts written year by year. The two *chronica* which I have used are regional chronicles covering local information arranged in chronological order.¹⁸

I have categorized the Latin sources into two different groups. Group A consists of sources such as *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*), *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis* (*CBC*), *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* (*CMC*), and *Iohannis gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum* (*GEN*). All of these were written in Italy and the first two were written soon after the Saracen raid of Rome. *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* was written at the end of the eleventh century by Leo Marsicanus who heavily used the *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis* as his source. John, the author of a certain part of *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum*, wrote a few decades after the actual

12 Pryor 1988: 91–94.

13 Ahmad 1975: 7–10.

14 Ahmad 1975: 17; Amari 1858: 78–84.

15 Kreutz 1991: 20, 25.

16 *MGH Epist.* III, letter 6, 96–97.

17 Traini 1995: 612.

18 van Caenegem 1978: 34, 30, 22.

raid, but he might have had a chance to question people who had met some of the looters.

Group B contains three Frankish yearbooks, *Annales Bertiniani* (AB), *Annales Fuldenses* (AF), and *Annales Xantenses* (AX). Even though their data was recorded quite soon after the raid, their narratives appear superficial as they only report the incident briefly and not very accurately compared to the Group A sources. Most problematic is that they were written far from the actual location of events and they do not reveal the sources of their information. Thus, there is a significant possibility that information was distorted before it reached the monasteries where the annals were written. However, it must be remembered that these annals were products of regional history and therefore their interest does not lie in the accurate recording of faraway events; let us read their accounts *cum grano salis*. Even so, it is curious that they mention the raid of Rome and echo how the Franks saw the incident. In general, the Group A sources are very detailed compared to the Group B sources, and thus seem more reliable.¹⁹

In researching the raid of Rome, I did not find any instances in which authors wanted to make a real distinction between ethnicities (e.g. between Berbers and Arabs), or between religions, except for pointing out that they were not Christian. The writers' intentions seem to have been purely to categorize the attackers as a group of "infidels" and "others from elsewhere", and therefore it was unimportant to record their exact origins or belief system. The most important thing was, rather, to relate what affected the authors themselves or happened in the territory in which they were living. Thus, they tended to use generic terms like *saraceni* or *hagareni* to label their adversaries from the East or the South. In the Middle Ages, these terms had biblical connotations, as it was thought that the Saracens were derived from Sara and Hagar. Another term, *ishmaelitae*, from Ismael, was also in use, but I do not find it in the cited sources.²⁰ In addition, I find that the Group B uses the term *mauri*. According to Pierre Guichard, the term is mostly used in Frankish sources to refer to someone of Berber origins or from the Maghreb.²¹ However, if this statement generally applies to the Frankish sources (Group B), it does not apply to the Italian sources (Group A), as I have mentioned before. Therefore, in this case, we should treat the Frankish sources' terms *mauri* and *saraceni* as synonymous. The Italian authors of Group A most often use the terms *saraceni*, *hagareni* or *Africani*,²² and in some instances they

19 See the Appendix for a comparison of the sources.

20 Shahid 1997: 27–28.

21 Guichard 1983: 68.

22 A reference to the old Roman province of *Africa Proconsularis*.

refer to marauders as Sons of Satan or Belial, *Satane filii*,²³ *Belial filii*,²⁴ or adversaries of God, *Deo contrarii*.²⁵

THE ORIGINS OF THE ATTACKERS

The sources provide different accounts of the origins of the Saracens who raided Rome. For example, the Papal chronicle (*LP*) and the chronicle of Montecassino (*CMC*) both mention that the Saracens originally came from *Africa*. However, *Liber Pontificalis* also says that they raided Corsica before storming the city of Rome.²⁶ The mention of Corsica is interesting, as the island went through a series of attacks, especially by the *mauri* of the Umayyad Spain, during the ninth century.²⁷ The island played an important role in the battle to control the Tyrrhenian Sea, and therefore it was used as a base for launching attacks to Liguria and Tuscany from the early ninth century.²⁸

The annals of Fulda claim that the looters were Moors, *mauri*,²⁹ whereas the annals of Xanten assert that they were either Saracens or Moors, who had earlier encamped in Beneventum.³⁰ The term *mauri* is problematic, as it usually refers to the old Roman province of *Mauretania* and not to the province of *Africa*.³¹ The sources of Group B do not clearly state where the marauders were from; they simply refer to them as *mauri*, which would indicate Andalusia and the Maghreb. *Mauri* could also be a synonym for *saraceni*, as the writers of the Group B sources were not interested in precise documentation of the foreign origins of the raiders but rather used generic terms. It is curious that no Italian source of Group A makes any reference to *mauri*.

23 *LP* Leo IV 77.

24 *LP* Leo IV 51; 2. Cor. 6:15. Belial or Beliar is an adversary or contrast to God.

25 *LP* Leo IV 32.

26 *LP* Leo IV 7. *Omnnes [Saraceni] enim cum vellent, iniquitatis ac depredationis scelere perpetrato, ad Africanam qua venerant regionem revertere; LP* Sergius II 44. *Adelvertus comes...tutor Corsicanae insulae misit epistolam Romae, continentem quod multitudo gentis Sarracenorum ad XI milia properantes venirent cum navibus LXXIII [...] quod se dicerent Romam properare; CMC* 76. *Ingens Sarracenorum multitudo ab Africa classe Romam devecta, ecclesias sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli exintegro depredati sunt.*

27 Picard 1997: 10–11; Sénac 2006: 37–39; Arrighi & Jehasse 2008: 141.

28 Istria 2005: 67.

29 *AF* 36. *His temporibus Mauri Romam cum exercitu venientes, cum non possent urbem inrumpere, ecclesiam sancti Petri vastaverunt.*

30 *AX* 15–16. *Eodem tempore, quod sine grandi merore nulli dicandum vel audiendum est, mater cunctarum ecclesiarum, basilica sancti Petri apostoli, a Mauris vel a Sarracenis, qui iam pridem Beneventaniam consederant, capta atque predata est, et omnes Christianos, quos foris Romam reppererunt, intus et foris eiusdem aecclesiae occiderunt.*

31 Guichard 1983: 68.

The Neapolitan bishop chronicle says that Saracens came to the islands of Pontiae, nowadays Ponza, to menace Italy.³² The supreme commander of the army of Naples, Sergius, decided to move against the Saracens of Ponza together with his allies from Amalfi, Gaeta, and Sorrento. The coalition sailed against the Saracens, defeated them, and quickly moved to the island of Licosa,³³ which was swarming with the enemy, and finally expelled the Saracens and freed the island. Perhaps aggravated due to losses of ground and military bases, the Saracens returned with a large force, capturing the valuable natural harbor of Misenum close to Naples.³⁴ According to the chronicle of Naples, occupiers did not come straight from Africa but from Panormus, modern Palermo. The town was captured by African Aghlabids with the help of Andalusian Muslims in 831. The *gesta* of Naples states that the stronghold of Misenum was the place from whence the Saracen attackers set sail for Rome in 846.³⁵ The problem with the Neapolitan chronicle lies in the fact that it was written somewhat later than the actual sack of Rome, that is, between the ninth and tenth centuries. While it is plausible that its author had a chance to question people who had witnessed these events, it is also possible that someone had recalled incidents incorrectly. However, in general, the chronicle links the sack of Rome to the Saracens of Sicily.

Consequently, we can point to three different possible origins for the marauders of Rome: 1) they came from the West, i.e. Umayyad Spain or modern Morocco; 2) they originally came from *Africa*, first devastating Corsica; 3) they came from Sicily and made their base at Misenum, but they were originally of African origin as the invaders of Sicily were mainly Aghlabids from modern Tunisia. The first assumption is problematic because the Frankish sources (Group B) are the only ones to mention *mauri*, but they do not locate their place of departure. As noted earlier, the Franks were probably using *mauri* as a synonym for *saraceni*, and we should thus rule out this option. As for the two latter assumptions, it is hard to draw any conclusion from them concerning whether the marauders came directly from Africa or Sicily. All in all, the information delivered by the Italian Group A sources appears more reliable because of their detailed and precise documentation. Therefore, I more firmly trust their account of the origin of the attackers, despite the fact that we still cannot draw a clear conclusion about whether they were from Sicily or Africa from the sources.

32 GEN 60. *Multorum naves Saracenorum latrocinari per Italiam cupientem Pontias devenerunt.*

33 Licosa is a small island situated around 25–30 km to the south from Salerno.

34 Misenum was a major naval base for the Western Roman navy before its relocation to Ravenna.

35 GEN 60. *Propterea magnus exercitus Panormitanorum adveniens, castellum Misematium comprehendit. Ac inde Africani in forti brachio omnem hanc regionem devastare cupientes, Romam supeverunt.*

THE SARACENS IN OSTIA AND PORTUS

Liber Pontificalis says that Count Adelvertus was the administrator of Corsica when the Saracens arrived, and he was the one to alert Rome of their movement. Somehow, Adelvertus had acquired information that the Saracens were planning an attack on Rome and he warned that an imminent danger was facing the city. The Papal Chronicle informs us that the army of Saracens was formidable, consisting of 11,000 men, 500 horses, and 73 ships.³⁶ This means that, on average, one ship would have had 158 men or horses in it, a great number indeed.

The Arabs were eventually aware of Byzantine naval warfare, and even translated the naval warfare guide of the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (886–912).³⁷ However, the translation was conducted in the fourteenth century, and therefore we cannot make strong assumptions about earlier Arabic knowledge. Even though not much is known about the early Arabic warships in the Mediterranean, they most probably used captured enemy vessels and additionally built their own ships based on them. In the East, Arabs used Byzantine warships called *δρόμων*, or a generic Arabic term, *shīnī*.³⁸ *Dromon* itself does not refer to a standard-sized ship but it is a general term for variously sized military vessels, and depending on the type it carried a combined crew and marines of one hundred to three hundred men. Classical warships were meant for sinking enemy ships by ramming, but in Byzantine times this tactic had changed to immobilizing enemy ships with the ram and capturing the ship using the beak.³⁹ Another Byzantine warship type was the monoreme galley, *chelandion* (in Greek *χελάνδιον*, in Arabic *shalandī*),⁴⁰ the main purpose of which was reconnaissance, and its crew was around seventy to eighty persons.⁴¹ Considering the *ghazw* warfare, an agile galley seems to be more appropriate for quick missions like raiding.⁴² However, the vessel terms of the eighth and ninth centuries are interchangeable and therefore *dromon* might also mean a monoreme galley of fifty oars.⁴³ My intention is not to argue about the terms themselves, because the sources do not reveal any specific information about the ship types, but more about the amount of crew and soldiers they could

36 *LP* Sergius II 44. [...] *gentis Sarracenorum ad XI milia properantes venirent cum navibus LXXIII, ubi inessent equi D.*

37 Christides 1984a: 139.

38 Pryor 1988: 62; Agius 2008: 334.

39 Christides 1984b: 44.

40 Agius 2008: 334–338.

41 Dolley 1948: 48–53.

42 Bruun 1997: 1286–1288. For comparison, in the same period of time Vikings used nimble longboats that had 40–70 seamen for their similar hit and run strikes.

43 Pryor & Jeffreys 2006: 173.

carry and the usability of the ships for raiding warfare. Thus, when considering the Saracen army and the information given by the Papal Chronicle, it appears plausible that the author doubled the size of the Saracen army; if it were half that size, around 5,500 soldiers and 250 horses, it would have fit well into a navy of seventy to eighty smaller agile galleys.

The Papal Chronicle tells that Adelvertus sent his letter on the 10th of August in 846, and it probably reached Rome a few days later. The Romans responded indifferently, as they were seemingly used to false alarms. It is also possible that the Romans did not believe that the Saracens would have dared to launch an attack against Rome. Nonetheless, Roman nobles gathered for a meeting and they decided to inform their neighbors, vassals, and allies about the possible Saracen threat. The warning was sent in the event that the Saracen army should actually arrive. The response among the neighbours was apparently the same as in Rome, and only few answered the call for help.⁴⁴

After less than two weeks, on Monday, the 23rd of August, the Saracen navy came ashore near the river Tiber close to Ostia, the old harbor town of Rome. The Saracens marched in haste to Ostia and captured it without resistance, for its citizens had deserted the settlement after blockading and barricading the town. Seemingly, the Saracen arrival did not take the Ostians by great surprise as they had had time to prepare barricades and take their leave. Most probably they had received the letter of Adelvertus and were prepared for what might be coming. Yet it is curious that Ostia was abandoned immediately without resistance. The port-town should not have been an easy prey if it had been defended by a fighting unit, because it had remnants of walls from the Aurelian period⁴⁵ and it had been heavily fortified not long before the Saracen attack, with high walls, moats and catapult towers built by Pope Gregory IV (828–844). In addition, it is clearly stated in *Liber Pontificalis* that Gregory's fortifications were made against the rising Saracen threat. According to the "Life of Gregory IV", "God's hated people", the Hagarenes, *Deo odibilis Aggarenorum gens*, had been raiding the nearby islands and neighborhoods, which was giving much distress to the inhabitants of Portus and Ostia.⁴⁶ However, there are no mentions of fighting in

44 LP Sergius II 44. *Quod leviter et quasi parvipedentes susceperunt, propter mutabilem et inefficacem praedictorum potestatem, quoniam et apud omnes tam inopinata res incredibile posse arbitrabantur.*

45 Christie 2006: 322, 398.

46 LP Gregorius IV 38–39. [...] *Deo odibilis Aggarenorum gens a finibus suis consurgens pene omnes insulas et omnium regiones terrarium circuiens, depraedationes hominum et locorum desolations atrociter faciebat et usque actenus facere nullatenus cessat; [...] praesul magnum habens timorem ne populous a Deo sibi et beat Petro commissus apostolo, qui in Portuensi vel Hostiensem civitatibus habitabant a Sarracenis nefandissimis tribulationis ac depredationis sentirent iacturam, intimo trahens ex corde suspiria, caepit prudenter exquirere quo modo civitate Hosti adiuveret et liberare potuisset [...] quoniam*

Ostia, so it seems that the town was taken without any resistance. Therefore, it is odd that the Romans did not use the fortifications to repel the disembarking attackers but, on the contrary, decided to abandon the whole fortification and move their defenses further back to Rome.

After sacking Ostia, the Saracen force marched against the other Roman port town, called Portus, looted it swiftly, and returned to Ostia.⁴⁷ Word of the Saracen incursion reached Rome possibly even on the same day that the enemy landed, as the distance from Portus and Ostia to Rome is only around twenty kilometers. Romans quickly gathered a defending force consisting of Saxons, Frisians, and a Frankish *schola*, and they sent this contingent to meet the Saracens. The unit was an auxiliary unit of foreigners living in Rome and consisted of pilgrims and merchants, but not of professional soldiers.⁴⁸ The band of foreigners marched close to Ostia on Tuesday and set up camp. The Saracens noticed the camp, and they made a surprise attack on it on Wednesday morning. Failing in the attack and losing some men, the Saracens had to fall back. This was only a small skirmish between an insignificant number of men. Later the Romans decided to send more soldiers to help the foreign unit, and with combined forces they all marched to Portus, only to discover how great the number of the Saracens was; they were thus forced to make a swift retreat. The contingent of Roman soldiers withdrew to the city and left the foreigners to keep an eye on the Saracens.⁴⁹

Apparently, no significant engagements occurred between the two parties at this point, and both seem to have planned their movements carefully. Earlier, I suggested that the size of the Saracen army was highly overestimated by *Liber Pontificalis*. The Roman army, on the other hand, was probably not much larger than that of its enemy. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that Rome was responsible for its own militia defense even though it was nominally under Carolingian

ea quae priori tempore aedificata fuerat, longo quassata senio, tota nunc videtur esse diruta. [...] muris quoque altioribus, portis simul ac serris et cataractibus eam undique permunivit, et super, at inimicos, si evenerit, expugnandos, petrias nobili arte composuit.

47 LP Sergius II 45. *Transacto vero duodecim dierum spatio, die mensibus augusti XXIII, feria II, indict. VIII, pervenerunt ipsi nefandissimi Sarraceni ad littus Romanum, iuxta civitatem quae dicitur Hostia. Et exeuntes venerunt ad praedictam urbem, quam illi habitatores obstruserunt et effugerunt, et caeperunt eam. [...] Pervenientes namque ad civitatem quae vocatur Portus, invenerunt eam ab habitatoribus derelictam; et subreptis inde victualibus et ea quae necessaria habebant, secunda et tertia feria Hostiam revertebantur.*

48 Schieffer 2002: 121–122; Hubert 2002: 197; Saxer 2001: 591–595; Noble 1984: 235–236.

49 LP Sergius II 46. [...] *mitterentur Saxi et Frisones et schola quae dicitur Francorum ad Portum. [...] Cum enim agnoscerent [Romani] illorum [Sarracenorum] multitudinem et suorum paucitatem, visum est eis periculosum illa nocte illic immorari. Recolligentes vero Saxones et Frisones et reliquos, constituerunt ut custodirent et vigilarent civitatem propter praedones, et reversi sunt Romani.*

protection.⁵⁰ When considering Rome during the Early Middle Ages, it is clear that the city had already gone through massive changes from Antiquity and was only a remnant of its past glory. The population of the city was around 30,000 or slightly more in the ninth century, having greatly decreased due to many calamities in Late Antiquity. In the period of the Gothic Wars (4th–6th c.), Rome had around 50,000–60,000 inhabitants but, because of the wars, agriculture suffered and the population decreased.⁵¹ Thus, when calculating only the male population available for military service, we may be dealing with an army of 5,000 to 10,000 men.

THE SARACENS MARCH AGAINST ROME

Early the morning of Thursday, the 26th of August, the Saracens took the foreigners' camp by surprise and scattered them, pursuing them all the way to Ponte Galeria, on the northern side of the Tiber. Following the roads of Via Campana and Via Portuensis they marched toward St Peter's Church and waited for the rest of their men to arrive. When all was prepared, the Saracens stormed St Peter's Church on Friday morning and carried off its treasures. In the meantime, the Romans moved their men out of the city and arranged them in the field of Campus Neronis, which is situated between the present-day Vatican and Castel Sant' Angelo. The Papal Chronicle ends here, abruptly, and leaves the armies' final encounters a mystery.⁵² We can only assume from other sources that a battle was fought and it either ended in a draw or a Saracen victory. Nothing dramatic could have happened because the Saracen army was not driven from the borders of Rome, nor did the Saracens try to besiege the city or take it by assault. The only thing that is clear is that St Peter's Church was looted and the Saracens left the city, marching south on the road of Via Appia.

Annales Fuldenses mentions that *mauri* came to Rome to sack the city, but failing to do this they decided to sack St Peter's Church instead. The Fuldan Annals also

⁵⁰ Noble 1984: 235, 322–323.

⁵¹ Santangeli Valenzani 2004: 21–24.

⁵² LP Sergius II 47. *In crastina autem feria IIII, cum securi essent praefati custodes et sedentes ut cibum sumerent, irruerunt repente eos Sarraceni et circumdantes occiderunt eos, ut pauci ex eis remansisset. Et insecuti sunt eos qui evaserant usque Galerium. Et iter assumentes navigio pedestres simul et equestres coeperunt Romam festinare. Qui tota die simul cum navibus properantes, diluculo venerunt ad loca ubi constituerant; ibique ex navibus examintes equestres, ecclesiam beati Petri apostolorum principis nefandissimis iniquitatibus preoccupantes invaserunt. Tunc omnes coetus Romanorum sine capite positi, campo qui dicitur Neronis, armatos obviati [...].*

omit the sack of St Paul's Church.⁵³ According to the chronicle of St Benedict, the Saracens killed men and women regardless of their age; the chronicle emphasizes that the Saracens also killed many Saxons.⁵⁴ The reference to the Saxons probably means the foreign unit that had fought the Saracens before the sack of St Peter's Church. *Annales Bertiniani* narrates that the Saracens looted everything they could find, especially emphasizing the desecration of the holy altar of St Peter's Church. Afterwards, the chronicle continues, the Saracens marched around one hundred kilometers to the south of Rome and made their camp on a mountain. We are also told that some men of the raiding party left the group to loot St Paul's, but they were defeated by a Campanian army.⁵⁵ Interestingly, no other author refers to this. However, the Life of Sergius in *Liber Pontificalis* does not explicitly state that the Saracens looted St Paul's. This is mentioned later in the "Life of Leo IV", where it is said that the pope restored the damages that the Saracens had inflicted to the church.⁵⁶ Here, we should follow the narration of *Liber Pontificalis*, as it is probably the eyewitness account of Anastasius Bibliothecarius, a chief librarian in the Papal archives.

How should we consider these accounts of the sack? Did the Saracens actually threaten the city of Rome? Some scholars have proposed that the Saracens tried to attack the city.⁵⁷ I find this proposition unsound because only the Frankish *Annales Fuldenses* references it, and no other source makes a similar claim. We must consider some aspects of the city and the Saracens. First, the Roman city walls were essentially the Aurelian Walls that Emperor Aurelian had built between the years 271 and 275. They went through many reconstructions during the following centuries, the most important of which were by Maxentius at the beginning of the fourth century, by Stilicho between 401 and 403, and by Belisarius in 536. After all of these renovations, the walls were around nineteen kilometers long and nearly twelve meters high, having 381 towers and a moat.⁵⁸ According to written sources, they were repaired again under the Lombard threat

53 AF 36. *His temporibus Mauri Romam cum exercitu venientes, cum non possent urbem inrumperere, ecclesiam sancti Petri vastaverunt.*

54 CBC 16. *His diebus Saraceni egressi Romam, horatorium totum devastaverunt beatissimorum principis apostolorum Petri beatique ecclesiam Pauli multosque ibidem peremerunt Saxones aliosque quam plurimos utriusque sexus et aetatis.*

55 AB 34. [...] *pars autem hostium ecclesiam beati Pauli apostoli adiens, a Campaniensibus oppressa, prorsus intefecta est.*

56 LP Leo IV 13. [...] *post cedem et depraedationem sevae gentis Agarenorum, quam sanctorum apostolorum ecclesiis peregerrunt, ad restauratinem ipsarum cotidie animus praetendebat [...].*

57 Partner 1972: 56.

58 Richmond & DeLaine 2003: 1616.

in the eighth century, and finally under Leo IV's rule after the raid of Rome.⁵⁹ *Liber Pontificalis* gives some indication about the bad condition of the walls before the Saracen attack, as it notes that Pope Leo IV had to rebuild fifteen collapsed towers.⁶⁰ In spite of the fact that the walls were repaired a century before the raid, they were still formidable in their height and strength, and would have been impregnable for an unprepared enemy. Thus, the Saracens would have needed a great number of men and siege machines to storm the ramparts, but nothing seems to suggest that they had prepared for a siege operation. They might have had a considerable number of soldiers, especially if we are to trust the estimate of 11,000 men that the Papal chronicle suggests, but as mentioned before, I find this to be exaggerated. Thus, if we take into account the galleys that the Saracens probably used, I assume that the Saracen force was around 5,000 men. It was a large raiding party, but it still did not pose a major threat to the city. Second, the two churches of great importance, St Peter's and St Paul's, were outside the city walls, making them lucrative and fairly easy prey for looters. Third, it also seems that the Saracens knew exactly what they were looking for, first plundering the two Roman ports, moving quickly to the important churches, and then taking their leave. This is reminiscent of the concept of Arabian raiding warfare, *ghazw*, where one quickly sweeps through enemy territory seizing as much as possible before retiring to shelter.

THE SARACENS LEAVE ROME

The chronicle of Montecassino details the movements of the Saracens after their sack of the two Roman churches: they took Via Appia and followed it to the south. However, nothing is said about what the Saracens did during their long Appian march. After their departure from Rome, the sources first indicate a Saracen presence near Fundi (Fondi), where they pillaged and burned the town. From there they moved approximately twenty kilometers to Caieta (Gaeta) where they set up a camp.⁶¹ The chronicle of St Bertin does not reveal exactly where the Saracens went after the sack of Rome, but it states that they encamped around one hundred and thirty kilometers away, near Caieta. The chronicles of

⁵⁹ Coates-Stephens 1998: 168; Coates-Stephens 1999: 210–211.

⁶⁰ LP Leo IV 38–39. XV *ab ipso solo turres, quas funditus dirutas per circuitum urbis repperit, novis fabricis restaurari praecepit.*

⁶¹ CMC 76–77.

Naples and St Bertin support this by telling of the battle of Caieta,⁶² and the latter also mentions the capture of Fondi.⁶³

According to the narrative of St Bertin, the commanders of the Frankish emperor, Lothar (795–855), followed the Saracens but were defeated.⁶⁴ St Benedict's and Naples's chronicles support this and the former informs us that the exact date of battle was the 10th of November.⁶⁵ *Annales Bertiniani* reports that Lothar's son Louis, the king of Italy, fought against the Saracens himself, and lost.⁶⁶ However, it is not explicitly stated where and when Louis's defeat occurred so, although it might have been at the same battle, we cannot be sure. *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* reports that a Frankish army, *exercitus*, left from Spoleto and followed the Saracens. Nothing is said about the size of the Frankish troops but, if it really was led by the king of Italy, it might have been considerably sized. However, if it was only a unit stationed at a border, it was probably not larger than a few hundred or less than a couple of thousand men, consisting of local militia and a few professional soldiers.⁶⁷

The Frankish and the Saracen armies met somewhere near Caieta, resulting in an infamous defeat of the Franks.⁶⁸ First, the Franks probably marched around one hundred and forty kilometers to Rome, and from there took Via Appia around one hundred and thirty kilometers to the south. Maps reveal that Rome was not surrounded by any highways that circumvented the city; every road literally led to Rome. The fastest route, then, must have been through Rome, and thus the total length of the march must have been around three hundred kilometers. Caesar's armies marched around thirty to thirty-two kilometers per day,⁶⁹ and if the Franks could have marched at the same speed, they would have been in Caieta in ten days. Now, if we consider that the Roman churches were looted

62 GEN 60; CBC 16.

63 CBC 16. *Fundensemque capientes urbem vicinaque depraedantes loca, septembrio quoque mense secus Gaietam castrametati sunt.*

64 AB 34. [Saraceni] *montem centum ab Vrbe milibus munitissimum occupant. Quos quidem ducum Hlotharii minus religiose adorsi atque deleti sunt.* Janet Nelson translates this "Then they [Saracens] took up a position on a mountain 100 miles from the city, an extremely well defended site. But they were mercilessly attacked and killed by some of Lothar's commanders" (Nelson 1991: 63). However, other sources clearly indicate that the Saracens were the ones to win. The chronicler either did not know the outcome of the battle or we need to adjust the translation and play with the word *delere/deleri*: "Lothar's commanders recklessly attacked them, yet, they got themselves annihilated."

65 CBC 16. *Sed superatus a Saracenis quarto nobemrii idus.*

66 AB 34. *Hlodoicus, Hlotharii filius, rex Italiae, cum Saracenis pugnans, victus vix Romam pervenit.*

67 Contamine 1984: 25–27.

68 CMC 77. *Contra quos missus a Spoletio Francorum exercitus, turpiter superatus aufugit; CBC 16. Contra quos pervenit Francorum exercitus, sed superatus a Saracenis quarto nobemrii idus, iniit fugam.*

69 Benario 1986: 360.

in August and the first major battle was fought at the beginning of November, we are dealing with a huge chronological gap. It took a long time for the Franks to gather their men and prepare for a counter-attack. In theory, the Franks of Spoleto could have managed to rush to Rome in time, if they had marched there immediately after receiving the warning of Adelvertus. It is curious that they did not do so, and especially why it took so long to form any resistance. It is well known that the Papacy was under the protection of Frankish kings, but clearly they failed to provide assistance in the times of dire need. When help finally arrived it was too late, and culminated in an utter defeat of the Franks.

CHRONICLE OF NAPLES AND ITS DIFFERING NARRATIVE

Interestingly, the most precise narrative of the combat is made by the chronicle of Naples. It states that the Saracens used their customary ruse and hid themselves in a narrow defile, waited for the right moment, rushed from their cover and stormed the Franks. *Signifer*, the standard bearer of the Franks, was killed immediately, causing the ranks to stagger and morale to collapse. Seemingly, the Frankish commander had marched rashly and his forces were not highly spirited. The defeat might have had something to do with the poor training of the soldiers, which would indicate that they were a militia rather than a real professional army. On the other hand, the loss of morale might have been caused by the loss of the military standard, *banda*. These were holy ensigns to the Franks, and in the similar manner the *bandae* were holy to the Roman legions.⁷⁰ The chronicle of Naples tells how the ambushed and defeated Franks were driven off from the field and pursued to the seashore, where the navies of Naples and Amalfi had just landed. After the battle, it is said, the Saracens rejoiced in their victory and they prepared to assault Caieta. In the meantime, Neapolitan and Amalfian ships withdrew to the harbor of Caieta to defend it, and they repelled the Saracen attack. It also said that the Saracen navy was near the town, but was heavily damaged by a tempest. The Saracens had to fall back to the shore to repair their boats, and they reached an agreement with the Neapolitan commander to set sail for home when the weather would permit. Apparently, the Neapolitans were not eager to take the field against the Saracens and they were content with the agreement, as long as the Saracens would not stay in Italy.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Bachrach 2001: 147–151.

⁷¹ GEN 60. *Hic autem Saraceni solitam molientes stropham, in locis angustis et arduo calle nonnullos audacioses absconderunt. Franci vero ignorantes calliditatem eorum, conabantur viriliter super eos descendere. At illi de latibulo exilientes, irato Deo, primum ipsorum percutierunt signiferum; quo perempto, cunctis terga vertentibus, validissime occidebantur; nisi Caesarius...qui cum navigiis Neapolitanorum et*

Intriguingly, the Neapolitan view of the incidents after the sack of Rome differs from the other sources. For example, it depicts more closely what happened in the battle, telling about the Saracen navy and the failure of the sacking of Caieta. In terms of narrative, the chronicle sounds reliable as it gives the most information about the events, but this information might also be intentional embroidery. It is also possible that the navy witnessed Saracen movements near Caieta, and some of the seamen might have been alive to describe to the author what they had seen. On the other hand, the chronicle discusses the matters that most concerned its author, a Neapolitan writer who was primarily interested in what happened in the sphere of Naples. A large Saracen navy sailing along the Italian coast must have been a menace to the seafaring city, which relied heavily on ships and trade routes. For some reason, the chronicle does not tell what the Saracen army did inland, unlike the sources from Montecassino, which tell that a raiding party was laying waste to the lands of the monastery. The explanation for this may be the firm regionalist approach that is observable in the chronicle of Naples. Perhaps the writer did not see it as important to describe what happened nearby, as it was not critical information to the history of the city. However, the chronicle agrees in at least one thing with the other sources: it also states that the Saracen vessels were thrown into a terrifying storm while sailing home, during which they perished.

SARACENS NEAR MONTECASSINO AND THE MONASTERY CHRONICLES

The chronicles of the cloister of Montecassino portray the Saracen movements in its territory. According to the chronicles, the Saracens chased the remnants of the fleeing Frankish troops all the way to the river Liris (Liri or Garigliano), where they found the Church of St Andrea, which is situated around thirty kilometers from Caieta. Here they burned the buildings and moved on a couple of kilometers to nearby Albianus (Sant' Apollinare), which they looted. If we are to believe the monastery chronicles, the Saracens intended to assault the monastery of Montecassino and steal its treasures. At this point, the narrative changes to a hagiographic praising of St Benedict, who guarded his cloister and its monks by providing divine protection. The weather had been good until the arrival of the

Amalfitanorum venerat, litoreum conflictum cum eis coepisset, nullatenus a persequendo recedebant. [... Saraceni] Caietam urbem capere minabantur. [...Caesarius] cum ratibus suis et Amalphitanorum in portum eiusdem civitatis magis custos quam propugnator devertens [...] illis obsistebat. [...] tempestivam excitavit [Salvator] procellam in puppes tantae superbiae naufragium comminantem. Unde perterriti [Saraceni], a Caesario sibi dari pactionem petierunt, quatenus naves ad terram subducerent acceptaque serenitate ad sua repedarent.

Saracens, and the river Liri was easy to cross by foot. However, suddenly a heavy rain broke, filling the river so quickly that it began to flood its banks and became impossible to cross. The Saracens' plan was nullified; they were infuriated and forced to fall back to their camp in Caieta. There, we are told, they hamstringed their horses and set sail towards home. After this, another hagiographic story is presented. When the Saracen navy was finally nearing home, two men appeared in a boat sailing among the ships, and the amazed Saracens questioned who they were. The two men were of course St Peter and St Benedict, who punished the Saracens for the misconducts inflicted on their lands, raising a terrible tempest that smote the navy asunder.⁷²

SARACENS TAKE THEIR LEAVE FROM ITALY

Most sources, except *Annales Fuldenses* and *Annales Xantenses*, share the similar story of the destruction of the Saracen navy. *Annales Bertiniani*, *Liber Pontificalis*, and the chronicle of Naples remind us in a god-fearing tone that the wreck of the Saracen navy was an act of the Lord,⁷³ but they do not mention the divine intervention of St Benedict. Leaving out the miraculous acts of St Benedict is an interesting point in the other Benedictine chronicles aside from *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* and *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, as this would have been an excellent opportunity to praise their patrons. It is clear that the latter two are closely related, and it is obvious that Leo Marsicanus used *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis* as his source when writing his *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*. Thus, this leaves us pondering how *Annales Bertiniani*, *Annales Fuldenses*, and *Annales Xantenses* acquired their information, because they do not refer to these chronicles of Montecassino and do not follow its agenda, even though Montecassino is the mother of Benedictine monasteries.

72 CBC 18; CMC 77–81. *Quos [Francos] Saraceni instantius persequantes, tandem ad viciniam huius monasterii trans flumen quod Carnellum vocatur applicuerunt ecclesiamque sancti Andree apostoli igne cremantes ac demum ad cellam sancti martyris Christi Apollinaris in loco qui dicitur Albanum pervenientes [...] cenobium omne destruerunt. [...] mane Saraceni surgentes, ad fluvii properant oram, vident eminus quem die preterito sicut diximus pedibus possent transire, vix nunc posse se illius vel ripas attingere. [...] ad sua castra Caietam reversi sunt. [...] debilitatos ac subnervatos equos suos universos dimitunt, et conscensis navibus versus Africam item aggrediuntur. [...] Cumque iam ita proximi patriae essent ut montes vicinos aspicerent [...] unam inter suas huc illucque naviculam discurrentes, in qua duo tantum homines [Petrum et Benedictum] videbantur. Repente igitur valida surgente procella, iam ingens tempestas exorta est, ut universas illorum naves partim inter se collisas, partim in montes et scopulos impulsas, naufragare compulerit.*

73 GEN 60. *Ire [Saraceni] coeperunt, sed pelagi vastitatem sulcantibus excitavit Dominus austrum, quo dispersi atque dimersi; LP Leo IV 7. Ad Africanam qua venerant regionem revertere, vasto maris pelago [...] Deo permittente demersi sunt.*

Some sources say that the whole navy was lost⁷⁴ and some say only a few men managed to survive,⁷⁵ but we are never told where exactly the wreck happened or to what home they were heading. An exception is the “Life of Leo IV”, whose author mentions that he had encountered a narration, *relatio*, that claimed that the Saracens were sailing to Africa.⁷⁶ The two chronicles of Montecassino relate that the navy was so close to home that the seamen could see the mountains.⁷⁷ Reference to the mountains might indicate the vicinity of Apennines or the rugged Sicilian coast. The coastline of *Africa*, modern Tunisia, is plain and level compared to northern Sicily. *Annales Bertiniani* tells that some wrecked crewmen were found on a beach, which might have been an Italian coast, or just an invented detail.⁷⁸ As for visibility at sea, in good weather a thirty-meter-high mound is visible to 11.5 nautical miles (21.3 km), and a 305 m high hill is visible 67.2 km to sea (36.3 nmi).⁷⁹ Panormus, Palermo, is situated in the middle of steep hills and, for example, neighboring Monreale stands 310 m high. So, if the Saracens were sailing to Panormus, they would have seen the mountains from about 70 km away. Another option is that this reference to the mountains was invented to embellish the story.

Apparently the Saracen raiding party did not rush in its departure from Italy. It had arrived in Rome in August 846, but took its leave perhaps in April 847. The date of departure is not certain, but it happened some time after the death of Pope Sergius II on 27 January 847,⁸⁰ and after the coronation of new pope, Leo IV.⁸¹ Some sources say that Leo was crowned immediately following the death of the late pope, but *Liber Pontificalis* proposes that the Papal See was vacant for two months and fifteen days, meaning that Leo IV was promoted on the 10th of April. In any event, it is clear that the Saracens did not want to leave immediately once they had sacked the Roman churches; rather, they were searching for more. Their raiding expedition was well planned and not made on a whim. First, they plundered Ostia and Portus; second, by a quick strike they sacked the

74 CBC 18. *Nullus unquam ex eis penitus remansit, qui ceteris talia nuntiaret; AB 35. Orto repente inevitabili turbine, conlisis in sese navibus, omnes pereunt.*

75 CMC 77–81. [...] *vix aliquanti evadere potuerint, per quos hec ad aliorum notitiam pervenirent.; GEN 60. paucissimi ex eis ad sedes remearunt suas.*

76 LP Leo IV 7.

77 CBC 18. [...] *vicinos cernerent montes [...]; CMC 81. montes vicinos aspicerent.*

78 AB 35. *Quaedam thesaurorum in sinibus defunctorum, quos mare litoribus reiecerat, inventa [...].*

79 McGrail 2001: 99.

80 AB 35. *Sergius Romanus pontifex 6. Kalend. Februarii defungitur.; LP Leo IV 6. [...] his qui obierat pontifex ad sepulturam debitam fuerat deportatus, et ecce omnes a novissimo usque ad primum [...] Leonem venerabilem presbiterum sibi futurum pontificem flagitabant [...].*

81 LP Leo IV 7.

churches; third, they moved swiftly to the south, following Via Appia, looting major cities along it; and finally they encamped at Caieta or somewhere nearby. In Caieta they met their fleet, which most probably carried most of their Roman plunder. From Caieta they made their way to the lands of Montecassino, where they carried out another attack and looting.

Obviously, it took some time to gather booty before returning back home, but it is still curious that they decided to stay for so many months. I would like to put forth the explanation of *mare clausum*. The so called “closed sea” is an excellent description of the Mediterranean Sea during the period from September–October to mid-April, as it is a difficult time to sail. In the period of *mare clausum*, weather is often very cloudy and hazy, making it hard to navigate offshore due to poor visibility, and thus increasing chances of shipwreck.⁸² Anyone who has spent time in Italy or Rome during this period is aware of the violent winds and raging thunderstorms that occur suddenly. The Saracens, perhaps, were waiting for the end of the bad weather, and therefore planned their departure for April. They cannot have been unaware of the poor sailing conditions that characterized the winter months, as they had been sailing in the Mediterranean for two hundred years. In addition, if their fleet was basically a copy of the Byzantine armada, they most likely also knew Byzantine sailing techniques for different periods of the year; these would have included the knowledge of the hazards of sailing in the wintertime.

Yet how did the Saracens have such a deep command of Italian geography? When reconstructing the movements of the Saracen raiding party, it is clear that it knew exactly what it was looking for and how to get to a multitude of places of prey. It is impossible to understand the source of the marauders’ geographical information solely from our Latin sources. It is likely that the Saracens either used Italian informants, captured or paid, or received information from Muslim travelers who had sailed to Italy earlier. While we have no information from such captured or paid informants, we do know that there were Arab merchants trading in Italy who spread geographical information. A geographer, Yāqūt (d. 1229), cites a Damascene scholar, al-Walīd ibn Muslim (d. AH 194 / AD 810), who in turn heard a story from a merchant who had travelled to Rome at the end of the eighth century or in the first years of the ninth century.⁸³ In many parts, the account is greatly exaggerated, as it narrates that in Rome there were four thousand baths and twelve hundred churches. However, the merchant did not travel to Rome for tourism but for trade and, therefore, most of his account is

82 McGrail 2001: 92–93.

83 McCormick 2001: 622; Juynboll 1993: 662.

devoted to describing a number of Roman marketplaces, which were paved by white marble. Most importantly, the visitor mentioned, by name, the apostolic church of St Peter and St Paul – assuming that there was one church carrying this name – and said that the saints were buried there.⁸⁴ Among the letters of Pope Hadrian I (d. 795), we find an even earlier indication of the Saracen slavery expeditions. In this particular letter, dated 776, Pope Hadrian responded to Frankish inquiries concerning the Christian slaves sold to some Saracens. The purchase occurred in the port town of Centumcellae, modern Civitavecchia, which lies only eighty kilometers north of Rome.⁸⁵ Both of these sources testify to the fact that the Saracen merchants were moving freely along the Italian coastline and, in some instances, conveying geographical information.

Another interesting account comes from a Persian geographer, Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. 911), who never travelled extensively himself, but who worked as a master of the intelligence offices in the Caliphate's provinces and in Baghdad. Later, under the reign of Caliph al-Mu'tamid (844–892), he wrote a geographical account of the world, *The Book of itineraries and kingdoms* (*Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*).⁸⁶ In this account, he gives a brief and partly exaggerated description of Rome, which resembles Yāqūt's description. Ibn Khurradādhbih mentions that, in Rome, there were two hundred churches, four thousand baths, and marketplaces paved with marble. In addition, he describes the riches of the Roman churches, stating that they held golden statues with eyes made of rubies.⁸⁷ Most importantly, he also mentions, by name, the apostolic church of Rome.⁸⁸ Neither of these accounts includes anything about the sacking of these churches. In Ibn Khurradādhbih's case, it is unfortunate that we do not know his source of information. Despite the fact that the two saints are grouped together in both

84 Yāqūt 102. و في داخل المدينة كنيسة مبنية على اسم مار بطرس و مار بولس الحواريين، و هما مدفونان فيها.

85 MGH Epist. I, letter 59, 584–585. *Repperimus enim in ipsas vestras mellifluas apices pro venalitate mancipiorum, ut quasi per nostris Romanis venundati fuissent in gentem necdicendam Saracenorum. Et umquam, quod absit, in tale declinavimus scelus, aut per nostrum voluntatem factum fuissent: sed in litteraria Langobardorum semper navigaverunt necdicendi Greci et exinde emebant ipsa familia et amicitia cum ipsis Langobardis fecerunt et per eosdem Langobardos ipsa suscipiebant mancipia. In quibus direximus exinde Alloni duci, ut preparare debuisset plura navigia et comprehenderet iam dictis Grecis et naves eorum incendio concremaret: sed noluit nostris obtemperare mandatis, quia nos ne navigia habemus nec nautas, qui eos comprehendere potuissent. Tamen, in quantum valuimus, Domino proferimus teste, quia magnum exinde habuimus certamen, cupientes hoc ipsud scelus vetare; qui et naves Grecorum gentis in portu civitatis nostrae Centumcellensium comburi fecimus et ipsos Grecos in carcere per multa tempora detinuimus. Sed a Langobardis, ut praefati sumus, plura familia venundata sunt, dum famis inopia eos constringebat; qui alii ex eisdem Langobardis propria virtute in navigia Grecorum ascendeabant, dum nullam habebant spem vivendi.*

86 Hadj-Sadok 1968: 839.

87 Ibn Khurradādhbih 115. اثنا عشر تمثالا من ذهب [...] ولكل تمثال عينان من ياقوت.

88 Ibn Khurradādhbih 115. و في داخل المدينة كنيسة بنيت على اسم بطرس و بولس الحواريين.

accounts, we can conclude that the main church, St Peter's basilica, was evidently well known in the Arab world around the end of ninth century, when the information concerning them reached al-Walīd ibn Muslim and Ibn Khurradādhbih.

RESULTS OF THE RAID

The Saracen attack was surprisingly successful. They delivered a blow to the ecclesiastical capital of the Western world without great losses to themselves, until the tempest finally befell them. The churches of the Apostles Peter and Paul were prominent and rich, and popes had long adorned them with lavish gifts.⁸⁹ Yet despite the importance of these churches, they were not protected by the old Roman walls, unlike the Lateran, the papal curia. Thus, these churches were easy targets for raiders who could break through the coastal defenses. It took a few days before the looters could march from Ostia to Rome, leaving some time for Rome's defenders to remove and shelter the most valuable, portable treasures. Not all could be saved, such as the holy altar of St Peter, which was desecrated by the Saracens according to the Carolingian chronicles,⁹⁰ or the doors of St Peter's church.⁹¹ The mediaeval writers do not relate more specifics on what was stolen, for they probably did not feel it was worth mentioning, whereas *Liber Pontificalis* spends most of its space in the biography of Pope Leo IV spelling out the restorations the pope conducted and the donations he bestowed. Another important result of the raid was the rebuilding of Rome and its churches.⁹² Leo's greatest mission was to enhance Roman defenses by fully rebuilding fifteen towers and gates of the Aurelian wall. He also closed the mouth of the river Tiber with a tower system, blocking the movement on the river with a chain.⁹³ This was, of course, meant to stop enemies from reaching Rome by ship, as the Saracen marauders had done during the sack of the churches. Lastly, Leo carried out the formidable project of fortifying the Vatican with walls, a new district called Leoniana, the city of Leo. According to Krautheimer, however, the encirclement

89 For example, LP Paschalis I 5. *Fecit autem in sacro altare beati Petri principis apostolorum vestem mire pulchritudinis decoratum, ex auro gemmisque confectam, praefigurantem storiā qualiter idem apostolus a vinculis per angelum ereptus est.*

90 AB 34. [...] *ablatis cum ipso altari* [...]; AX 16. *Altare sancti Petri cum aliis multis detraxerunt* [...].

91 LP Leo IV 84. [...] *portas* [...] *quas destruxerunt progenies argentoque Saracena nudarat* [...].

92 LP Leo IV 13. [...] *pontifex* [...] *ad restorationem ipsarum* [ecclesiarum] *cotidie animus praetendebat* [...].

93 LP Leo IV 38–39. [...] *XV ab ipso solo turres* [...] *novis fabricis restaurari praecepit. Et quia per hunc locum* [Tiberis] *non solum naves verum etiam homines ante faciulius ingrediebantur, nunc autem vix unquam per eum parvae naviculae introire valebunt.*

of the Vatican with walls was not a new plan, as the Romans had considered doing so nearly a half century before.⁹⁴

The Carolingian Emperor Lothar I (795–855) was greatly moved by the raid of Rome and he ordered the reconstruction of St Peter's Church and the encircling of the Vatican. He also commanded his son to launch an assault against the Saracens of Benevento.⁹⁵ We may ask whether he meant the attack against Benevento as a punitive action for their raid of Rome, as it is plausible that the Beneventan Saracens made another strike later in 846 on the borders of Rome.⁹⁶ The emperor did not have the resources to send an expedition all the way to the Saracens in Sicily, and a similar menacing enemy was nearer – the Beneventan Saracens were an easier target.

Yet, apparently the Saracens still did not feel that they adequately plundered Rome, and they prepared another attack against the city in 849. By then, Leo IV and Lothar I had braced themselves and their defenses. A considerable Saracen fleet was seen in Sardinia, which then sailed towards Portus and Ostia. A coalition of maritime cities, including Naples, Amalfi, and Caieta, had sailed to Rome before the Saracens to negotiate with Pope Leo IV. Apparently, the coalition had learned that the Saracens were coming to Italy and they wanted to unite with the pope to defeat them. At first, Leo IV was doubtful as to why the coalition had come to Rome, but when he understood the gravity of the situation he was delighted to ally with them. The Saracen navy soon arrived, and the Battle of Ostia was fought. This time, the Saracens were not in luck. Their navy was scattered by unfavorable winds, offering their enemies a great opportunity to strike. The battle turned into a disaster for the Saracens, resulting in many sunken vessels and drowned seamen. Those who managed to reach the shore were instantly killed or captured. Eventually, many of the prisoners either ended up as forced laborers, constructing the wall around the Vatican, or were hanged near Portus, in the spot where the Saracen marauders had, only three years earlier, taken a great amount of spoils. Now, it was the Italians' turn for revenge.⁹⁷

94 Krautheimer 1980: 118–119.

95 *Capitularia Regum Francorum* II, 66–67. 7. *Quia pro peccatis nostris et offensionibus aecclisia beati Petri hoc anno a paganis vastata est et direpta, omni desiderio et summa instancia elaborare cupimus, qualiter ecclesia restauretur et deinceps ad eam paganorum accessio prohibeatur. Itaque decernimus et hoc Apostolico per litteras nostras et missos mandamus, ut murus firmissimus circa aecclisiam beati Petri construatur. Ad hoc vero opus collationem pecuniae ex omni regno nostro fieri volumus, ut tantum opus, quod ad omnium gloriam pertinet, omnium subsidio compleatur. 9. Decretum quoque et confirmatum habemus, ut karissimus filius noster cum omni exercitu Italiae et parte ex Francia, Burgundia atque Provincia in Beneventum profisciscatur, ut inde inimicos Christi, Sarracenos et Mauros, eiciat [...].*

96 *AB* 35. *Mauri et Saraceni Beneventum invadunt et usque ad Romana confinia populantur.*

97 *LP* Leo IV 47–55.

After the Battle of Ostia in 849, the Saracens did not attempt any new major attacks against the city of Rome. A minor incursion of 870 is recorded in *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum* when, strangely enough, Neapolitan *agareni* were responsible for the raid. The sources say that the Saracen mercenaries had a pact with Naples and lived in the city when they made their raid. Later, the pact was broken.⁹⁸ Paradoxically, Naples had hired the Saracens despite the fact that they had fought against Naples only two decades before. The raid of Rome in 846 showed how poorly the Romans had prepared for the incoming threat, but now they proved how quickly they could respond to the Saracen menace by building new fortifications and restoring old defenses. It is significant that the Carolingian crown gave Rome substantial aid, providing monetary backing for the building expenses. After the Battle of Ostia in 849, the Romans forced the captured Saracens into the fortification program. They turned the Saracen vexation into a Roman benefit.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen how all extant sources represent different accounts of the raid of Rome, and that these differences depend most dominantly on where the account was written. Authors were mainly interested in the matters that were closely related to their own spheres of living. Regionalism is blatant, and therefore all narrations must be compared with one another in order to create a more complete picture of the events. Additionally, the terminology used for the Saracens is seemingly different in the Frankish and the Italian sources, and thus we must be careful when reading different records and before making assumptions too quickly about the origins of the Saracens. Despite varying information, it is most plausible to assume that the Saracen raiding party that attacked Rome came either from the old Roman province of *Africa* or from Sicily.

This case study widely enhances current scholarly understanding of the Saracen raid of Rome as well as Saracen means of communicating and acting on information at the time. The implications of these findings can be applied to other Saracen raids throughout the Mediterranean in the period to garner additional insight. I have provided an example of the maritime *ghazw* and shown how Saracen groups operated on their raiding missions in the Early Middle Ages. In the same way that the Prophet had used informants before his raids in order

⁹⁸ GEN 66. *Consecratus est (Athenasius) autem in ecclesia beati Nazarii martyris, sita in loco, qui dicitur Canzia, territorio Capuano, a Iohanne octavo papa, qui eo tempore illuc advenerat, ut Sergius consul et dux, germanus praedicti praesulis, foedus dirrumperet cum Agarenis, qui tunc Neapoli habitabant et Romanam provinciam penitus dissipabant.*

to plan them, so too did the later Saracen raiders in 846. As we learn from the Arab geographers and Papal letters, Saracen knowledge came from information derived from merchants who had visited Italy and Rome. The Prophet had used camels, the “ship of the desert”, in his raiding missions, but due to the change of environment, from land to sea, the raiders of Italy had to rely on ships, what I term the “camels of the sea”. While the Arabs had long ago mastered transportation in the desert, they had also quickly acquired knowledge of seamanship, which enabled them to conduct long range maritime raids. Raiding by sails was obviously much different from desert raiding, and it required many new skills as well as elements of natural knowledge, such as poor winter weather, *mare clausum*. In the long run, sailing made the raiding campaigns less rapid than raiding by camels had been. Still, the very basis of the raid remained the same. The Saracens avoided close contact with the enemy; they preferred laying ambushes to direct fighting. They also attacked vulnerable targets, which were not well protected, such as the Apostolic Churches. Securing the booty was conducted quickly, with the Saracens acting like birds of prey, as Ammianus Marcellinus had observed of the Arab raids.

At least during the raid of Rome, the Saracen force had a clear plan of movements and seemed to have prepared their attack well. Almost everything likely succeeded as planned. First, they had equipped an efficient and large raiding force that the Romans and Franks could not match. Second, they had a strong grasp of Italian geography, knowing where to sail and march, and thus their land and naval forces moved logically and swiftly according to their plans. This is shown by their arrival in Ostia, where they knew where to go ashore and the shortest way to Rome. They also knew that Via Appia was the fastest route to the south for other lucrative targets, which they hit after the sack of the two Roman churches. Near Caieta, they found an excellent spot for setting up camp, and here they met their ships. Another example of their geographical knowledge is exhibited by their rapid expedition to the lands of Montecassino, albeit bad weather restrained them from attacking perhaps another major target, the monastery of Montecassino. Third, they were aware of the weather conditions in the Mediterranean Sea, as they decided to set sail in April when tempestuous winter weather, *mare clausum*, should have been over. However, they were ill-fated, as a sudden storm caught and destroyed them. Briefly put, the *ghazw* of 846 was clearly executed and it succeeded well as the Saracens plundered, swiftly, the most important churches of the area. In 849, when the new raid was directed against Rome, the city was much better defended and prepared than it had been three years earlier, which ended up in a Saracen disaster at the Battle of Ostia. The Saracens never again had a chance to overcome Rome. However, because of

their ruthless effectiveness in the art of pillaging, and transfer of their deeply-rooted desert mentality to the seas, in 846 the Saracens truly had appeared to the Romans as the avengers of God, *ultores misit Deus paganos*.

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APPENDIX

x: explicit mention

(x): implicit mention

GROUP A:

CMC: *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*CBC: *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinense*GEN: *Iohannis gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum*LP: *Liber Pontificalis*

GROUP B

AB: *Annales Bertiniani (Prudentius)*AF: *Annales Fuldenses*AX: *Annales Xantenses*

	AB	AF	AX	CMC	CBC	GEN	LP
Sack of St Peter's Basilica	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sack of St Paul's Basilica				x	x	x	x
Saracens come from <i>Africa</i>				x		(x)	x
Saracens come from Sicily						x	
Saracens come from Corsica							x
Moors, <i>mauri</i> , are mentioned	x	x	x				
Sack of Ostia and Portus							x
Battle against Roman forces					(x)		x
Saracens capture slaves			x			x	
Sack of Fondi				x	x		
Sack of Caieta and mention of the battle				x	x	x	
Louis fights against the Saracens	x						
Franks fight against the Saracens	x			x	x	x	
Campanians fight near Rome	x						
Sack of monasteries by the side of River Liri				x	x		
Destruction of the Saracen navy by storm	x			x	x	x	x