18.   The Route of the Franks: Travelscapes in post-classical Gaul

by CRISTINA CORSI, Università di Cassino

Following two threads

The work I present here is the outcome of several years of research aiming at developing an original interpretation of travel in the past, building on the convergence of different approaches deployed in a plethora of disciplines, ranging from landscape archaeology to anthropology, from geography to social sciences, from phenomenology to environmental behaviour studies, from spatial analysis and ICTs to cognitive studies and environmental psychology. Fundamentally, I tried to merge a more traditional approach to tracing ancient routes with a new vision of the journey as a way of exploring the landscape.[1]

The traditional part of this project aims at documenting and reconstructing the topographical and material evidence of the road connecting southern England to Rome following the itinerary textually transmitted by (someone of the party of) Archbishop Sigeric in AD 990 during his homeward journey from Rome to Canterbury (in this context, limited to the segment from the Alps back to England), extending the quest to the aspects linked to the narratives, practicalities and modalities of a medieval journey.

At the same time, I am attempting to understand how medieval travellers sought to make sense of their surroundings and how they socially and culturally structured the space. In brief, two very different approaches concur with the study of communication networks, balancing the corporality of roads as opposed to the immateriality of communication axes. Roads can be studied and analysed in their materiality and morphological shape; communication axes in their functionality. The morphological approach includes studying systems of material objects (the scattered evidence and segments of road or infrastructure)

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[1]   This paper summarises the research into the "landscapes of movement" and travel in post-classical times, that I carried out in relation to the journey of Archbishop Sigeric at the twilight of the first millennium AD: C. Corsi, The Route of the Franks: The journey of Archbishop Sigeric at the dusk of the first millennium AD (Oxford 2022).- Primary Source: Edictus Langobardorum, Leges Ratchis Regis, in Leges Langobardorum, ed. G.H. Pertz MGH, Leges IV (Hannoverae: Bibliopoli Hahniani 1893) 183–193.- I sincerely thank the organisers of the symposium, Johannes Bergemann and Aurelio Burgio, for having offered me the possibility to frame my research into the broader context of communication systems of the past.

and the imprint that roads left on the ground. The hermeneutical approach implies analysing how movement through the landscape influences the configuration of space,[2] and how it is perceived and "appropriated".

Conceptualising the Landscape

The core idea here is that places are more than mere physical spots; they are imbued with meanings and values unique to each individual, thereby forming the foundation of personal identity. Geographical space has stopped being considered simply as the backdrop to human activity, the neutral and inactive background to history rather than a dynamic actor playing a distinctive role over time. This subjective landscape includes an individual understanding and interaction with the environment, guided by recognition of familiar places or landmarks.

The very definition of 'landscape' has been updated, following what is enshrined in Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention, signed in Florence on 20 November 2000, where it is stressed that it is the subjective component and the meaning it has for the people populating it that has to be protected and preserved.[3]

Moreover, there is growing interest in a more sensory-focused study of landscapes, moving beyond a purely visual interpretation to embrace a multisensory experience – encompassing touch, sound, smell, and taste. This sensory synergy suggests that landscapes should be perceived as a fusion of various 'scapes' ("a visionscape, a touchscape, a soundscape, a smellscape, and a tastescape"[4]), offering a richer, more comprehensive understanding of space through movement.

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[2]   B. Hillier, Space is the machine (London 2007).
[3]   Council of Europe, European Treaty Series no. 176. Available at Council of Europe, Treaty Office <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/by-subject-matters1?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=176>, viewed 31 January 2025. Art. 1 "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors; art. 5 "Landscapes is an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity".
[4]   C. Tilley, Phenomenological Approaches to Landscape Archaeology, in: Handbook of landscape archaeology, B. David – J. Thomas (eds.), World Archaeological Congress research handbooks (Walnut Creek 2010) 271–276, especially 272.

Landscapes of movement

This new approach to the concept of the landscape also brought about a change of perspective in the study of mobility,[5] with a stronger emphasis on the subjectivity of how we perceive the same location, making the act of moving from one place to another a profoundly personal experience. Indeed, being physically, sensorily, emotionally or socially connected to a landscape implies moving through it. The primary way of experiencing the surroundings and gaining knowledge of the landscape is the action of movement;[6] appreciation of the material and immaterial characteristics of a given place can be achieved only via movement to and from it, further assessing relationships with other places.[7] As Robert Witcher synthesised, "by physically and symbolically linking places together, paths order places and how they are encountered as part of everyday social praxis".[8]

Applying this conceptual framework to the past implies that the best – or even the only – way of investigating the modalities of landscape exploration is to study the material pathways, roads and tracks that have been progressively engraved in the physical landscape. Through the material record of the communication networks, we can understand human landscapes as a system, determining how people at different times in history, and by different patterns, orientate themselves and even make themselves part of the landscape.[9] The evidence of roads, paths, tracks and other routes left on the terrain over time, their engineering or their basicness, their naturalness or artificiality reflect how people moved in the landscape, and explain how space was structured by social travelling. Hence, landscape archaeology plays a key role in distinguishing and analysing the web of social, cultural, and historical determinants and agents that structured those specific "travelling spaces".[10]

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[5] R.E. Witcher, Roman Roads: Phenomenological Perspectives on Roads in the Landscape, in: TRAC 97, Proceedings of the seventh annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, April 1997, Nottingham, C. Forcey – J. Hawthorne – R.E. Witcher (Oxford 1998) 60–70 especially 63.

[6] T.S. Guttormsen, The Embodied Landscape of Roads. The case of Via Egnatia in Macedonian Greece, in: European Landscapes and Lifestyles. The Mediterranean and Beyond, Z. Roca – T. Spek – T. Terkenli – T. Plieninger – F. Höchtl (Lisbon 2007) 93–106 especially 95.

[7] C. Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments (Oxford – Providence 1994) 31.

[8] Witcher, loc.cit. 63.

[9] Tilley, loc.cit. 27–31.

[10] Guttormsen, loc.cit. 95.

Essentially, all identified routes are manifestations of human movement through the landscape. They are not just physical connectors but elements that structure our encounters with places.[11] Understanding their logic, the socio-political organisations, the economic forces and the cultural factors that shaped them leads to comprehending "the way that trails, paths, and roads materialise traditional knowledge and engineering, world views, memories, and identity".[12]

Despite some criticisms regarding its application in archaeology, such as challenges in interpreting archaeological evidence through the lens of social constructivism, this theoretical framework has sparked stimulating discussions and yielded insightful analyses,[13] for example, on Roman roads in Italy.[14] Thus, roads and communication networks turn into much more than lines on a map. They come to embody ideology, power and identity.

Travelscapes

The concept of 'travelscape' spans to envelope the experience of the journey in its material and immaterial aspects, ranging from landscape perception and the modalities and practicalities of travel to all the emotional and mental factors of navigation through time and space, building a multi- and hyper-sensorial experience. This innovative angle complements the broader adoption of a mobility paradigm across disciplines, emphasising the movement's impact on society and its role in shaping social relationships and structures.

The Route of the Franks

I loaded these concepts of travelscape and landscapes of movement with the historical contextualisation of the journey of archbishop Sigeric, adding the reports of the medieval travellers that preceded and followed him; I tried to

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[11] Witcher, loc.cit. 4.
[12] J.E. Snead – C.L. Erickson – J.A. Darling (eds.), Landscapes of movement: trails, paths, and roads in anthropological perspective (Philadelphia 2009) XV.
[13] See e.g. R.E. Witcher, Roman Roads: phenomenological Perspectives on Roads in the Landscape, in: TRAC 97, Proceedings of the seventh annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, April 1997, Nottingham, C. Forcey – J. Hawthorne – R.E. Witcher (eds.) (Oxford 1998) 60–70; S. Malmberg, Navigating the Urban Via Tiburtina, in: Via Tiburtina: Space, Movement and Artefacts in the Urban Landscape, H. Bjur – B. Santillo Frizell (Rome 2009) 61–78; I. Östenberg – S. Malmberg – J. Bjørnebye (eds.), The Moving City: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome (London 2015).
[14] R. Laurence, The roads of Roman Italy: mobility and cultural change (London–New York 1999).

texture his testimony with the narrative of the experience of a lifetime, and I attempted the reconstruction of the topographical aspects and the architectural background of the centres he crossed at the twilight of the first millennium AD.

Roman vs Medieval Road Network

The construction of an efficient road network achieved under the Romans increased connectivity and enhanced the cultural identification of the new subjects with Roman values since the remodelling of the landscape and the ability of the new mobility to alter the nature of space affected the perception of a novel cultural unity. Above all, the creation of a centralised and engineered net enabled the reduction of the time taken to travel from one place to another, altering the temporal distance and the perception of the spacing itself.

Although switching from metrical to temporal distance, medieval 'architecture' of the communication network was still anchored to a sort of linear conceptualisation of space. Indeed, the places recorded from Rome to the Channel in the document attributed to Sigeric, defined as sub-mansiones, are all reachable in a day of travel, sometimes even in a shorter time, giving the impression that the temporal distance between the locations mentioned in the text was taken for granted in the eyes of a medieval user/reader. The same could apply to the itinerary of Nikulas of Munkathvera of the mid-twelfth century (infra).

Undeniably, the conception of a 'road-network' was different after the fall of the Roman empire. Rome sought to weave a web spreading efficiently to every corner of the lands controlled by Rome, generating astonishing connectivity between north and south, east and west, inner lands and Mediterranean regions, inexorably converging toward the centre of the web, the Urbs. The post-classical political bodies did not possess the resources or abilities or simply often did not last long enough to make an impact on the communication network and were probably not even interested in doing so since centralism and dirigisme were not the superintendent powers. Thus, with the waning of the imperial control over the provinces and with the fragmentation of political and administrative entities, the number and quality of long-distance routes decreased rapidly; only connecting routes between settlements within the same political entity were maintained, and only a few local and service roads remained clearly marked.[15]

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[15] T. Mannoni, Strade e vie di comunicazione, AM 10, 1983, 213–222 especially 213–214.

However, like Roman, post-classical roads cannot be reconstructed as idealised and immutable lines. On the contrary, the road is a living organism in every historical phase, uninterruptedly subject to at least minimal or more significant variations, which 'corrupt' (i.e. change) the materiality of the artefacts. The variations can be due to historical, economic, cultural, geomorphological or hydrogeological factors; inevitably, they lead to substantial changes in the historical significance of that itinerary. The road and the territory it passes through are inextricably connected in a dynamic relationship and interaction. When tackling the study of a road, therefore, the main objective should be to distinguish the variants and unravel why they were generated, determine which variations represent real innovation in landscape dynamics and settlement patterns, and which changes lead to a topographical rupture with the former system, and with the historical framework.

It is also necessary to revise the conventional view that considers the medieval road network a mere derivation from the Roman one, where continuity is the driving force impeding substantial transformations in the road system.[16]

Although it is undeniable that Roman roads continued to be the backbones of the communication system until at least the ninth century, and that they only blended into the new landscape management in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries,[17] a new perspective has been gaining ground, especially in France, with clear evidence of the differences between the two systems, manifest not only in new foci of road organisation (villages, castra, fairs and markets, monasteries and pilgrimage destinations), but also in the proliferation of paths, and in their decreased stability and structural complexity.[18] The concept of curvilinearity supplanted that of straightness; the fragmentation of itineraries replaced the functionality of long-distance routes. Ultimately, Roman roads went straight through obstacles, whereas medieval roads bypassed them.[19]

In essence, then, although medieval routes often used segments of pre-existing roads, the combination of these segments generated conceptually new axes, connecting new settlements or centres that had risen in the hierarchy of

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[16] For instance, this conventional vision is expressed in G. Reverdy, Atlas historique des routes de France (Paris 2006) 11–15.

[17] O. Bruand, Voyageurs et marchandises aux temps carolingiens: les réseaux de communication entre Loire et Meuse aux VIIIe et IXe siècles, Bibliothèque du moyen âge 20 (Bruxelles 2002) 91.

[18] T. Szabó, Comuni e politica stradale in Toscana e in Italia nel medioevo (Bologna 1992) 15–17.

[19] A. Esch, Le vie di comunicazione di Roma nell'Alto Medioevo, in: Roma nell'Alto Medioevo, XLVIII Settimana CISAM, 10–16 aprile 1958 (Spoleto 2001) 421–453 especially 426.

settlement patterns and that acquired a brand new political or religious relevance. The interaction between communication and the new socio-cultural landscape attracted other types of settlements along the roads, such as hermitages, several of which evolved rapidly into monastic foundations and monasteries.[20]

The 'Route of the Franks' or – even better – the 'Routes of the Franks' fall into this category, where a patchwork of existing viable stretches joins together to create something new, in its materiality as well as in its perception and use.

Of course, this does not mean that the medieval road network did not bear the heavy imprint of its predecessor, but, again, its general conception met different needs and achieved diverse goals. It structured itself more spontaneously, more fragmentedly, and more 'locally', even if interventions by local authorities aimed at controlling and stabilising the infrastructure have already been relatively well documented from the Early Middle Ages.

In essence, although the linear development of the road network that covered medieval Europe was inferior to that of the Roman imperial age, the medieval system was no less important in terms of the political, economic and cultural contributions it made to creating medieval society.

The Route of the Franks and its geohistorical context

Although in the High Middle Ages, the term 'Franks' was used mainly by Greeks, Turks and Arabs to generically address all of the people of western Europe and specifically its Catholic populations, the origin of the designation Via Francigena, 'the Route of the Franks', can be traced back to the later phase of the Lombard domination in Italy and to the fact that this route embodied generically the idea of a sort of 'transnational' communication axis between the Italian Peninsula and the *Oltralpe*. With the Carolingian conquest, the route to Rome became one of the most frequented itineraries on the continent The several roads crossing France and leading to the shores of the Channel, which were progressively equipped with resting places and accommodation facilities for pilgrims, were indicated in one direction as the Romeward road or strata Beati Petri Apostoli, in the other as *strata Francorum* or *via Francisca*.[21]

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[20] J. Heuclin, Aux origines monastiques de la Gaule du nord: ermites et reclus du V{e} au XI{e} siècle (Lille 1988).

[21] C. Corsi – E. De Minicis, In viaggio verso sud. La via Francigena da Acquapendente a Roma, (Viterbo 2012) 22–23.

However, as demonstrated by the fact that even journeys completed in the same historical period never follow the same path, it is clear that 'the Franks' way' is an idealised route that can be declined in many variations. That is why I chose this more comprehensive translation for '*via Francigena*'.

Coming to the geo-historical framework of Sigeric's journey, in addition to the political instability in England, with the succession of King Edgar and a new wave of Scandinavian invasions, we can underline the impact that the fragmentation of the former Carolingian kingdom, split into a multitude of small realms and polities, especially in north-eastern France, had on mobility, although Sigeric's trip was contemporary with the reign of Hugh, the first Capetian king.[22] The fragmentation of continental France into different political entities and small potentates generated instability and made connections and journeys more challenging. The conditions of insecurity were amplified by the Viking raids and by internal struggles between powers, but it cannot be ruled out that the violence of the clashes between factions of nobles in Rome worried travellers the most.

In the case of the Alpine crossing, the choice was not usually between the fastest or more direct route but normally the easiest ascent. For this reason, for example, the route via the Mont Cenis Pass was often favoured against the Great St Bernard Pass: the Jura massif, which could be traversed at the Jougne Pass, made the ascent of the Alps somewhat less arduous.[23]

It is also possible that early English travellers avoided (or simply ignored) the Great St Bernard Pass for other reasons, since there is evidence that it was crossed by travellers from France, such as Bishop Bonitus of Clermont, who went to Rome in 701 via Lyon, and stopped at Saint-Maurice, the village at the foot of the Swiss side of Mt St Bernard, and Pavia.[24] Abbot Austrulph of St Wandrille in Normandy died in Saint-Maurice in 752 on his return from Rome.[25] It might seem strange that French travellers attempted to cross those regions of

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[22] V. Ortenberg, Archbishop Sigeric's journey to Rome in 990, Anglo Saxon England 19 (1990) 197–246 especially 206.

[23] J.E. Tyler, The Alpine Passes. The Middle Ages (962-1250) (Oxford 1930) 21–22.

[24] J. Zettinger, Die Berichte über Rompilger aus dem Frankenreiche bis zum Jahre 800 (Rom 1900) 71–72.

[25] Zettinger, loc.cit. 83.

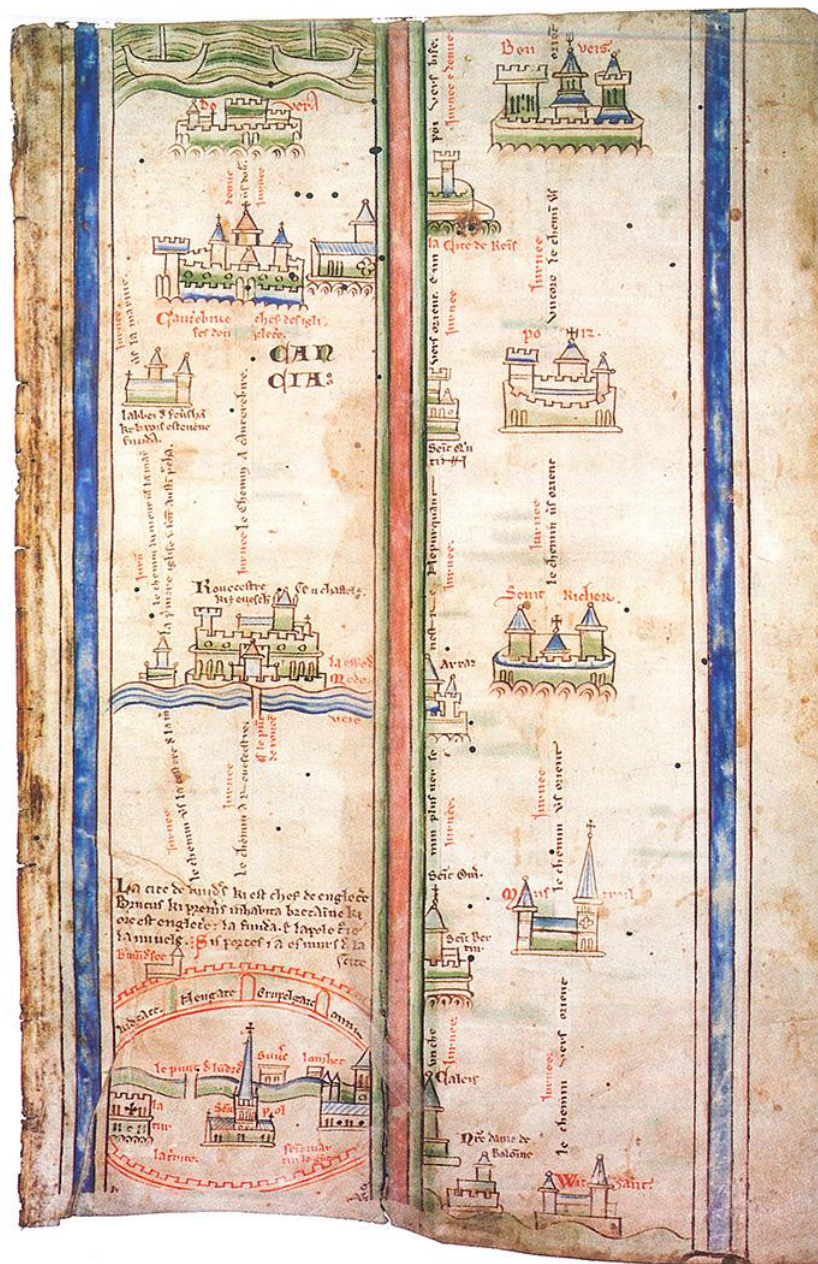northern Italy that were so firmly controlled by the Lombards, since relations

Fig. 1. Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora*, the itinerary from London to Beauvais. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 26, f. 1r. After Sansone, Tra cartografia politica e immaginario figurativo, fig. 2. Courtesy of S. Sansone, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo.

between the Lombards and the Carolingians were not really trusting, but it is possible that 'nationality' was less important when it came to the control of mobility. Indeed, a paragraph in a Lombard edict issued by King Ratchis in 746 gives instructions about admitting people travelling to Rome to the borders of

the kingdom, a complex procedure that implied a sort of temporary 'entry visa' that had to be matched by an 'exit visa'.[26]
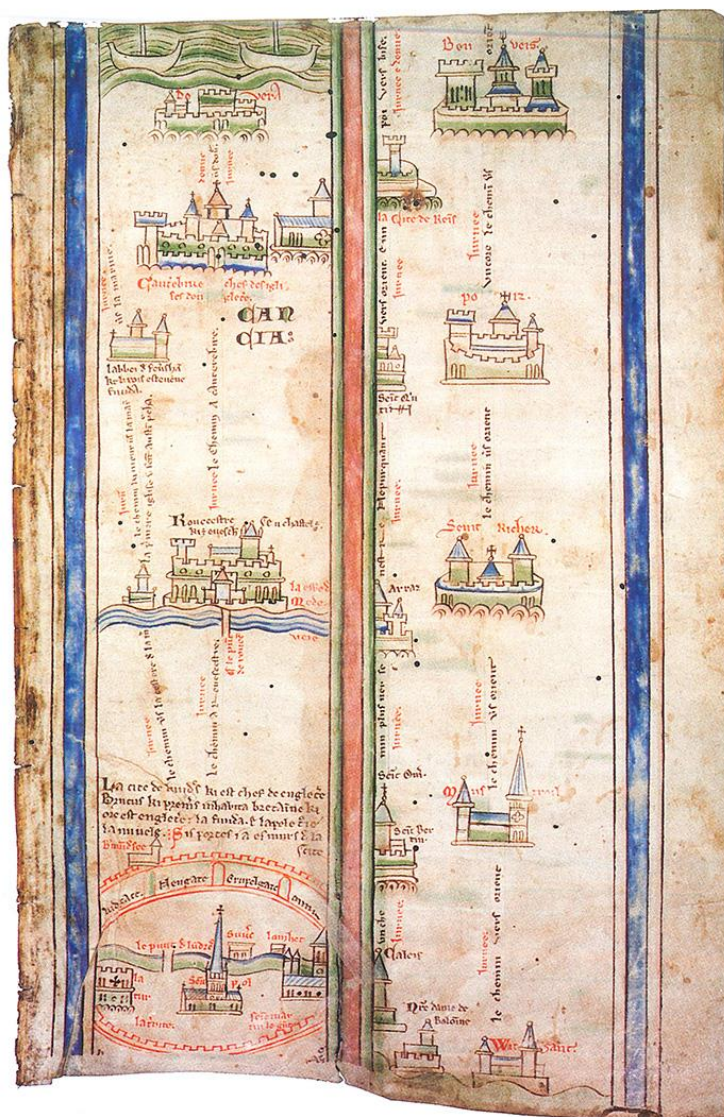

Fig. 1. Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora*, the itinerary from London to Beauvais. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 26, f. 1r. After Sansone, Tra cartografia politica e immaginario figurativo, fig. 2. Courtesy of S. Sansone, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo.

26 Law of King Ratchis of the Lombards: "strangers who plan to go to Rome come to our borders, the judge should inquire diligently whence they come. The judge should issue a passport (*clusarius syngraphus*), placing it on wax tablet and setting his seal upon it, so afterwards the travellers may show this notice to our appointed agents. After this notice has been sent to us, our agents shall give the travellers a letter to enable them to go to Rome. When they return from Rome, they shall receive the mark of the King's seal ring' (*Ed. Lang. Rat. c.* 13). See R. McKitterick (ed.), Atlas of the medieval world (New York 2003) 119.

Fig. 2. Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora*, the itinerary from Mâcon to Montcenisio. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 26, f. 2r. After Sansone, Tra cartografia politica e immaginario figurativo, fig. 5. Courtesy of S. Sansone, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo.

Judging from the surviving testimonies, the principal routes to Rome from the British Isles did not change greatly from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries,[27] with a higher rate of travellers choosing the so-called 'direct' route. The latter is sketched leveraging the exceptional 'strip-map' by Matthew Paris (Figs. 1–2).[28]

Matthew draws three possible routes from the northern French coast to Beaune: one starting from Boulogne and heading to Champagne via Paris, Nogent-sur-Seine, Troyes and Bar-sur-Seine; a second, which runs parallel to this on the north-eastern side from Calais, which is in broad outline the route followed by Sigeric; and a third that also departs from Boulogne but skirts Paris on the eastern side, then turns south towards Sens, Auxerre, Vézelay, Beaune, Chalon-sur-Saône, Mâcon and Lyon, continuing over the Alps by the Mont Cenis Pass.[29] The choice of the route to follow could have been driven by many factors, from knowledge of former experiences, through personal inclinations, the urgency of the travel, political or economic factors,[30] sanitary and seasonal conditions, to preferences for assistance options and even individual wishes to meet certain people or visit specific places.

One of the reasons that this so-called 'direct' land route could have been favoured over the longer but easier trail following the Rhone valley up the Mont Cenis Pass, is the fact that it appears – at least at the beginning of the eleventh century – to be well structured, secure and equipped with facilities. This is the impression we get from a treaty signed by King Cnut in 1027, in which arrangements are taken '*in viam Romam*' to safeguard the border crossings for English and Danish travellers across the lands of the Emperor, the Pope, King Rudolph III of Burgundy and other unspecified nobles.[31]

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[27] D.J. Birch, Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages. Continuity and changes (Woodbridge 1998) 43.

[28] British Library MS Royal 14 C VII fol. 2r; see most recently D.K. Connolly, The Maps of Matthew Paris: medieval journeys through space, time and liturgy (Woodbridge 2009); S. Sansone, Tra cartografia politica e immaginario figurativo. Matthew Paris e l'*Iter de Londinio in Terram Sanctam* (Roma 2009). The nature and the possible uses of the maps authored by Matthew Paris are discussed in C. Corsi, The Route of the Franks: The journey of Archbishop Sigeric at the dusk of the first millennium AD (Oxford 2022) 12. 72–79.

[29] G.B. Parks, The English Traveler to Italy. I, The Middle Ages (to 1525) (Stanford 1954) 47.

[30] D.A.E. Pelteret, "Not All Roads Lead to Rome", in: England and Rome in the Early Middle Ages. Pilgrimage, Art and Politics, ed. F. Tinti (Turnhout: Brepols 2014) 17–41 especially 17–18.

[31] Sources edited by D. Whitelock – M. Brett – C.N.L. Brooke (eds.), Councils and Synods: With Other Documents Relating to the English Church (Oxford 1981) I.1.509; see: R.R. Darlington – P. McGurk (eds), The Chronicle of John of Worcester: The Annals from 450–1066 (Oxford 1995) no. 6.

Furthermore, a few of these monasteries open to hosting pilgrims and hospices were expressly dedicated to English travellers (e.g. St Josse at Ponthieu and Moutiers-en-Puisaie, south of Auxerre)[32], explaining the popularity of this route among travellers from the British Isles. Conversely, the decreased documented popularity of the 'western' and 'central' routes among English travellers can also be explained by the expansion of the Saracens raids, not only in coastal areas but also inland regions, conveyed as they were through river valleys. In addition to the danger, the fact that Saracens imposed tolls and fees on the critical passages of these routes might have also played a key role in choosing one itinerary over another.

Sigeric's journey and its reporting

The wide popularity of Sigeric's trip is undoubtedly due to the fact that a synthetic account of the central and last part of the journey ("one of nearly one hundred such journeys to Rome by kings and prelates from the British Isles": Cathy Magnay) survives in a single manuscript, preserved in the British Library of London (fig. 3) and classified as Cotton Tiberius B. V, fols 23v–24r. The text of interest to us was included in a miscellany assembling texts of different natures (e.g. *De Rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*, Cicero's *Aratea*, Aelfric's *De temporibus annis* and a selection of texts on astronomical topics), including episcopal and regnal lists, some of which are illustrated with painted miniatures.[33]

The contents are mainly related to timekeeping, astronomy and geography and, regardless of the diversity of the places and periods where they were transcribed, all in all they give the impression of a coherent whole relating to knowledge of the world.

The brief report of the journey is preceded by a list of Canterbury archbishops, where Sigeric is inserted in the 24th position, and a list of popes, from John X to John XV (914-989, although John XV died in 996). It has been argued that this list was brought to England by Sigeric himself.[34] The 'travel diary' starts with a

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[32]   Ortenberg, Archbishop Sigeric's journey, 204.

[33]   P. McGurk, "Introduction. Contents of the manuscript", in: An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany: British Library Cotton Tiberius B. V Part I, Together with Leaves from British Library Cotton Nero D. II, P. McGurk – D.N. Dumville – M.R. Godden – A. Knock (eds.) (Copenhagen 1983) 15–24.

[34]   B. Pesci, L'Itinerario Romano di Sigerico Arcivescovo di Canterbury e la lista dei Papi da lui portata in Inghilterra, RACr 13, 1996, 43–60 especially 58; F. Tinti, The English Presence in Rome in the Later Anglo-Saxon Period: Change or Continuity?, in: Cities, Saints, and Communities in Early Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Alan Thacker, S. DeGregorio – P. Kershaw (eds.) (Turnhout 2020) 345–371 especially 349–351.

sort of 'abstract' of the contents: the text accounts for the journey from Rome to the Channel, '*usque ad mare*', including a list of eighty stop-overs (in Latin '*submansiones*'); it includes the description of the short stay in Rome and a list of churches toured during the three intensive days that Sigeric and his party spent in the Capital of Christianity.
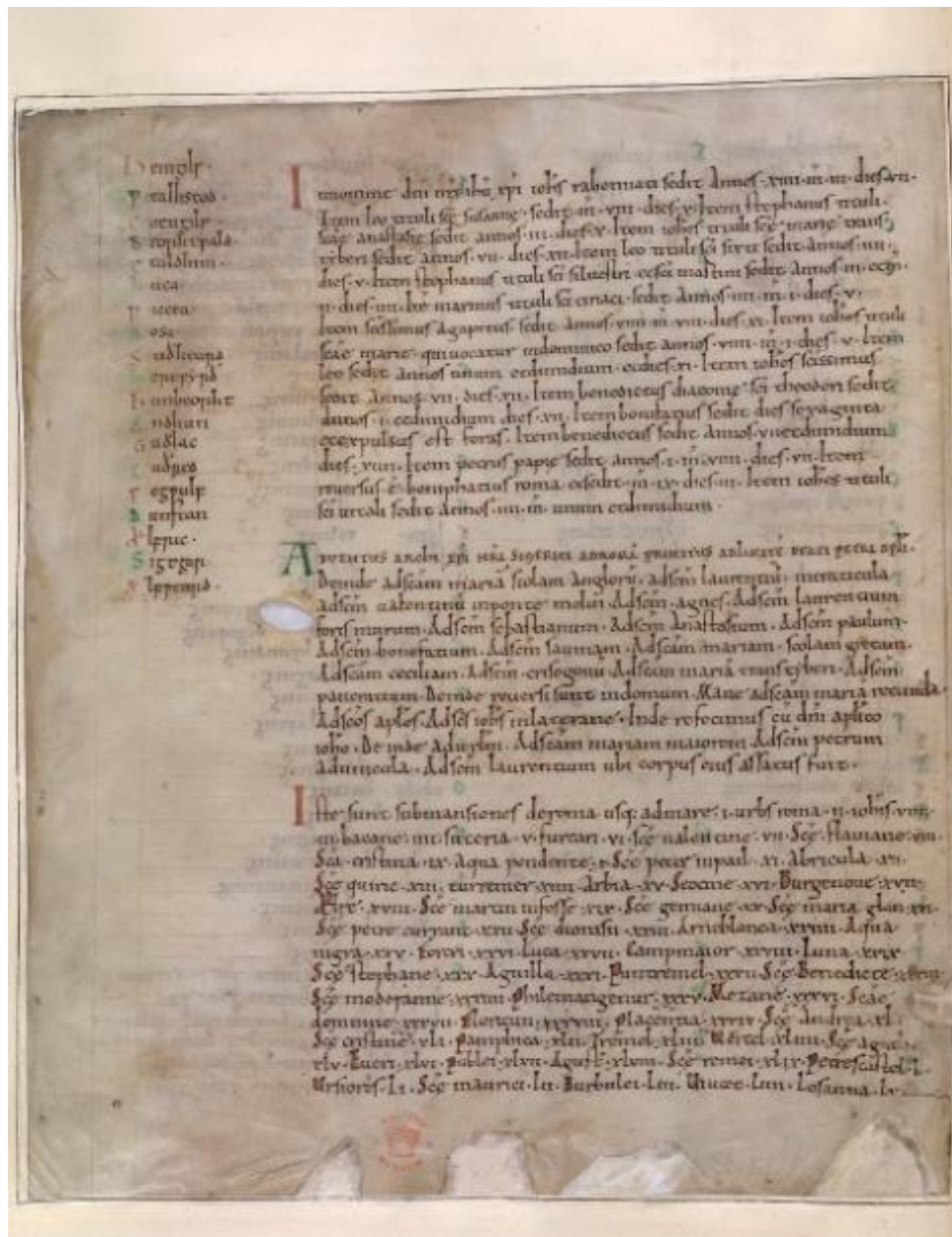

Fig. 3. Sigeric's itinerary manuscript: British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B.V., f. 23v. © The British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/itinerary-of-archbishop-sigeric. Public Domain.

A screenshot of the road network in France at the twilight of the first millennium AD

The road network of France at the end of the first millennium was much more similar to the Roman one, pivoting on Lyon, than to the modern one, centred on Paris, a change that followed the institution of the royal postal service enforced by Louis XI in the fifteenth century. Especially in the north-eastern part of France, the Roman road network remained substantially intact until the Norman invasions, as proven by the fact that the anti-Norman fortifications arose at the nodes of that network.[35] However, although a few centres confirmed their role as road junctions, such as Pontarlier, a strategic centre at the crossing of the Jura,[36] new monastic foundations such as Saint-Oyan/Saint-Claude and Baume-les-Dames, or centres as Salins (at the passage of the Jura and at the crossing of the Saône) and fortresses such as Miroual (Joux) and Usier (controlling the route from Besançon to Lausanne and Italy)[37] arose as important road stations.

Other changes were brought about by the creation of tight monastic networks and the increasing need to connect the 'mother abbeys' with their daughter houses, as in the case of Cluny in the tenth century and of the priories of the eleventh century, veritable outposts of the abbeys.[38] The monastic hostelries worked as *gîtes d'étape*, as shown by the eleventh-century Chronicle of St Benignus of Dijon, where the estates located along the road to Italy owned by the monastery are listed as places where abbots and monks would be offered hospitality.[39]

A topographical sketch

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[35] J. Hubert, Les routes du Moyen-Age, in: Les routes de France depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours (Paris 1959) 25–56 especially 25–30.

[36] X. Barral I Altet (ed.), Le paysage monumental de la France autour de l'An Mil (Paris 1987) 329.

[37] É. Vergnolle, L'architecture monastique du premier XIe siècle en Bourgogne Cisjurane et Transjurane: style et spiritualité, in: Les Royaumes de Bourgogne jusque 1032 à travers la culture et la religion, A. Wagner – N. Brocard (eds.) (Turnhout 2018) 165–183.

[38] Hubert, loc.cit. 42.

[39] L.-É Bougaud – J. Garnier, Chronique de l'abbaye de Saint-Bénigne de Dijon, suivie de la chronique de Saint-Pierre de Bèze (Dijon 1875) 32.

The itinerary reported by Sigeric across modern France follows in broad outline the Roman road mentioned by Strabo (4.6.11) and described in the *Itinerarium Antonini* (346.10-349.2). It connected northern Italy to the shores of the Channel and had as its main terminals *Mediolanum* (Milano) and *Gesoriacum-Bononia* (Boulogne-sur-Mer) (Fig. 4).[40]

Along the segment from the Great St Bernard Pass to Besançon, the *Itinerarium*
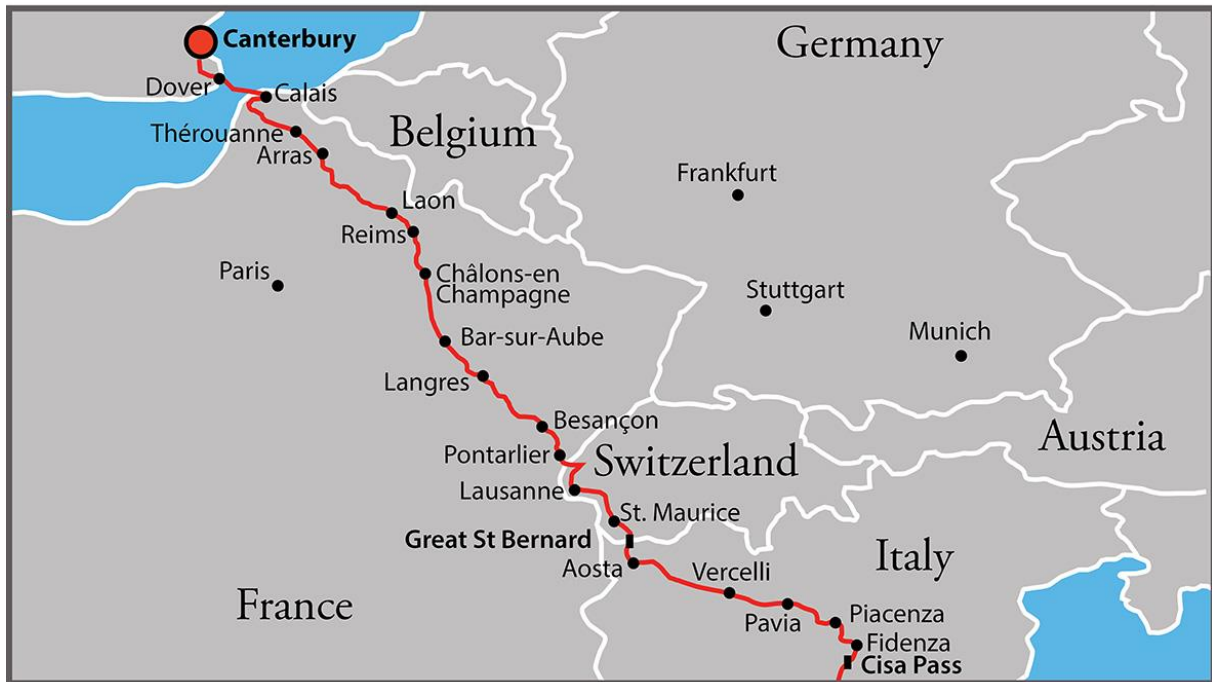

Fig. 4. Schematic overview of Sigeric's itinerary across France. Elaboration A. Panarello.

mentions only the stops of *Equestris* (Nyon), *Lacum Losone* (Lausanne), *Urba* (Orba) and *Ariorica* (Pontarlier), for a total distance that does not correspond to the actual one. In the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (III, 1-4) the given distance between Besançon and *Ariorica* is much closer to reality, and an intermediate stop at *Filomusiacum* (identified with La Malepierre)[41] is inserted. Heading north-west,

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[40]   The literature about the Roman roads is predictably very extensive, but here it will be referred to only when necessary. Leaving aside the essays on the Roman road network, a general framework can be found in P. Leman, Des Alpes à l'Océan, la voie d'Agrippa et la voie orientale d'après les textes et l'archéologie, Bulletin de la Société de Fouilles Archéologiques de L'Yonne 5, 1988, 29–34. Also, local research has been very active: e.g. P. Nouvel, Les voies romaines en Bourgogne antique: le cas de la voie dite de l'Océan attribuée à Agrippa, in Voies de communications des temps gallo-romains au XXème siècle, actes du 20ème colloque de l'Association Bourguignonne des Sociétés Savantes, Saulieu, 16–17 octobre 2010, C. Corbin (ed.) (Saulieu 2010) 9–57, for Burgundy and specifically the area between the Saône valley and the Parisian Basin.

[41]   E. Frézouls (ed.), Les Villes antiques de la France. II. Germanie supérieure. 1, Besançon, Dijon, Langres, Mandeure (Strasbourg 1988) 116–117.

the same passage of Strabo and the Roman *itineraria* delineate the road from Besançon to *Andemantunnum* (Langres), via *Segobodium* (Seveux) and *Varcia* (Aumoniéres)[42]. Archaeological traces of this road have been discerned thanks to trial excavations carried out in the twentieth century, documenting that the road, upon leaving *Vesontio*-Besançon, passed via Auxon, Cussey (with ruins of a bridge on the river Ognon), Oiselay and Seveux, and reached *Varcia* with a direct or indirect (via Volon) connection.

Sigeric, however, chose to skip Langres to head to Bar-sur-Aube, Châlons-sur-Marne and Reims, showing what seems to be an early interest in the *champenoise* fairs.[43] From Laon, the archbishop reached a place called Martinwaeth, then one spelt Duin (probably corresponding to Doingt), a suburb of Péronne, and went up to Arras. From Arras, he could have followed the so-called chaussée Brunehaut until Thérouanne (in the text spelt *Teranburh*), ending at Sombre, a village not far from Wissant.[44] The choice of the harbour where Sigeric and his comrades would have boarded to sail to Britain appears to be innovative since most British travellers preferred Quentovic. However, the mid-ninth-century attacks of the Vikings mentioned above[45] easily motivated such a diversion to Wissant. Furthermore, the nearby Abbey of St Josse, endowed to Alcuin by Charlemagne, ensured assistance to pilgrims.

Sigeric's choices

To determine whether Sigeric's itinerary was planned according to the existence of special links with the ecclesiastical communities of the regions that he intended to cross, it would be essential to understand the nature of these connections. In addition to its closeness to the papal court, the Church of England had documented exchanges with many episcopal sees and religious centres (e.g. Liège, Köln, Bremen, Verdun, Metz, Trier and Mainz). Alas, among them, only

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[42] Frézouls, loc.cit. 118–119.
[43] J. Lestocquoy, D'Angleterre à Rome au Xème siècle. Études historiques dédiés à la mémoire de M.R. Rodière, Mémoires de la Commission Départementale d'Histoire et d'Archéologie du Pas-de-Calais 5, 1947 no. 2, 35–40 especially 38–39.
[44] Lestocquoy, ibidem 40.
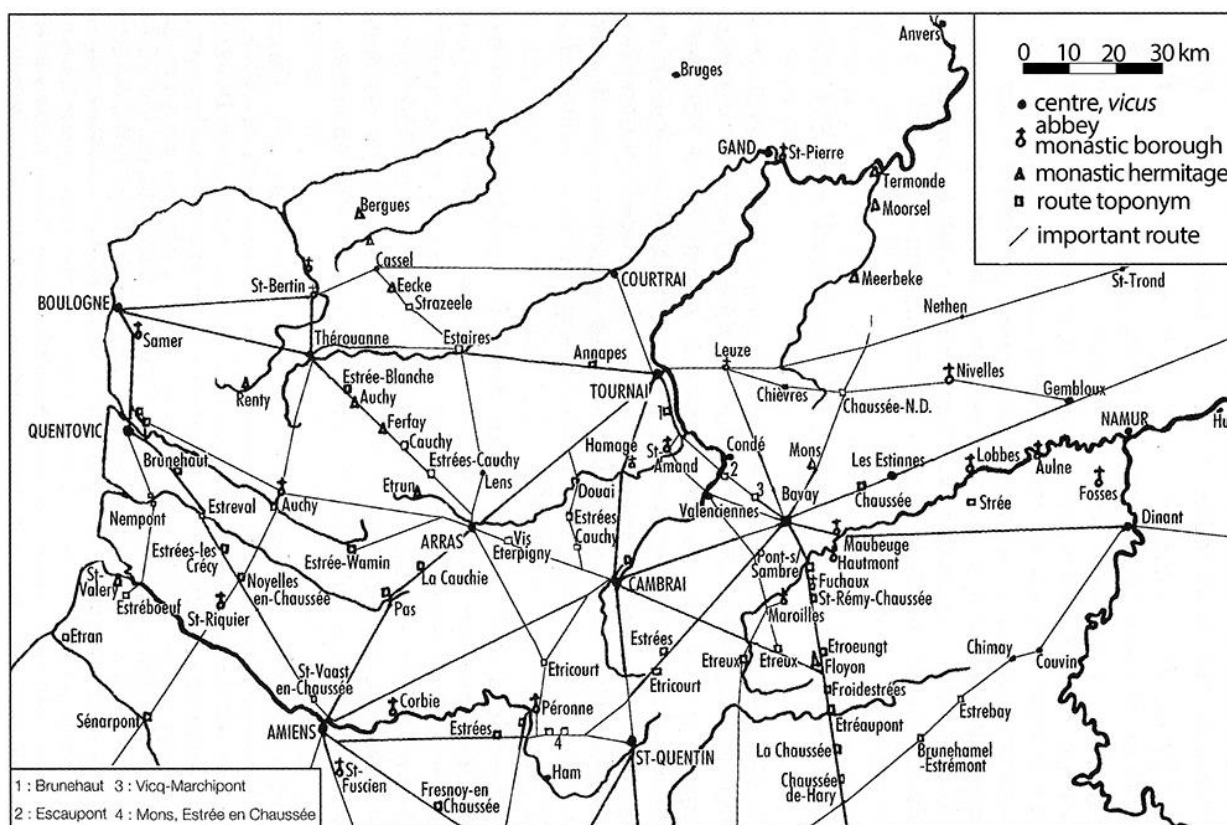[45] Ph. Grierson, Grimbald of St Bertin, English Historical Review 55, 1940, 529–561.

Fig. 5. Schematic map of the road network in north-western France and the river Seine basin during the Carolingian age, with indication of the main centres (dot: centre, vicus), religious settlements (cross: abbey, monastic borough), smaller monastic settlements (triangle) and route toponyms (square). Elaboration A. Panarello after O. Bruand, Voyageurs et marchandises aux temps carolingiens: les réseaux de communication entre Loire et Meuse aux VIIIe et IXe siècles, Bibliothèque Moyen âge 20 (Bruxelles 2002) 94 map 1.

Besançon is located along what is called the 'direct route' from southern England to Rome and, therefore, featured among Sigeric's stopping points.

A comparison between the schematic reconstruction of the road network in the late Carolingian age (figs. 5-7) and Sigeric's itinerary shows that only a few main towns feature in both, suggesting that, although the general routes remained unvaried, either the previous century had produced a substantial change in the topography of the roads and their infrastructure, or Sigeric's personal choices had played a dominant role in the definition of his itinerary and stopping points. Moreover, the 'eastern variant' of the Roman route passing via Besançon, Langres, Reims, Saint-Quentin, Arras, Cassel or Thérouanne and Sangatte seems to be older. Indeed, it is equipped mainly with fords rather than

bridges and, therefore, was easier to maintain. Is this one of the reasons why the archbishop favoured this route at the end of the tenth century?

Although only a few segments of the road effectively walked by Sigeric and his entourage can be identified in the contemporary landscape, it is the continuity of the more significant part of those roads and paths into post-medieval towns thoroughfares and countryside roads that confirms how their 'logic' and design embodied a durable socio-political organisation, the economic forces and the cultural factors that shaped them. The memories and landmarks clustered along them witness the everlasting imprint on local identity and world views. The new medieval routes, composed from a patchwork of older roads adapted to serve novel needs, although generated more spontaneously, still intensely patterned the perception of urban and rural landscapes, influencing the construction of social structures.
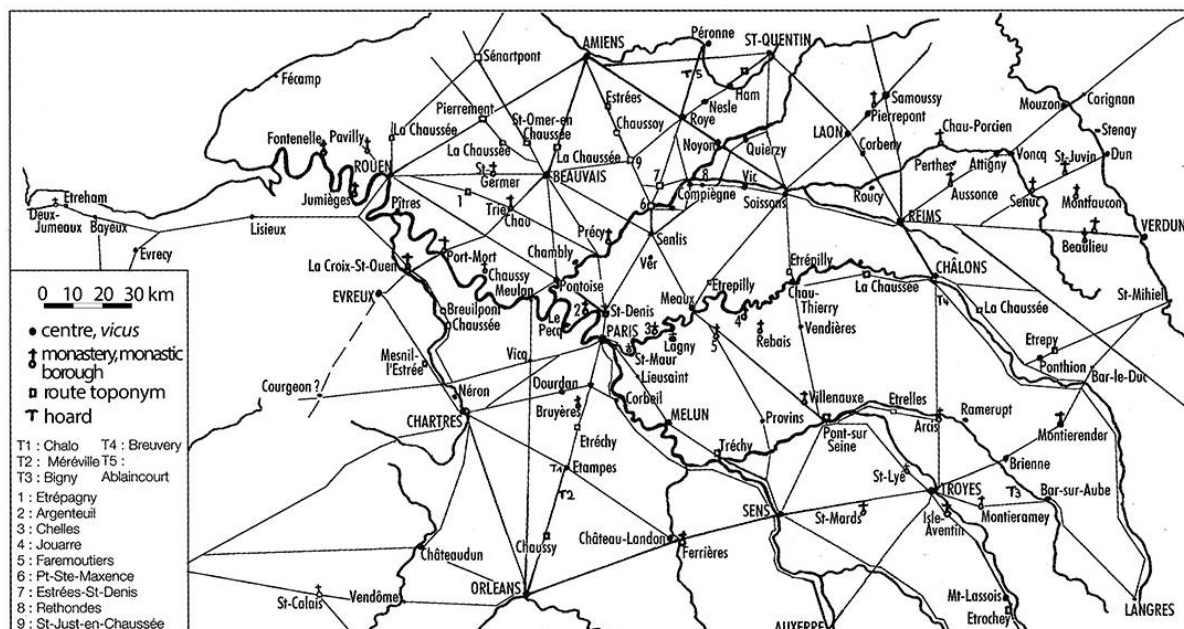

Fig. 6. Schematic map of the river Seine basin during the Carolingian age, with indication of the main centres (dot: centre, vicus), religious settlements (cross: monastery, monastic borough), smaller monastic settlements (triangle) and route toponyms (square). Elaboration A. Panarello after Bruand, Voyageurs et marchandises, 99 map 2.
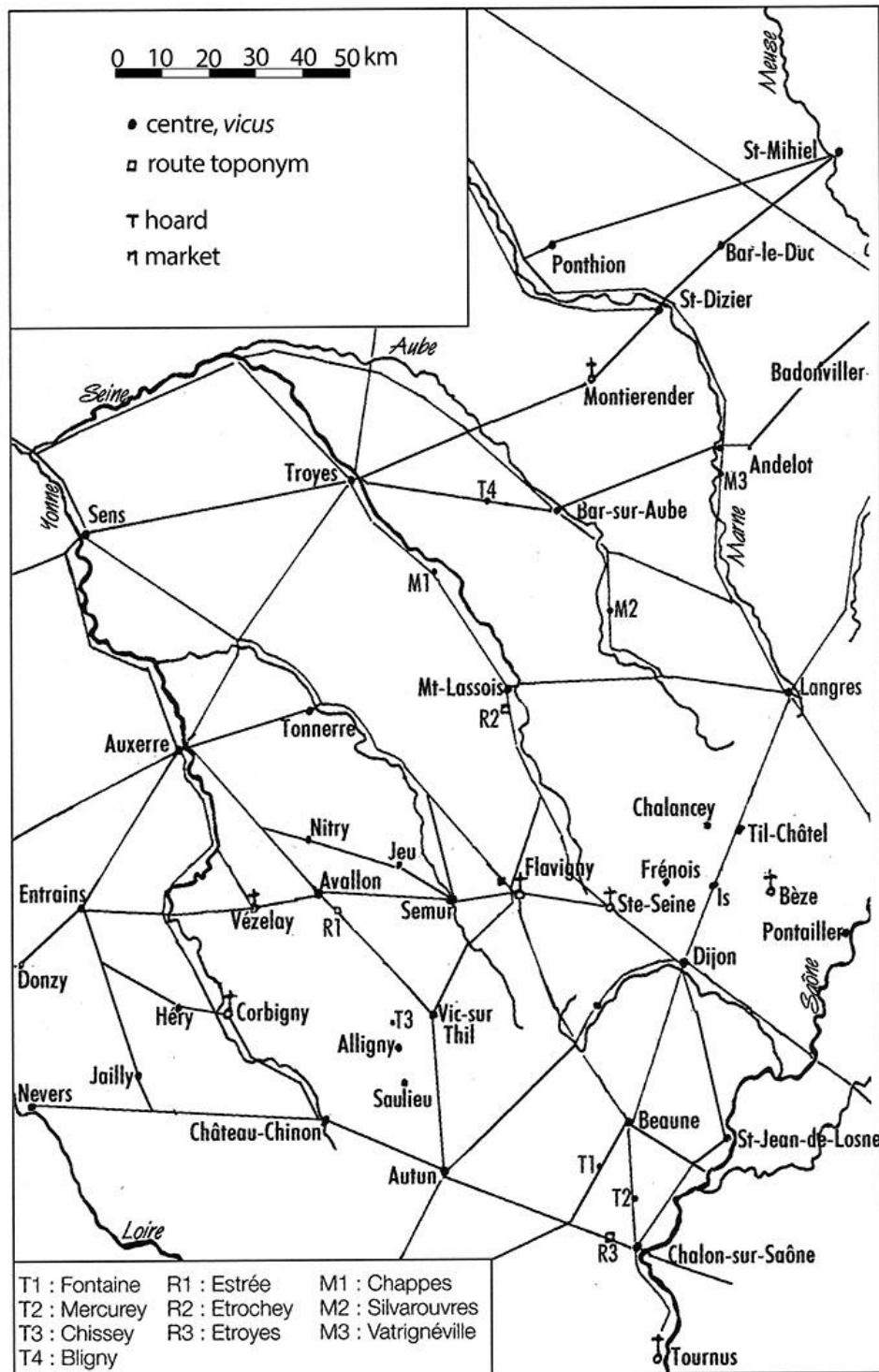
Fig. 7. Schematic map of the road network in Burgundy during the Carolingian age, with indication of the main centres (dot: centre, vicus), religious settlements (cross: monastery, monastic borough), smaller monastic settlements (triangle) and route toponyms (square). Elaboration A. Panarello after Bruand, Voyageurs et marchandises, 107 map 4.

The traveller's choices shaped the configuration of space: the selection of more impervious mountain passes, the choice of thriving urban centres over isolated monasteries, the predilection for powerful episcopal sees over political capitals patterned Sigeric's experience and perception. Notwithstanding his silence on the matter, he shows through the watermark of the manuscript his own attitudes and personality. Clearly still physically fit to endure a tour-de-force of sightseeing in Rome soon after his arrival in the capital, Sigeric shows strong determination in selecting his way, demonstrating a 'pathfinder's' attitude. In other words, by combining different elements that complement and enrich each other, even Sigeric's concise text comes to embody ideology, power and identity. Piecemeal evidence can be collected to detail the experience of the journey, in its material and immaterial aspects, ranging from landscape perception and the modalities and practicalities of travel to all of the emotional and mental factors of navigation through time and space, building a multi- and hyper-sensorial experience. In other words, designing his travelscape.

Cristina Corsi
Università di Cassino - European University of Tecnology
Cassino, Italy – European Union
E-Mail: c.corsi@unicas.it