Ferries and cargo ships alike pass through the entry channel between the two enormous artificial moles that today protect the busy port of Durrës (Porti i Durrësit) in Albania (fig. 1). With eleven berths, divided into four terminals, the port covers approximately 65 hectares of built-up areas that skirt the basin of another 67 hectares of water surface. Durrës harbour handles more than three quarters of the total cargo that leaves or reaches Albania by sea, comprising 3.4 tons in absolute numbers in 2014. In its fourth terminal, ferries of different sizes load and unload roughly 1.5 million people each year, a number that makes Durrës the largest passenger port in the Adriatic Sea providing especially convenient connections to Ancona, Brindisi and Bari.

Durrës’ importance in terms of maritime traffic and trade is of course not a recent phenomenon. Ever since its foundation in the 7th century AD under the name of Epidamnos / Dyrrhachion, the town has played a vital part in maritime networks, especially in Roman and Byzantine times. Durrës has not only functioned as a natural gateway for traffic into the central Balkan plains – its harbour has also served as a hub for routes along and across the Adriatic. For centuries, there was no single town to compete with Durrës, which offered virtually the only safe harbour along the coast between Ulcinj and Vlorë (about 161 km).

Despite its undeniable continuity as a central place, Durrës has undergone many transformations both in terms of geomorphology and infrastructure. Even though the town’s history has always been linked so closely to its harbour, very little is known about it. I will thus attempt to outline the town’s medieval history up to 1204 from a maritime perspective, focussing on economic, military and traffic issues. Moreover, the location of the harbour(s) of Byzantine Durrës shall be discussed.

Pre-Byzantine History

The first Greek colonists from Corfu and Corinth, who set foot on the shore of what is today the city of Durrës in 625 or 627 BC in order to establish an emporion, were perhaps not the first people to settle there. Archaeological findings suggest that there had been an earlier Illyrian settlement, but so far, no buildings could be connected with certainty to a pre-colonial phase. In any case, the Greek settlers had chosen the place for their emporion wisely, as it offered excellent access to the hinterland. The distribution pattern of coins minted in Epidamnos between the end of the 4th and the middle of the 1st century BC points to strong commercial relations deep into the Balkan peninsula as far as Dacia. Apart from this, the colony established itself as an important stop on the main routes across and along the Adriatic Sea.

According to recent archaeological research in Rruga A. Goga – and contrary to an earlier hypothesis of an acropolis – the Hellenistic settlement was probably situated on the plain that extends east of the old town. This settlement evolved along two axes, one leading from west to east (and being probably the precursor of the later Via Egnatia) and the other leading north, following the hill range. The latter perhaps connected the settlement to some landing place east of Capo Pali (Kepi i Bishti i Pallës), as it is known from later centuries that vessels sought shelter there from winds against which the bay of Durrës could not provide any protection (see below). Traces of Hellenistic fortifications were so far only identified in the south-eastern bastion of the city walls.

The town of Epidamnos became a Roman protectorate in 229 BC. The main layout of the Hellenistic settlement does not seem to have changed considerably in Roman times as there are corresponding construction phases on most Hellenistic sites.

1 Metalla / Vyskha / Nexhipi, Performance Measurement.
2 Depending on the period in concern, studies on Durrës use the town’s Greek (Epidamnos/Dyrrhachion), Roman (Dyrrchium) or Italian (Durazzo) name. For the ease of better understanding, I chose to use the modern name ubiquitously, if not referring to proper names of historical administrative entities (e.g. »thema of Dyrrhachion»).
3 On the history of ancient Epidamnos/Dyrrhachion see RE V/2 1882-1887. – DNP III 858. – On the foundation myths of the city see Santoro, Urbanistica 149. 177-189.
5 Picard / Gjongekaj, Drachmes.
6 Santoro, Epidamnos 25.
7 Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova immagine 313-314.
8 Gutteridge / Hoti, New Light 367. – Shehi, Topografia 161.
istic sites. The city prospered as a main trading centre and was of strategic importance in the Roman-Illyrian wars\textsuperscript{9}. A key event for the town’s future evolution was the establishment of the Roman province of Macedonia in 146 BC and the subsequent construction of the \textit{Via Egnatia}, a new road leading from Byzantion across the Balkan peninsula and reaching the sea both near Apollonia and at Durrës, the latter being more advantageous than the first\textsuperscript{10}. However, the importance of the road increased considerably only after the foundation of Constantinople in 330 AD (\textbf{fig. 2})\textsuperscript{11}. By this time, Apollonia

\textsuperscript{9} On the building activities during the Roman protectorate see the overview in Shehi, Topogra\v{s}a 161-174.

\textsuperscript{10} Fasolo, \textit{Via Egnatia} 140-143. 177-180. – Cabanes, \textit{Ports} 130-131. – Several antique sources name only Durrës as the beginning of the road: Hammond, \textit{Via Egnatia} 193.

\textsuperscript{11} Gutteridge/Hoti/Hurst, \textit{Walled City} 395-396.
Early Byzantine Durrës (5th-8th centuries)

The gradual disintegration of the Roman Empire in the second half of the 5th century made the Adriatic a pivotal area between East and West. Even though the whole province of Illyricum was theoretically governed by Constantinople, the Western Empire with its seat in Ravenna had some natural interest in holding sway over the Adriatic coasts. It is not surprising that Dalmatia played a key role in the struggle for the crown in the last decades of the Western Empire. For Durrës, the vacillating claims of authority as well as the Hunnic and Gothic incursions meant that direct rule from Constantinople was only loose. However, Byzantine administration was brought to a first formal end only in 479, when Theodosius the Great’s Goths took the city by ruse and held it until 482/3, making Constantinople especially concerned about the dangers of the establishment of a considerable Gothic fleet.

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Theodoric’s interests initially shifted to the West. Even his later attempts to gain a foothold in the Balkans did not harm Byzantine Durrës22. Being the major western port of the empire, the town once again entered the focus of Constantinople’s policy and fortification became a key issue. It was probably Anastasios I (r. 491-518) who furnished his birthplace Durrës with impressive brick walls, parts of which are still preserved today (fig. 4)23.

During the Justinianic reconquest, Durrës repeatedly appears as the major gateway from the Balkans to Italy. Driven by conflicts with the Ostrogothic elite, Amalasuntha, the daughter of Theodoric the Great and regent for her son Athalaric, asked Justinian I (r. 527-565) for asylum; the Emperor ordered the renovation of the most sumptuous building in the town to serve as her residence until she made her journey to Constantinople. However, the queen never arrived and one of her ships, loaded with 400 kentenaria of gold, which had already been anchoring in Durrës’ harbour, was called back to Ravenna (534)24. Durrës remained a crucial foothold for Constantinople, especially when the struggle against the Goths in Italy expanded to Dalmatia. After the Gothic conquest of Salona, the Byzantine land and sea forces gathered at Durrës before heading north to Dubrovnik and then farther to Salona25. In 545 Justinian’s commander-in-chief Belisar sailed from his headquarters in Ravenna to Durrës, awaiting reinforcements from Constantinople. While the soldiers under the command of Narses took the Via Egnatia, the troops of the generals John and Isaac seem to have arrived by sea26. Once again the Byzantine army had used the logistic advantages of Durrës at the crossing of important land and sea routes.

Durrës’s involvement in Mediterranean networks of trade and communication in the 6th century is reflected by the patterns of imported fine ceramics27. The traditional dominance of African produce (African Red Slip Ware / ARSW) was challenged by imports of Phocean Red Slip Ware (PRSW) from Asia Minor (e.g. Hayes 3C, 3E) in the second half of the 5th century. This temporary change was not only due to the Vandal conquest of North Africa (affecting exports only for a short period) but also due to the general decline of the Western Roman Empire and a subsequent orientation of Durrës to the Eastern Mediterranean. However, African fine ware kept dominating the market, especially ARSW from Northern Tunisia, where production sites had taken an upturn in the early 6th century. Consequently, the range of variants of African pottery available in Durrës reached its height between 500 and 530 (e.g. Hayes 93B, 87, 79/93, 99B, Bonifay 35, Fulford 40.4). PRSW was also still being imported (Hayes E3). In the second half of the 6th century, the number of variants

22 Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 28.  
23 John of Antioch, Fragm. 243 (Mariev 462). – Suda, s. v. Ἀναστάσιος (Adler I 187). – The impressive walls have repeatedly been subject to scholarly activity from the 19th c. onwards. Among the most important studies are Heuzey/Dauvet, Mission archéologique. – Fraschini/Schober, Forschungen 33-37. – Ugolini, Albania antiqua. – Karajski/Baçe, Kalaja e Durrësit. – Most recently Gutteridge/Hoti, Walled City. – Gutteridge/Hoti, New Light. – Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies.  
24 Procopius, De bello gotico V 2, 28 (Haury/Wirth II 14).  
25 Procopius, De bello gothico V 7, 26-28 (Haury/Wirth II 37).  
26 Procopius, De bello gothico VII 13, 19 (Haury/Wirth II 352); VII 18, 1-7 (Haury/Wirth II 373-374).  
27 The following after Shehi/Shkodra Rrugia, Importazioni 342-346.
decreased before fading out completely in the middle of the 7th century.

The obvious fall in imported goods coincides with the decline of Durrës in the second half of the 6th century, sharing thus the fate of most Balkan towns: in 552, an earthquake damaged parts of the city once again 28 and it seems that, due to the Justinianic plague, Durrës’s population decreased significantly in the course of the 6th century. There is reason to believe, therefore, that already under the rule of Justinian I (r. 527-565) Durrës received a new circuit of fortifications that corresponded to the shrunken dimensions of the inhabited area 29. The once prosperous city took on features of a tron-style settlement even if it perhaps preserved a higher degree of urbanism than most towns on the Balkan Peninsula 30.

For the period between the late 6th and the 7th century there are virtually no written sources that shed light on the development of Durrës. What is certain, however, is that by the middle of the 7th century, the world around Durrës had changed. Avars and Slavs had penetrated deep in the Balkan peninsula and as a consequence of the breakdown of the remaining Byzantine defence in the aftermath of the usurpation of Phocas in 602, only some of the coastal towns remained under Byzantine control 31. A hoard (c. 680-90) found in the village of Vrap is the southernmost find spot of Avar silver items and testifies that the Avar-Slavic immigration reached the surroundings of Durrës. The town itself, however, seems to have been spared from destruction 32. The Slavic invasion and the breakdown of Byzantine administration and defence undoubtedly meant an interruption of the Via Egnatia from c. 550 to 850/1000, thus isolating Durrës from its Balkan hinterland 33.

Durrës itself must have lost much of its urban features in these centuries. More than anything, the urban impression of the Late Roman town must have changed with the establishment of necropoleis in the former heart of the city from the 7th century onwards, including the areas of the macellum and the amphitheatre, the latter having been transformed from a public space to a residential district by then (fig. 5) 34. In the 7th and 8th century, Byzantine hegemony has to be considered theoretical. Similar to other peripheral areas like Dalmatia, Cyprus or Cherson, administration relied on local archontes who enjoyed a very high degree of autonomy. Durrës’ once-prosperous port seems to have turned into an anchorage of secondary importance as ships crossed the southern Adriatic already at the height of the island of Corfu and as the volume of traffic along the Adriatic shore also apparently diminished 35.

The thema of Dyrrhachion (c. 800 - c. 1042)

The Byzantines managed to restore control over the lost parts of the Balkans only from the middle of the 8th century onwards. Step by step, the conquered territories were re-organized. The thema of Kephallonia was probably founded around 750 and Durrës and its surrounding territories were promoted from an archontate to a thema probably already around the year 800 36. Initially, the thema seems to have (theoretically) covered the old province of Praevalis and Epirus Nova 37. According to Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos it even extended from Antiparos in the north to Valona/Vlorë in the south. The border to the thema of Nikopolis must have been drawn somewhere between Cape Glossa and Himare, the Accroceauan Mountains being a logical natural boundary 38.

The thema ranks quite low, both in the Taktikon Uspseskij (842/843: 24th place) and in the Kletorologion of Philotheos (899: 27th place) 39. In the second half of the 9th century, Durrës seems to have primarily functioned as a local bulwark against Saracen piracy 40. However, Durrës played neither a role in the joint offense against Saracen Bari with King Louis II of Italy in 870/71, nor in the successful defence of Dubrovnik and Kotor against the Arabs, two years previously 41. At least some contingents – and most likely also ships – from the thema of Dyrrehachion participated in the re-conquest of Calabria between 880 and 885 42.

From a landward perspective, the situation was at least as challenging for the young thema. Due to the expansion of the Byzantine Empire between the 830s and the 860s, the new province remained largely isolated from the core lands of the Balkans. The situation improved after the peace treaty with the Bulgarians in 863/864. The Via Egnatia had become partially viable again by the late 9th century when papal legates embarked for Italy from the port of Durrës returning from the synod in Constantinople (868/869) 43. However, road connections remained unstable as the Byzantine-Bulgarian rivalry was revived under Tsar Symeon who conquered thirty strongholds in the surroundings of Durrës (894-896) but returned them in 904 44. Its harbour continued to play an important role for the Byzantine navy: according to

28 John Malalas Xvii 15 (Thurn 344).
29 Shehi, Front Nord 331-332.
30 Brandes, Byzantine Cities. – Haldon, Idea.
31 Kistlinger, Oberhoehst 318-319.
32 Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 32 (with literature). The archaeological evidence corresponds well with Procopius, Wars VII 29.1 (Haury/Wirth II 423).
33 McCormick, Origins 69-73.
34 Santoro/Sassidioti, Nuova immagine 316-317.
35 Kistlinger, Oberhoehst 330.
36 Kistlinger, Oberhoehst 337-338. 349. – On the discussion of the dating until 2003 see Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 33 with n. 74.
37 Ducellier, Façade 92.
38 Ducellier, Façade 92.
39 Dikonomides, Lists 49. 139.
40 Kistlinger, Oberhoehst 344-345.
41 Kistlinger, Oberhoehst 346.
44 Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 21.
During the next Bulgarian uprising, Durrës fell to Tsar Samuel in 997 after his marriage with the daughter of one of the leading men of the town, John Chryselios. However, the latter changed sides quickly and handed Durrës over to Basil II in 1005. For Constantinople, the town had become increasingly significant, also from the perspective of church administration. Since the important bishopric of Ohrid was in the possession of Tsar Samuel, Durrës was furnished with additional suffragan bishoprics, their number increasing from four to fifteen in the early 11th century. The last Bulgarian resistance was crushed in 1018. Due to this Byzantine victory, after centuries of restricted viability, the Via Egnatia became once again the major artery between the Adriatic Sea and Constantinople. More than that: when Byzantine warships once again dominated the Mediterranean in the 10th century, Durrës served as a minor naval base.

Yet, Byzantine hegemony over the Balkans must be considered as quite loose even after 1025. The main duty of the governors of Niš, Skopje, Dubrovnik and Durrës was to monitor the loyalties of local zupans/archontes. Collaboration with the élites was also of cardinal importance within the strong walls of Durrës itself. An inscription donated by the inhabitants of the town, which praises the strategos Niketas Pegonites while at the same time denigrating his incapable predecessor, is an eloquent piece of evidence for the fragile balance of powers in the aftermath of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war. In the following decades, Dyrrachium developed into a classical thematic province with its strategos entitled to muster local troops, and the existence of hypostategoi shows conformity with the evolution of other Byzantine themata.

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The ducate of Dyrrachium (c. 1042-1203)

Contrary to its rising importance, the *thema* of Dyrhachion was reduced to a small stretch of coastline, while even the commander of nearby Hiericho was promoted to a *stratagos*. This fragmentation reflects an overall trend in the Byzantine Empire, where large border *themata* had increasingly been divided ever since the second half of the 10th century. At the same time, these smaller units were put under larger commands led by a *katepano* or *dux*54. In the case of the Western Balkans the *stratagos* of Dyrrhachion rose to be the undoubtedly pre-eminent figure in the region, as is evident from the role of Basil Synadenos during the revolt of the Bulgar Peter Deljan in 104055. Durrës's development from a *thema* to a kind of new military prefecture for the Illyricum seems to have been formally completed by 104256. In this year Konstantinos IX (r. 1042-1055) gave orders to the *patrikios* Michael, governor of Durrës, to assemble not only his own troops but also those of the neighbouring *themata*57, thus proving his supra-regional authority. John Skylitzes calls Michael simply an *archon* but Kekaumenos addresses the governor more precisely as a *katepano*58. Thereafter, the governor of Durrës is mostly addressed as *dux* by our sources. A *praitor* was responsible for civil matters of administration in the ducate59. Apart from its importance on the mainland, Durrës also played a key role in the empire's efforts to defend Byzantine possessions in Italy60.

Due to its favourable strategic location, the ducate of Dyrrhachion played a key role in the history of the Byzantine Empire's western provinces at the end of the 11th century. The power and influence of its governors rose to such an extent that first Nikephoros Bryennios (in 1077) and then Nikephoros Basilikios (in 1078) were ready to attempt a coup d'état. More than ever, it was imperative for the emperor to secure the loyalty of the *dux* of Dyrrhachion. Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078-1081) seems to have appointed the right man for the office, since George Monomachatos refused to join a rebellion against his emperor led by Alexios Komenos. Both Norman and Byzantine sources claim that his loyalty even induced him to invite the Norman count Robert Guiscard and his Normans to take revenge on Alexios, who succeeded in seizing the throne from Nikephoros III in 108161. Being aware of the key strategic role of Durrës, one of the first moves of the new emperor was to put George Palaiologos, one of his closest supporters and a relative of his, in charge of this office. Also thereafter, Alexios was careful to install only his relatives as *duces* of Dyrrhachion62. On the whole, the appointed did not betray Alexios’ trust, with the exception of his nephew John, whom the emperor reprimanded pre-ventatively as soon as rumour had it that John attempted to seize the crown63.

The Byzantine-Norman wars

Durrës’s importance increased even more when the Normans from Southern Italy began to threaten the empire's western coast64. Already in 1066, there was a first Norman attack which was countered by Michael Maurikas, *katepano* and vestarches of Dyrrhachion65. Eight years later a Norman fleet under the count Amicus of Giovinazzo took several towns of central Dalmatia for a short time66. The well-known clash of 1081 did, therefore, not come all of a sudden. Tensions between Duke Robert Guiscard and Constantinople had been increasing since the deposition of Michael VII (r. 1071-1078), as the betrothal of Robert’s son and Michael’s daughter had suddenly become worthless to the Norman leader67. Yet, the Byzantines were not prepared when Robert led his army across the Adriatic Sea in May 1081.

There has been much speculation about Robert’s motives that cannot be revisited here in detail58. Within the context of the present chapter, it is only worth mentioning that Alan Gutteridge’s hypothesis that the immediate goal of Robert’s ambitions was to take control of the town of Durrës itself, as from here the Byzantines could easily interfere with the affairs in Southern Italy as they had done in 1064-67 when the *dux* Perenos had supported a revolt against Robert69. However, being the main threshold to the Balkans, Durrës would have been the logical starting point for any invasion, especially if its *dux* George Monomachatos had really been in contact with the Normans70. In any event, the capture of Durrës was not an easy task. It was the largest city of the Illyrion71 and its almost legendary walls were still an impressive obstacle72. In the northwestern corner of the innermost circuit, situated

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54 Ahweiler, Administration 52-67.
55 John Skylitzes 410 (Thurn).
56 Ahweiler, Mer 140, n. 3. – Ducellier, Façade 95.
57 John Skylitzes 424 (Thurn).
58 Kekaumenos 71 (104 Spadaro).
60 Von Falkenhausen, Dominatione 136 with n. 236.
62 Frankopan, Governors 103.
63 Frankopan, Governors 88.
64 Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 36-37. – For an overview on publications dealing with the Norman attacks see Kisliger, Verantwacht Notizen 127, n. 6.
66 See below, n. 76.
67 Kisliger, Verantwacht Notizen 127, n. 4 with the essential bibliography on this topic.
68 See the publications listed by E. Kisliger, Verantwacht Notizen 128, n. 9.
69 McQueen, Relations 434-440. – von Falkenhausen, Dominatione 99.
70 Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 36. – Kisliger, Verantwacht Notizen 131.
71 Albert von Aachen, Historia Hierosolymitana I 10, 40 (Edgington): Hic sibiujugatus, Dyrrhachium, civitatem magnam rebus et omni virtute vivium ac militum potentissiam, divertit. – Nikephoros Bryennios, Hyle Historias III 3 (Gautier 212).
72 The strength of the walls and towers are emphasised by various (almost) contemporary authors: Anna Comnena X 3, 8 (Reinsch/Kambylis 392). – Geoffrey Malautra III 25 (Ponteri 72). – Ralph of Torve vv. 101-102 (Jenai): Dyrrhachium cingunt: rapes, quae circa profundos / Aequoribus caelo tumbus appropriat.
73 – William of Apulia IV 234-235 (Mathieu 216): Quondam fuit urbs opulentia / Magnaque praecipe tegulosis obista muris.
on higher ground than the town, the citadel (praitorion in Anna Komnena’s text) with its four towers offered additional protection 73.

Robert Guiscard’s fleet crossed the Adriatic Sea in May 1081, consisting of 150 vessels, if we can trust Anna Komnena’s words 74. Even though parts of his fleet were lost in a tempest, Robert landed near Vlorë (Valona/Aulona) and moved along the coast towards Durrës. Obviously, there was no Byzantine navy capable of resisting the Norman invasion 75. In search of naval assistance, Alexios turned to the Venetians who shared Byzantine preoccupations with a Norman presence on both shores of the strait of Otranto 76. In exchange for military support, Venice was granted far-reaching trade concessions, which were ultimately formalized in the well-known chrysobullos logos of 1082 77. In hindsight, the privileges stipulated in the contract 78 were correctly seen as the “corner-stone of the Venetian colonial empire in the eastern Mediterranean” 79. However, the chrysobullon implies that one of Venice’s immediate and primary concerns must have been to establish a foothold in Durrës, as it is the only place (apart from Constantinople) where they were granted property (see below), a fact that is also underlined by Anna Komnena 80.

The Venetians kept their word and probably by mid-August 1081 they arrived with a fleet of 14 warships and 45 other vessels to lift the siege of Durrës. Although they were able to drive back the Norman vessels to their encampment (see below), the Venetian galleys could not score a decisive victory and the siege continued 81. In October, Emperor Alexios and his troops arrived on the scene. In the following pitched battle (18 October) near Arapaj, not far from the shoreline of Durrës Bay, the Byzantine army was routed and dispersed (fig. 6) 82. Since George Palaiologos was not able to return to the town, Durrës was left without its commander to face the Norman siege. The defence of the town was entrusted to some local archon bearing the title of a komēs tēs kortēs, whereas the citadel was put under control of some Venetians 83.

74 Anna Comnena I 16, 1 (Reinsch / Kambylis 50-51). – His son Bohemund had already landed before with his vanguard between Vlorë and Iericho and had conquered Butrint, cf. Kislinger, Verstauchte Notizen 29-30.
75 Ahriveler, Mer 179.
76 Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 55-57. – Madden, Chrysobull 24-25. – Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 168. – Only a few years before Venice herself had been faced with Norman ambitions when count Amicus of Giovinazzo tried to gain control of central Dalmatia in 1074. As some of the towns had willingly accepted Amicus as their sovereign, Doge Domenico Silvio (r. 1070-1084) forced them to promise to never again let any Norman pass their gates.
77 Pozza/Ravegnani, Trattati, no. 2, cap. 8 (p. 40). – Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 57.
78 For a concise overview see Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 60-61. – Madden, Chrysobull 24.
79 Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 60.
80 Anna Comnena VI 5, 10 (Reinsch / Kambylis 178). Anna dates the treaty incorrectly in the year 1084. – The causal relation between the trading concessions and the siege of Durrës is remembered by John Kinnamos VI 10 (Meineke 280-281) too.
81 Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 57.
82 Haldon Byzantine Wars 183-187.
83 Anna Comnena IV 8, 4 (Reinsch / Kambylis 140). – Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 166. – For the komēs tēs kortēs see Vranousse, Komiskortes.
As there was no hope of relief through an imperial army, Durrës was handed over to Robert Guiscard on 21 February 1082 by a man of Italian origin. Lupus Protospatharius relates that a Venetian treacherously delivered Durrës to the Normans. William of Apulia and Geoffrey Malaterra provide more details. According to them, the traitor was Dominicus, a distinguished Venetian who did not feel sufficiently acknowledged by the leader of his compatriots, who allegedly was a son of the Doge (Domenico Selvo, r. 1070-1085). Therefore, he secretly offered Robert to deliver the town to him. When he opened the gates for the Norman soldiers, the Venetian garrison fled hastily and Robert was able to take the town. The events read a little differently in Anna Komnena, our only Byzantine source. Although drawing heavily from the account of William of Apulia, in her version of events, the leading men of Durrës assembled in order to discuss the terms of capitulation. Following the insistent advice of an anonymous Amalitan, they finally decided to hand over the town to the Normans. Anna may have made this modification intentionally so as not to cast unfavourable light upon her father’s alliance with the Venetians.

The story of the citadel being entrusted to some Italians raises the important issues of the degree of municipal autonomy and of the presence of Latins in Durrës alike. Anna’s account that the leading men of Durrës met to discuss how to come to terms with the Normans is quite plausible. Given the lack of any Byzantine commander or governor and with no relief army being in sight, it is only natural that a decision had to be made. It was not the first time that important local individuals put the interests of Durrës (or of their families) above those of the emperor in Constantinople. Local elites had already played a decisive role in the Byzantine-Bulgarian war around the year 1000 (see above) and, as will be shown, ties to the capital were not strong enough to rally the population to resist foreign armies - neither in 1185 nor in 1203. Furthermore, Anna remains true to her interpretation of facts by stating that after Robert Guiscard’s death, Alexios not only requested the Norman garrison of Durrës to lay down their arms but also sent a letter to the Amalitans, the Venetians, and the other inhabitants, offering various promises and gifts if they would support his claim to the town and open the gates. According to Anna, the «Latins» consented to do so, as they were always craving riches. It is, however, inconclusive whether Anna’s account refers to the Normans or the Italians.

Perhaps the lack of loyalty can be partially explained by the multi-ethnic composition of Durrës’s population from the late 11th century onwards. Anna Komnena’s claim that the defence of the citadel was entrusted to distinguished Venetians living in Durrës (τοῖς ἐκκρίτοις ἐκκρίτοις τῶν ἑκάστης ἐκκρίτους) led scholars to believe that there must have been a considerable colony of merchants in the town. Even though this may be true, it seems that this important military task was fulfilled instead by the combat-tested crews of the Venetian fleet (who had not suffered losses in the fatal battle in October 1081) rather than by merchants. According to William of Apulia, Dominicus himself may indeed have been a resident of the town. However, the doge’s son, who evidently was the leading figure, would have arrived with the Venetian fleet, and William clearly states that the latter only left the port of Durrës after Dominicus’ betrayal. Yet, this observation does not contradict the assumption of an Italian colony. Even if Anna Komnena probably exaggerates when she claims that the majority of the population was made up of Amalitans and Venetians, Durrës is the only harbour along the route from the Upper Adriatic to Constantinople where the Serenissima had demanded property from Alexios I, namely the church of St. Andrew with all its property and revenues. The building has not yet been identified or located, but its possessions comprised equipment for Alexios’ warships (which was explicitly not ceded to the Venetians!): *Similiter dat et ecclesiam Sancti apostoli Andreæ que est in Dyrrachio, cum et ibidem existentibus imperialibus pensionalibus, preter in is positam aphanes, que debet dari ad chelandià*. The church, therefore, was probably close to the port where it would be logical to expect the nucleus of a possible Venetian quarter.

It is now time to return to our line of events: while Robert Guiscard was back in Italy, another Venetian fleet sailed down to Durrës in early October 1083. They attacked the town, which was almost depopulated after a famine, and plundered it for 15 days. The citadel, however, remained in the hands of the Normans. When news reached the Venetians that a Norman army was drawing closer, they retreated from the town and built a floating platform out of their ships. As winter fell, they refrained from any further attack and limited themselves to intercepting Norman supply ships from Southern Italy. In spring 1084 they sailed to Corfu and expelled the Norman garrison. Together with Byzantine makeshift detachments under the command of the former dux of Dyrrhachion Michael Maurikas they suffered a devastating defeat when Robert

84 Lupus Protospatharius 61, ad a. 1082 (Pertz 61): *mense lanuarij Robertus dux cepit civitatem Dyrrhachion tradidisse quorumdam Venetiorum*.
86 Frankopan, Turning Latin.
87 Anna Comnena V 1, 2 (Reinsch/Kamylis 141).
88 Paul Stephenson (Balkan Frontier 169-170) claims that the Venetian Dominicus had in fact been installed as governor of the town. Direct control would have been part of the concessions granted to Venice in order to receive naval assistance. However, Alexios later gave orders to kill a man (Dominicus?) and his entourage who had been responsible for delivering the town to the Normans, ending thus the «brief period of Venetian domination». However, Stephenson’s hypothesis is not supported by any of the contemporary sources.
89 Anna Comnena VI 6, 4 (Reinsch/Kamylis 180).
90 Anna Comnena IV 8, 4 (Reinsch/Kamylis 140).
91 E.g. Hashimihali, Dyrrhachion byzantin 296.
92 William of Apulia IV 449-450 (Mathieu 228): *Diracii quidam, quem terra Venetica mist, vir praeclarus erat, nomenque Dominicus illi*.
93 William of Apulia IV 496-505 (Mathieu 230).
94 Anna Comnena IV V 1, 1 (Reinsch/Kamylis 141)
95 Pozza/Ravegnani, Trattati, no. 2, cap. 7 (p. 40) and the commentary (p. 32). – Tafel/Thomas, Urkunden, no. 23 (p. 52). – Ducellier, Façade 32. – Hashimihali, Dyrrhachion byzantin 297-98.
returned with a new fleet. However, the Norman army was soon struck by an epidemic resulting in the death of the count in 1085, which not only thwarted their ambitions to occupy the Byzantine Illyrikon but also put an end to the Norman dominion over Durrës.96

The 12th century: restoration and decline

By the end of the 11th century, Durrës had risen to be the se- 

ior military command in the western Balkans.97 From several letters from Theophylact of Ohrid to the dux of Dyrhachion it is obvious that the latter’s authority exceeded that of his colleague in Ohrid.98 With an increasing number of Venetian traders being engaged along the eastern shores of the Adriatic and with the Via Egnatia having become viable again after 1085, Durrës was without doubt an important harbour for exporting the agricultural produce of its hinterland.99 From the end of the 12th century onwards, there were Latin merchants operating the overland transportation routes from the inner Balkans. From Durrës the merchandise was shipped to Italian ports.100 Still, from the point of view of economy, Durrës does not seem to have played an extraordinary role within the Adriatic trade networks.101

For Constantinople, Durrës and its province was first and foremost considered as a bulwark against invasions from the West. The events of 1081-1085 had proved, however, that any efficient defence necessitated a strong fleet, and Alexios I indeed tried to strengthen his navy. While in 1081 there had not been any fleet that was powerful enough to offer resistance against the Normans, the situation of the Byzantine navy slowly began to improve as the appearance of the fleet of Maurikas shows.102 The shipyards of Durrës seem to have become increasingly busy, too. When in 1092 Alexios I sought a man to supervise the construction of the empire’s new fleet, he chose to entrust this task to his nephew John Doukas who presumably had gained experience in this field when he had been dux of Dyrhachion.103 At least, we know from the chrysolobpos logos from 1082 that there was a magazine near the church of St. Andrew in which equipment for the imperial warships (chelandlia) was stored (see above).104

To a certain extent, Alexios’ initiative to restore Byzantine sea power proved fruitful and between c. 1090 and 1105 the core of a new fleet was re-established. In 1107 Alexios’ navy had its baptism by fire. Robert Guiscard’s son Bohemund was preparing for another attempt to invade Byzantine Albania. Alexios ordered the megas dux Isaakios Kontostephanos to sail to Durrës. His mission was to keep the sea routes under surveillance and, if necessary, to intercept Bohemund’s transport ships. Isaac even considered his fleet strong enough to attack Otranto. His assault failed, though, and he had to retreat to the vast natural harbour of Vlorë/Valona where he gathered the fleet, as he expected Bohemund to land there (as the Normans had done in 1081).105 Yet, when the Norman fleet approached in close formation, the Byzantine ships immediately gave way.106 Bohemund’s first target was again Durrës but this time the siege failed and the Norman force was compelled to capitulate.

Hélène Ahrweiler’s assumption that by the second decade of the 12th century Durrës and Cyprus had become the empire’s two main naval bases,107 needs to be relativized. Even if there is evidence for some activities and involvement, we cannot conclude that there were large-scale naval operations in effect: in 1169, ten ships from Durrës participated in the campaign against Damietta in Egypt.108 Shortly afterwards a Venetian fleet attacked Euboea and Chios (1171-1172) but was routed by the Byzantine navy near Lesbos. On their way back, the decimated Venetians were attacked by naval forces from Durrës.109 It is possible that vessels from Durrës and Venice clashed again in 1173. In this year, the sebastos Konstantinos Doukas, governor of Dalmatia, was given the task of lifting the Venetian siege of Ancona. After several successful skirmishes he was promoted to a »dux of the army« (kata laon douka) and governor of Diokleia, Dalmatia, Split and Durrës. Konstantinos’ fleet probably comprised vessels from Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Dyrhachion.110

After the death of Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-1180), the Byzantine navy was once again in a miserable state. And – similar to the events of 1081 – Durrës was one of the first victims of Constantinople’s loss of control over the seas: on 24th June 1185, a Norman fleet crossed the Adriatic and was able to take the town without meeting any resistance, as both Niketas Choniates and Eustathios of Thessalonica emphasize. According to the latter, this military disaster was the fault of Andronikos I. The emperor, Eustathios complains, had installed a certain Romanos, his son-in-law-to-be, as dux

97 Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 151-2.
99 Ducellier, Présence latine 216.
100 Ducellier, Présence latine 216. 
101 Ducellier, Présence latine 216. 
102 Ahrweiler, Mer 181. – Böhm, Flota. – Kislinger, Vertauschte Notizen 141.
103 Ahrweiler, Mer 186. 190. – Ducellier, Façade 102. 
104 The dating of the chrysolobpos has been disputed ever since but 1082 is very probable. On the discussion see Madden, Chrysolobpos.
105 Pozza/Ravegnani, Trattati, no. 2, cap. 7 (p. 40).
106 Ahrweiler, Mer 195.
107 Anna Comnena XII 8, 1-8 (Reinsch/Kambylis 378-381).
108 Anna Comnena XII 9, 1-2 (Reinsch/Kambylis 381).
109 Ahrweiler, Mer 224.
110 Niketas Choniates 160 (van Dieten). – Ahrweiler, Mer 264-265.
111 Kinnamos VI 10 (Meneke 284-285).
112 Ahrweiler, Mer 260-261, based on Montfaucon, Palaeographia Graeca 47.
of the city. Romanos’ craving for riches «brought the people of Dyrrachion from prosperity to poverty» and was therefore detrimental to their loyalty to the emperor.114 However, Eustathios’ account is very biased against Andronikos, whom he blames as being fully responsible for the breakdown of the Byzantine defence of the western frontier and the subsequent capture of Thessalonica. Yet, it seems that Andronikos had indeed taken the necessary steps to defend Durrës too late, since John Branas, the general whom the emperor had ordered to organize resistance, arrived only shortly before the Norman fleet.115 The city then remained under the control of the Normans during the next months; after their defeat in the battle at the river Strymon, their remnant troops took to Durrës in order to embark for Italy.116

The last Byzantine dux of Dyrrhachion is mentioned in 1203 when the registers of Pope Innocence III report that the Archbishop of Trnovo was taken into custody when he wanted to embark for Italy in order to obtain an imperial coronation for his Tsar Kalojan from the pope.117

It is astonishing that most western chronicles do not mention that the Venetian fleet made a stop at Dyrrachion on their way from Zadar to Kerkyra in 1203.118 Fortunately, the very reliable account of the eye-witness Geoffrey of Villehardouin tells us explicitly that the crusaders landed in the «port à Duraz» too, where they presented their candidate for the Byzantine throne, Alexios (IV), to the people.119 Niketas Choniates’ account supports this itinerary from the Byzantine point of view. Both authors imply that Dyrrachium had willingly opened the gates for the Latins, since the inhabitants are reported to have sworn fealty to the usurper without hesitating (quant il le virent, mult volentiers et il firent fealté / Ἀλέξιος παρὰ τῶν Ἑπιδαμνίτων ἀνήγορευτο)120. Probably, the Venetians installed a garrison in the town before continuing their crusade, which ultimately ended with the sack of Constantinople. In the Partitio terrarum imperii Romanae the Venetians were allotted the province of Dyrrachium (provincia Dirrhachia) as well as the provinces of Arbania, Kanina, and Drinopolis and also the chartolarates of Glavinica and Vagenetia.121 The first Venetian dux of Durrës is mentioned in 1210.122

Considering the fact that already in 1185 the Norman fleet had met no resistance whatsoever, it seems that the bonds between Durrës and Constantinople were not indeed very strong. Alan Gutteridge put forward the thesis that the increasingly strong Latin element in the population of the town (and all along the Albanian coast) had led to a cultural and political orientation towards the West rather than to the Byzantine East.123 Although this approach seems tempting, we simply do not have enough information about the size of the Latin colonies in Durrës. On the grounds that the Venetians did not try to be granted even more privileges and property in the town when the treaty of 1082 was renewed in 1148 and in 1187, André Ducellier cautions that the number of Venetian residents in Durrës should not be overestimated.124 On the other hand, we know that Latin clerics were influential enough to play a decisive role when the Archbishop of Trnovo was prevented from continuing his journey to Rome in 1203.125 Yet, even if the behaviour of Durrës’s inhabitants in 1185 and 1203 was not necessarily motivated by their ethnic composition, it is obvious that they enjoyed a considerable degree of municipal autonomy, serving first and foremost the interests of the town and not those of the empire.126

Landscape and the location of the harbour in Antiquity and Middle Ages

Depending on geopolitical circumstances, the role of Durrës vacillated between trading hub and naval base, between flourishing marketplace and bulwark against invasions. In any event, its importance has always been due to its location at the crossing of important trans-Adriatic and trans-Balkan routes, with its harbour(s) being the decisive factor. In the context of the present paper, it is vital to see what is known about the location and the layout of the ancient and mediæval harbour. The interest in the topic has intensified only in the last few years and although many issues cannot be definitely solved for the moment, it is useful to revisit established theories and present current discussions.

A harbour at Capo Pali?

Immediately east of the hill-range between Capo Pali in the north and Durrës in the south, there extends a distinctive plain, which had been a lagoon (këneta e Durrësit) before it was made arable by drainage only from 1965 onwards (figs 6-7). The extent of this lagoon in antiquity and in mediæval times is however disputed. Antiquarian sources agree that the plain was covered with water and that the town of

114 Eustathios Thessalonikies 64 (Kyriakides). – Transl. Melville Jones, Eustathios 65.
115 Eustathios Thessalonikies 64 (Kyriakides). – Niketas Choniates 297. 317 (van Dieten).
116 Niketas Choniates 361 (van Dieten).
117 The Registers of Innocent III, Register VI, letter 142 (Hageneder et al. 233-235, esp. 235) and Register VII, letter 5 (Hageneder et al. 15-18, esp. 16).
118 Hashimihal, Dynachium byzantin 299.
119 Geoffrey of Villehardouin 111 (Faral I 112-114): Et ensi partirent del port de Jadres, et orent bon vent, et alerent tant que il pristrent port a Duraz. Enquifrent cild de la ville la ville a lor seignor (scil. Alexios (IV,)), quant il le virent, mult volentiers et il firent fealté.
120 Niketas Choniates 541 (van Dieten): Επεὶ δὲ παρεστήσαντο μὲν οἱ Λατῖνοι τὰ τὰῦδα, ἡ δὲ Ἑπιδάμνια προσώκησιν καὶ βασιλείας Ρωμαίων ὡς συνὸς Ἑλληνικὸς Ἀλέξιος παρὰ τῶν Ἑπιδαμνίτων ἀνήγορευτο [...]. – Ahnweiler, Mer 295. – Cheynet, Pouoir 139-140 (no 199).
121 Ducellier, Façade 98-99. – Caret, Partitio 220 (see also the commentary 161. 263-264).
122 Hashimihal, Dynachium byzantin 298-299.
123 Gutteridge, Cultural Geographies 44.
124 Ducellier, Présence latine 216-217.
125 See above, n. 117.
126 Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 186.
Durrës was situated more or less on a peninsula: according to Thucydides (5th c. BC) and Eratosthenes (3rd c. BC) the town of Epidamnos was situated on an Isthmus or a peninsula, respectively. Perhaps, ships could enter from the south and/or from the north (either at Porto Romano or east of Capo Pali) in this time. When Dyrrhachium became the stage for the famous clash between Cesar and Pompey in 48 BC, Lucan (1st c. AD) states that the town was connected to the mainland only by a narrow strip of land. The eyewitness Julius Caesar speaks of two connections, probably screening the lagoon from open waters both at its northern and southern rim. This assumption of a lagoon is clear from the description offered by Cassius Dio (2nd/3rd c. AD), who states that Caesar, approaching the town on a narrow landbridge (he mentions only one) between sea and marshland, had to retreat as his troops were attacked simultaneously by Pompeian land and sea forces. It is sufficiently supported, therefore, that at least in antiquity Durrës was indeed situated on a kind of peninsula.

However, archaeological investigations have evidenced Roman building activities in areas that later definitely were covered with water. More than that, in 2004 Eduard Shehi discovered a Roman wall, which seems to have originally served to block the waters from the lagoon. At the same site, extra muros, he found parts of Roman canal works dating to the 1st/2nd c. AD, meaning that by this time the lagoon had silted up, at least in this area. Therefore, it may be wrong to reconstruct the antique lagoon on the basis of its extension in the early 20th century. Yet, the lagoon, even if smaller in size, must have constituted a key geographical feature for the town of antique and mediaeval Durrës.

The existence of a lagoon has always tempted scholars to assume that perhaps parts of it would have been suitable as a perfectly sheltered harbour. This assumption was repeatedly fuelled by a stretch of a late antique fortiﬁcation preserved at Porto Romano (Portë), approximately seven km north of the old town. In 1919, Praschniker and Schober took notice of a wall consisting of alternating layers of brick and stone that was furnished with one gate and three towers of rectangular shape. Today, only c. 135 m of the wall are preserved up to a maximum height of 3.4 m and a width of 1.8 m.

All but one of the towers have been destroyed since the survey carried out by Praschniker and Schober, who dated the fortiﬁcation to the 6th century based on similarities with the Roman building in other coastal areas. However, archaeological investigations have evidenced Roman building activities in areas that later definitely were covered with water. More than that, in 2004 Eduard Shehi discovered a Roman wall, which seems to have originally served to block the waters from the lagoon. At the same site, extra muros, he found parts of Roman canal works dating to the 1st/2nd c. AD, meaning that by this time the lagoon had silted up, at least in this area. Therefore, it may be wrong to reconstruct the antique lagoon on the basis of its extension in the early 20th century. Yet, the lagoon, even if smaller in size, must have constituted a key geographical feature for the town of antique and mediaeval Durrës.

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127 Peloponnesian War I 26: ἔστι δ’ ἱσθμὸς τὸ χωρίον. Stephen of Byzantium c. 91 (Billerbeck/Zubler 150), s. v. Epidamnos: πόλις Ἰλλυρίας, ἐπὶ χερρονήσου τῆς καλουμένης Δυρραχίου.
128 Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova immagine 305.
129 Lucan, Pharsalia VI 23-25: nam clausa profunda undique preecipit scapulisque uomentibus aequor exiguo debet, quod non est insula, coll. Contrary to Shehi/Shkodra-Rugia, Front nord 326, I cannot see from the passage in the Pharsalia that this landbridge was necessary in the north.
130 Caesar, Bellum civile III 58: aditus duos quasi esse angustos demonstravimus. Cassius Dio, Historiae Romanarum XI 50: αύτον δ’ οὗ τοῦ Δυρραχίου Ἀλέων μεταξύ τῶν τε ἑλῶν καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης νυκτός, ὡς καὶ προδηληθημένου ὑπὸ τῶν ἄμμων ὅπου περασάτως ἔλεις μὲν τῶν στενῶν παρῆλθε. It is, however, not clear if this skirmish took place on the southern (Shehi/Shkodra-Rugia, Front nord 326) or on the northern (Veith, Feldzug 168-169) isthmus. – Contra to Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80, n. 23, I do not think that Aelian, De Natura animantium XIV 1, refers to the lagoon of Durrës: In mari Ionio prope Epidamnum, ubi et Taulantii habitant, insula est, quae Minervae appellatur, eamque piscatores incolunt, et istic lacus est, ubi scombrorum qui ad piscatorum consuetudinem assuerunt, et mansuefacti sunt, greges aluntur.
131 Cassius Dio, Historiae Romanarum XI 50: αύτον δ’ οὗ τοῦ Δυρραχίου Ἀλέων μεταξύ τῶν τε ἑλῶν καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης νυκτός, ὡς καὶ προδηληθημένου ὑπὸ τῶν ἄμμων ὅπου περασάτως ἔλεις μὲν τῶν στενῶν παρῆλθε. It is, however, not clear if this skirmish took place on the southern (Shehi/Shkodra-Rugia, Front nord 326) or on the northern (Veith, Feldzug 168-169) isthmus. – Contra to Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80, n. 23, I do not think that Aelian, De Natura animantium XIV 1, refers to the lagoon of Durrës: In mari Ionio prope Epidamnum, ubi et Taulantii habitant, insula est, quae Minervae appellatur, eamque piscatores incolunt, et istic lacus est, ubi scombrorum qui ad piscatorum consuetudinem assuerunt, et mansuefacti sunt, greges aluntur.
132 Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80 and Shehi/Shkodra-Rugia, Front nord 326, think that the sources even allow to trace the gradual change from the once open waters to a lagoon between the 3rd and the 1st c. AD.
133 Myro, Gërime.
134 Shehi, Topograﬁ a 187.
135 Cabanes, Ports d’Illyrie 127. – Guttridge, Cultural Geographies.
136 Schober, Topographie. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova immagine 300-301, 305.
137 Karaiskaj/Baçe, Kalaja e Durrësit 5-33. – Praschniker/Schober, Forschungen 46. – Heuzey/Daumet, Mission archéologique.
138 Guttridge/Hoti/Hurst, Walled City 394. – Shehi/Shkodra-Rugia, Front nord 327.
city scholars tend to agree on an earlier date between the 3rd and the middle of the 5th century. Praschniker's and Schober's interpretation of the structures as part of the outermost circuit of the city walls can today be dismissed. Already in 1876, Heuzey and Daumet had advanced the thesis that the port was originally situated within the lagoon, with its main access point at Porto Romano. A channel would have allowed vessels to proceed southwards. The town itself would have been located further to the north too, before the constant silting-up of the lagoon made the settlement shift to the south. A similar view was expressed in 2001 by Gutteridge, Hoti and Hurst who suggested that it [the wall] possibly formed part of a defensive circuit around a managed harbour area that was of some importance in the later Roman period. It is possible that a change in sea levels, due to climate change or local seismic activity, dried up the land around the port and made the landing of ships impossible. However, it must be stressed that, after the discovery of Hellenistic structures beneath the Roman and Byzantine phases of the southern bastion of the city walls, the authors revised this hypothesis.

According to another theory, which I am inclined to follow, the fortifications at Porto Romano may have always been an isolated structure that served to block and to control the only road from Capo Pali to Dyrrachium, following the narrow path between the open sea in the west and the lagoon or marshland in the east. By 1920, when the lagoon still covered the whole plain, Durrës could indeed be approached from the northeast only via two isthmi, the first being the northern rim of the lagoon leading to the hills of Capo Pali and the second bridging the gap between the hills of Capo Pali and the area of Porto Romano. This hypothesis, of course, presupposes an anchorage in the bay east of Capo Pali, and, indeed, there are at least two possible candidates in that area.

The first one is the bay behind Capo Pali and Capo Rodoni, which would have compensated for the shortcomings of the southern harbour, especially regarding the limited space and the exposure to southern winds. From a nautical viewpoint, it would have been a logical choice. Even though, however, the bay of Capo Pali seems to have been sufficient as an anchorage, it would be wrong to imagine any sophisticated infrastructure. Moreover, the entrance to the bay was dangerous because of shallow waters around the cape itself and along the shoreline. According to a 19th-century portolan it was only possible to anchor in the northern part of the bay, and even there ships should keep a distance of about 300 feet from the shoreline. Recent underwater surveys in the immediate surroundings of the cape brought to light amphorae that date from the 4th century BC to the 1st century AD. They may hint at the fact that ships approached the beaches to the east of the cape where today there is a small Albanian naval base.

A second anchorage is mentioned in a 16th-century Greek portolanic book under the name of «Porto Pale» (Λιμήνος Πάλη Παλαμάκι), situated three miles NNE-EENE (grego, although the indication of wind directions is normally not very accurate) of Durrës, referring thus roughly to the areas east (see above) or west of the cape itself. A survey brought to light archaeological material from the area immediately southwest of Capo Pali proving not necessarily an anchorage but at least evidence of some activity. However, as this stretch of coastline offers hardly any protection, ships would have approached it only in cases of emergency to seek protection from northern winds. At times, manoeuvres ended in disaster: a Byzantine shipwreck (5th/first half of 6th century) was discovered about two km southwest of the cape and in 1097 the crusader Hugh I, Count of Vermandois, was also shipwrecked «on the shore midway between Durrës and Capo Pali» (κατά την μεσαιώνα παράλιον τού τοῦ Δυρραχίου καὶ τόπου τινὸς καλουμένου Πάλου) after having embarked from the port of Bari. Byzantine guardsmen watched the scene and took the count to Durrës. The Latin sources withhold the accident and report instead that Hugh was taken into custody by the Byzantines after he had disembarked. In any event, it is interesting that the Byzantine Dux of Dyrrachion had the coastline guarded by watchmen, which only makes sense if he expected that arriving ships could anchor somewhere north of his city.
The harbour in Durrës Bay

If the assumption of Durrës’s main harbour lying near Porto Romano can be dismissed, we have to look for it further south, with the modern-day port serving as a logical starting point. According to an Italian 19th-century portolan, the whole bay of Durrës, stretching from the town in a southeastern direction to Capo Lagi (Kepi i Lagjit), was «the best and safest anchor bay of Albania in every season, capable to shelter a big fleet» 156. Earlier portolans similarly appreciated the harbour’s quality 157.

Praschniker and Schober were, therefore, probably right in assuming that Durrës’ harbour has always been in the bay that extends southeast of the town 158 and most scholars have come to accept this view 159. Although this assumption is very probable, one must consider that the natural conditions of this bay are not perfect. The hill range in the west only provides protection from winds coming from the northwest to north. Anna Komnena reports that when the Normans wanted to invade the Illyricum in 1107, they could not go directly to Durrës because of the strong southern winds but instead had to disembark in the bay of Valona more than 100 km south of Durrës 160.

Durrës Bay as a whole is open to most winds from the east. Today, long moles resolve this problem. We do not know if the ancient and mediaeval harbour had similar constructions too. What we do know, from a portolan from the end of the 15th century, is that protection against currents was provided by shallows that extended almost 5 km from the cape in a southeastern direction (exactly the location of the modern moles today) and that these shallows formed the port (e quella secha fa porto) 161. The very same shallows are mentioned in a portolan from 1845 162. Yet, entering the harbour was not an easy task, as virtually all sailors’ handbooks warn about the shallows in front of the town 163. Another mediaeval portolan even states that the port of Durrës must be approached via a channel, probably referring to the narrow straits between the shallows (Durazzo e buon porto et entrasi per canale) 164.

Additionally, until it was completely reworked and deepened under Italian guidance between 1928 and 1932, the harbour had suffered from its relatively shallow depth 165. At the end of the 19th century, two wooden jetties, each 50 m in length, compensated for this shortcoming; larger ships had to lie in the roads anyway. On occasion of a brief visit to Durrës in May 1877, Sir Arthur J. Evans described the situation as follows: »Then we passed the promontory of Cape Pali, which, jutting out into the Adriatic, offers a welcome bulwark against the force of the boreal gales, and is the northern arm of the bay which forms the harbour of Durazzo. In this bay the steamer anchored, but some way from the shore, as the harbour has to a great extent been allowed to silt up, and no attempt to improve or in any way secure it has been made by the Turkish authorities […] [O] ne lands on the cranky wooden pier and makes one’s way into the narrow streets through a gloomy sea-gate.« 166 Even if ancient and early mediaeval vessels had less draught than modern ships, one must imagine a similar solution for these

156 Portolano Marieni 458.
158 Praschniker/Schober, Forschungen 46.
159 Guttridge/Hoti, New Light 367. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80.
160 Anna Comnena XIII 7, 2 (Reinsch/Kambylis 404).
161 Kretschmer, Portulane 504.
162 Portolano Marieni 458.
163 Kretschmer, Portulane 249. 367-368. 503. – Delatte, Portulans III 265.
164 Kretschmer, Portulane 313.
165 Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova Immagine 305.
166 Evans, Illyrian letters 133 (no 13).
centuries, although possible material traces would have been destroyed during the massive renovation under Italian guidance between 1928 and 1932.\(^\text{167}\)

However, recent archaeological investigations can perhaps aid in locating the ancient harbour near the modern port area. Between May and August 2007, excavations in Rruga H. Troplini brought to light some architectural structures, which were identified as parts of the ancient port area (figs 9-10).\(^\text{168}\) The main argument for this interpretation was the discovery of a building with a circular floor plan (dm: 8 m) at the western edge of the excavation area (L). Due to adverse conditions, the archaeologists did not get deep enough to determine its foundations but they were able to document the masonry being preserved to a height of 1.60 m, which is five layers of ashlar. Despite the difficult stratigraphic situation, the building can be clearly associated with the Hellenistic stratum (end of 4\(^\text{th}\) – beginning of 3\(^\text{rd}\) century BC). Based on comparison with a similar structure on the island of Thasos, and dismissing alternative interpretations as a tower of the defensive system or as the basis of a monument, Sara Santoro addressed the circular building as one of presumably several lighthouses of the antique harbour.\(^\text{169}\) She additionally conjectures that a semi-circular structure recently discovered in the substructures of the Ottoman Palace of the Governor was part of a sea gate of the Hellenistic town wall, as the Ottoman sea gate was only 20 m northeast of it.\(^\text{171}\)

Under Roman rule, Durrës flourished and its harbour was one of the most frequented ones in the Adriatic Sea, although for military purposes priority was given rather to the excellent natural port of Oricum.\(^\text{172}\) From an economic viewpoint, however, Durrës harbour was without rival. In his Menaechni, the playwright Plautus (+ 184 BC) set out a liturgical monument of the hustle and bustle in this vibrant marketplace (vv. 258-264). Cicero’s letters (Ad Fam. XIV 1) testify the presence of Roman businessmen in the town and Catullus’ dubious appraisal of Dyrachium as the »tavern of the Adriatic Sea« (36, 15) points to the very profane side effects of a vivid harbour environment. Again, however, there is the question of its location. If we accept the interpretation of the circular structure in Rruga H. Troplini as the lighthouse of the Hellenistic harbour, one might conclude that it remained in use in Roman times (figs 9-10). In the middle of the circular structure a new, rectangular platform was erected in a very crude opus caementitium, whose only purpose was to support the round tower from within. Fragments of pottery allow the dating of this building phase to the 1\(^\text{st}\) century AD, probably within the context of the town’s promotion to colonia in 30 AD. The surrounding structures show construction phases that can be dated to the 2\(^\text{nd}\) and 3\(^\text{rd}\) centuries AD. Most importantly, on the opposite edge of the excavated area, a sequence of four rectangular buildings (B, C, D, E) was discovered, each measuring 5.50-5.85 m in length and 1.85-3.55 m in width. The masonry suggests a later dating than the circular structure, probably the 1\(^\text{st}\) century BC.\(^\text{173}\) The buildings were interpreted as warehouses. The southernmost »warehouse« was flanked by a street or jetty (F), whose surface was made of mortar and gravel. To the west of this stretch of pavement, several other structures of unknown purpose were built anew in the 5\(^\text{th}\) century. If the assumption of a Hellenistic harbour in the vicinity of Rruga H. Troplini is correct, it seems that it would have remained active at least until the end of the 5\(^\text{th}\) century, even partially until the early 6\(^\text{th}\) century.\(^\text{174}\)

However, there is no evidence for any activity in the area in the Byzantine period. Santoro assumes that probably already in the course of the 6\(^\text{th}\) century the coastline shifted southwards. She hypothetically localizes this new harbour area in front of the southern bastion of the city walls. There, a stretch of the city wall was discovered in the substructures of the Palace of the Ottoman Governors in 2001 and, almost perpendicularly to it, five narrow walls (fig. 11). Gutteridge, Hoti and Hurst associated the latter with the cellars of the Palace of the Ottoman governors (18\(^\text{th}\) c.).\(^\text{175}\) Santoro, on the other hand, claims that they are of early Byzantine origin. As these walls point outwards from the walled town to the sea, she addresses them as shipsheds (navalia) for small and medium-sized vessels.\(^\text{176}\) Yet, the very exposed location works against this interpretation. In any event, due to the topography of Durrës Bay, it is almost certain that the harbour remained in the area southeast of the town. As Durrës reached its nadir in terms of urbanity in the following centuries and as trade and traffic doubtless declined, we should not assume any sophisticated infrastructure anyway. The bay itself and perhaps some wooden piers probably were sufficient to handle the amount of traffic in the Byzantine era (as they also were sufficient in later centuries).

**Another anchorage?**

In April 1097 Robert, Duke of Normandy, and Stephen, Count of Blois, set out from the port of Bari in order to join the other

\(^{167}\) Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 80-81. – For some arguments in favour of long wooden piers in the Roman harbour see Deniaux, Recherches.

\(^{168}\) The following after Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 72. 77-79. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova Immagine 306-311. – Santoro, Porto 216-229.

\(^{169}\) Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 71-79. – Santoro, Porto 226.

\(^{170}\) Gutteridge/Hoti/Hurst, Walled City 408-409.

\(^{171}\) Gutteridge/Hoti/Hurst, Walled City 408-409.

\(^{172}\) Cabanes, Ports d’Illyre. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova Immagine 306. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 81. The latter mention one exceptional case in 171 BC when a Roman fleet united with some seventy Illyrian vessels. However, Livius XLI 48, 6-8, does not explicitly state that all of them anchored in the harbour of Durrës.

\(^{173}\) Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova Immagine 307. In an earlier publication (Faro) the authors attributed had proposed an earlier dating in the last quarter of the 2\(^\text{nd}\) c. BC.

\(^{174}\) Santoro, Porto 225. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 72-74.

\(^{175}\) Gutteridge/Hoti/Hurst, Walled City 408-409.

\(^{176}\) Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Faro 75. – Santoro/Sassi/Hoti, Nuova Immagine 308. 310 with fig 8.
leaders of the First Crusade in Constantinople. They crossed the Adriatic and landed at Durrës where their fleet rode at anchor in two different ports (duo portus classem illam susceperunt)\(^{177}\). It is possible, of course, that the chronicler of the event refers to the southern harbour in Durrës Bay and to the northern anchorage in the bay between Capo Pali and Capo Rodoni (see above). However, it is also conceivable that there was another anchorage southeast of the town. In order to evaluate the possibilities of this second harbour, one has to examine the topographical circumstances first.

For our understanding of the maritime geography of Durrës, it is vital to reconstruct the first encounter of the Norman and the Venetian fleet in 1081. The events are reported in detail primarily by three authors. Anna Komnena provides the Byzantine point of view, whereas William of Apulia and Geoffrey Malaterra side with Robert Guiscard. Their accounts are relatively consistent when dealing with geographical details. On the basis of these three key texts, a hypothetical reconstruction of the southern outlet of the lagoon can be attempted.

William of Apulia relates that the first encounter of the Venetian and the Norman fleet led to a battle, from which the latter retreated to the harbour (ad portum). Three days running the Venetians kept attacking the harbour. Ragusan crews that were allied with the Normans shot arrows at the Venetians but did not leave the harbour, which was protected by the nearby army camp. Robert realized that he should have brought along bigger and heavier ships to resist the Venetians more successfully\(^{178}\).

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\(^{177}\) Gesta Francorum IV (493): Deo praeduce atque gubernatore, quarto die iuxta Dyrachium prosperis velis applicuerunt; duo portus classem illam susceperunt, et ante urbem omnes convenerunt, et ibi castrametati sunt.

\(^{178}\) William of Apulia IV 295-307 (Mathieu 220): Ad portum fugitiva redit, sic pugna remanisit. / Ter redeunte die gens multa Venetica portum / Appetit, et naves Roberti marte lacesit. / Gens comitata ducem cum Dalmaticis Ragusea / Telorum crebris consternit iactibus aequor; / Non tamen a portu procul audent ducere naves. / Castrorum dedrat tatum vicinia portum. / Funibus incisis quasdam violenter ab ipso / Littore propulas vi turba Venetica ducit.
Geoffrey Malaterra gives yet some other pieces of information: The Norman fleet was unprepared when the Venetian ships arrived and immediately gave way. The Venetians could enter Durriës’s harbour (*in portum Duracense*) without further resistance. In the night, they engaged the Norman fleet in battle and sank one ship by the use of Greek fire.
When the Venetians lost one of their ships themselves, they retreated to the town’s port (ipsi in portum urbis, unde exierant, regrediuntur)\textsuperscript{179}. Although writing some decades after the events, Anna Komnena had first-hand sources at her disposal. Among them, there was presumably also a (lost) Greek translation of William of Apulia’s Gesta Roberti, which she probably replenished with eye-witness accounts provided by her father and her uncle, George Palaiologos\textsuperscript{180}. Yet, her account is often prone to inaccuracies, especially concerning the chronology of events. In the present context it is important to mention that the incidents described in Alexias IV 3, 1-3 are mistakenly attributed to the year 1081 instead of 1083/4, as Ewald Kislinger has convincingly showed\textsuperscript{181}. Following his reconstruction of events, Anna’s account contains the following information: The Venetians saw the Norman fleet when arriving at Cape Pali. They decided that an attack was pointless as siege machines protected the enemy’s ships. The next day, the Norman fleet attacked but was repelled by the Venetians who in turn pursued the beaten enemy back to the coast and even further towards Robert’s camp. The Byzantine garrison watched the Norman retreat from the walls of the city and made a sally\textsuperscript{182}.

What can we glean about the topography through these three texts? Anna Kommena writes that when the Venetian fleet arrived »at the location called Pallia« (ις τόπον Παλλία καλοίμενον), the sailors lost heart as soon as they saw Robert’s navy, which was protected by siege engines\textsuperscript{183}. At first sight, this passage seems to imply that the Norman ships moored in the bay of Capo Pali, but from Anna’s subsequent account it is clear that they must have anchored in the harbour or bay southeast of the city. For the Norman navy it would have been a logical choice as they approached Durrës from the south and obviously there was not a single Byzantine warship to defend the harbour. Lying at anchor south of the city, the Norman ships also backed the southern flank of Robert’s camp, which he had pitched within the circuit of the Late Antique city walls. Anna probably refers to the outermost circuit, which protected an area that had been depopulated since the 6th century\textsuperscript{184}. To the northwest, the camp was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{179} Geoffrey Malalaterra III 26 (Pontieri 72-73): Sed Venetiani nostris, ad se venientibus, arma potius quam deplenditer ostentantes, dumi magno impetu versus ipsos grasuntur, nostris, quia improvidum processerant, certamen declinavant. Sicque facultatem liberam urbem ingrediendi habentes, vicissim nautae urbicensibus et urbicenses nautis consulantur; invicemque per undis periculosa ignem, quem graecum appellant, qui nec aqua extinguitur, occultis maculis adornato, sub palore lunae armantur; navibus quoque ardentibus et flammis consumnatis, certatum occurrientibus, acerrime utrimque congreditur. Sed illi arti crepando, nostris certamen offerre progrediuntur: quibus nostri, certatum constitutis, navibus qui sub palore lunae armaverunt, ante eam temporis mancipiat, morem sequuntur. Itaque exharrescentibus dolum ipsorum, ipsi autem strenuissimis nostrorum, certamen utrimque hospitium quiuisit. Ipsi in portum urbis, unde exierant, regrediuntur; nostri vero ubi primum applicuerant, persistunt.  
\item \textsuperscript{180} Frankopan, Turning Latin.  
\item \textsuperscript{181} Kislinger, Vertauschte Notizen.  
\item \textsuperscript{182} Anna Commena IV 1, 1-2, 6 (Reinsch / Kambylis 120-124).  
\item \textsuperscript{183} Anna Commena IV 2, 3 (Reinsch / Kambylis 123): τηρικαία τοιαύτα στόλον εκτείνοντες διά παντοῦ εἰδὼν πλοίων τοῦ πρὸς τὸ Δυρράχιον ἀπῆξαν ἑποιοῦντο σὺν ὑπάρχει πολλῆ πολλὰς καλόμενας διανυκτήμαν καθάπερ τὸ ἔπ’ ἀναμνησία τῆς ἐπιμέρους υπομνήματος πολλὰς αναδιοκονδομένη ἡμέρας τὸν τόπον Παλλία καλοίμενον ἐποίησαν τῆς παραμβολῆς τοῦ Ρομπέρτου ἐξέβαν τὸ Δυρράχιον κεχεῦτο ἦτο τῶν πολλῶν τοῦ Ρομπέρτου ἐκαθὼς τῆς πολλῶν Δυκάρων παντοῦ εἰδὼν πολλῶν ἄλλων περιπέφραγμαν ἀπεδείξασι πρὸς τὸν πόλου.  
\item \textsuperscript{184} Shehi/Shkodra-Prugia, Front Nord 332.
\end{itemize}
skirted by salt marshes (figs 6, 12)\(^{185}\), and somewhere to the southeast there was a bridge, which the Normans destroyed after they had left to engage Alexios’ army in battle\(^{186}\). The bridge probably crossed the outlet of the lagoon, which consequently must have bordered the Norman camp to the east. Thus, the location and the surroundings of Robert’s camp east of the town are quite clear but where did the Norman and Venetian ships anchor? All three authors agree on the fact that the Venetian fleet had only been able to force back the Norman ships without gaining any noteworthy victory. However, it remains unclear where the latter withdrew. The town’s proper harbour, which presumably was just southeast of the city walls, was controlled by the Venetians: Malaterra explicitly states that the Venetians had withdrawn \textit{in portum urbis} and when Alexios arrived in October, George Palaiologos was thus easily able to board a (Venetian?) warship in order to meet his emperor\(^{187}\). Additionally, it is improbable that the Norman ships anchored directly beneath the battlements of the town’s garrison. As Robert’s fleet obviously consisted of rather light ships, it would be tempting to assume that the Norman ships retreated into the shallow waters of the lagoon, were it not for the bridge which would have blocked the access to it from the south. What solutions remain? Perhaps the ancient shoreline offered a recess just south of the bridge that was large enough to shelter the Norman ships but, admittedly, this assumption is entirely hypothetical (fig. 12).

**Conclusion**

Throughout most of its Byzantine history, Durrës can be seen an important gateway between the East and the West in many aspects. Strategically, it was at first a major foothold for Byzantine campaigns against Ostrogothic Italy and later the Normans’ preferred gateway to invade Byzantine territories. Economically, it was an important hub between the Adriatic Sea and the inner Balkans for most of its mediaeval history. Culturally, it was for centuries one of the few coastal outposts under Byzantine influence and gradually became an ethnic melting pot with a strong Italian element. Durrës’ mediaeval harbour still poses many challenging questions to scholars, but its far-reaching effects on the town’s development and character are beyond the shadow of a doubt.

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\(^{185}\) Alexios planned to launch a surprise attack against the Norman camp by sending his Turkish mercenaries through these salt marshes (διὰ τῶν ἁλυκῶν): Anna Comnena IV 6, 1 (Reinsch / Kamylis 131-132).

\(^{186}\) Anna Comnena IV 6, 1 (Reinsch / Kamylis 132). — William of Apulia IV 378-380 (Mathieu 224).

\(^{187}\) Anna Comnena IV 5, 2 (Reinsch / Kamylis 129): ἀποσταλέντα δὲ τοίς θεασάμενος τηνικαῦτα φοιτάν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα μετά πολεμικοῖν νήμαν.


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