For fifty years debate has raged about early European commerce during the period between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Was there trade? Or no trade? If trade, in what – and with whom? New evidence and new ways of looking at old evidence are now breaking the stalemate. Analysis of communications – the movements of people, ideas, and things – is transforming our vision of Europe and the Mediterranean in the age of Charlemagne and Harun al Rashid.

The prevailing view of Europe’s stone-age isolation yields to one of openness and dynamic change, even as new archaeological findings on the economic collapse of the Roman empire throw that change into clear relief. Discovering the travellers themselves, and the things they carried, leads to ships, sailing rhythms, the reopening of overland routes, and the rise of Venice. The travellers’ stories show how the first truly European economy exported European slaves in exchange for African and Asian coins, silks, and drugs. The patterns laid down by 800 would shape trade and shipping into the next millennium.

This is the first comprehensive analysis of the economic transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages in over sixty years. Using new materials and new methodology, it will attract all social and economic historians of antiquity and the Middle Ages, and anyone concerned with the origins of Europe, the history of the slave trade, medicine and disease, cross-cultural contacts, and the Muslim and Byzantine worlds.

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ORIGINS OF
THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMY

Communications and Commerce,
A.D. 300–900

Michael McCormick
Harvard University
In memory of
Léopold Genicot and Alexander Kazhdan
friends and teachers
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When elevations are shown, the first level of shading designates heights of 1,000–3,000 feet (305–915 m), the second level, 3,000–7,000 feet (915–2,134 m), the third, 7,000–11,000 feet (2,134–4,622 m), and the darkest shading indicates elevations over 11,000 feet (4,622 m).

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PREFACE

This book began in Baltimore. But it was fostered in the remarkable scholarly repair of Dumbarton Oaks, and grew to maturity in the bracing clime of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its sprang, utterly unintended, from another research project, on diplomacy between the Carolingian and Byzantine empires. My intent had been a respite from the “powerful and sinister drama” of late antiquity, the social transformations of political power and its rituals which had formed the subject of Eternal Victory.

When I had about concluded the research for the diplomacy book, I sat down to write a brief chapter describing how two early medieval courts communicated. Within a few weeks it became clear that my prosopographical study of diplomats had uncovered much new evidence. A few months more of research, and I was back at Dumbarton Oaks to present a first sketch of my findings in an informal talk. I no longer remember everyone in the small group who attended that talk, but I do recall that my friends Alexander Kazhdan and David Jacoby were present. Both levied vigorous criticism of the sort that we all most enjoyed, even as they lent me further important evidence for my findings. Alexander, in particular, objected to detecting broad shifts in the infrastructure of Mediterranean shipping and transport on the basis of “only sixty pieces of evidence,” sixty instances of long-distance communication. We all laughed when I retorted that complaining about “only” sixty witnesses was rather unbecoming to a Byzantinist. But I took his point, and have spent no small effort in deepening the research in order to expand the evidentiary base. Conversations with my friend John Baldwin urged me on in seeking independent series of data against which to test the patterns, and the intellectual stimulus of The Seminar of the Department of History of the Johns Hopkins University showed me some places to look for them, particularly when I listened to papers and comments by Philip Curtin and Richard Goldthwaite. The “pieces of evidence” are now some ten times what they were, and the patterns observed that distant day still hold. But others have emerged alongside them.
PREFACE

The move to Cambridge both slowed and deepened progress. No one who examines the footnotes of this book will fail to recognize that it was written in Widener Library. This book owes an incalculable debt to the men and women, librarians, scholars, and benefactors who have made that library great: without it, and them, it would never have been written in this way.

At Harvard University, I have been immensely stimulated by my colleagues and students, particularly in the Department of History, Thomas N. Bisson, in particular, has exemplified collegiality in every way, and so made this book possible also. I am grateful to the Department for its handsome support of this project, especially to my colleagues David Blackbourn, Chair, Patrice Higonnet, Chair, Publications Committee, and Mark Kishlansky. To list the colleagues who have sparked my thinking in the last eight years would make this a very long preface indeed. But I cannot fail to mention the most stimulating interlocutors of all: the justly fabled students, graduate and undergraduate, whose probing, thoughtful questions push all of us ever forward in our understanding of our subjects.

Special thanks are due to a few colleagues who helped me in areas where I dared not help myself. Bernard Septimus and, while on a visit, Robert Brody made an invaluable contribution to this book by introducing me to important new Hebrew evidence. Roy Mottahedeh generously aided me by deciphering the inscriptions on some Kufic dinars. Michael L. Bates provided precious expertise on the Arab coins. Horace Lunt has helped me more than once with his piercing insight into the linguistic (and other) jungles of Old Church Slavonic. At Dumbarton Oaks, Irfan Shahid kindly labored over an Arabic text on my behalf. There too, Philip Grierson has taught me much. It is due to long years there, across the hall from Philip, and his unfailingly kind and thoughtful answers to my questions that I dared to venture as far into numismatics as I have. The last part of this book was written up in the splendid circumstances afforded me by my friend and colleague, then Director, Angeliki Laiou, during a spring leave at Dumbarton Oaks. I am not about to forget the stimulus of my conversations there, especially during the questions that followed the public presentation of my findings in the very room where the first results had been discussed nine years earlier. Irene Vaslef and her assistant Mark Zapatka worked wonders in obtaining for me books and articles which wandered far beyond the ample confines of Byzantium. Thrice in recent months I had the privilege of discussing my findings in depth with Dietrich Claude, whose gift of his own book on the subject had sharpened my interest long ago. It was with great sadness that I learned of his death two weeks after our last meeting.

My weekly swims with Paul Meyvaert have exercised the mind no less than the body. Poor Paul has had many a theory tried on him in the slow lane of Blodgett Pool; rarely did he fail to suggest a further reference. Telephonic, electronic, and face-to-face conversations with Guy Philippart and his comments have been a
PREFACE

continuing source of stimulus, especially on hagiography, but on much else as well. The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation made possible the research on diplomacy out of which this book was born. That it was born at all in the intended fashion reflects the support of my editor, Mr. William Davies; Ms. Philippa Youngman's meticulous copy-editing has made this a better book.

From beginning to end, this book has benefited from the serene and happy home that Magda has created for all of us. Thomas Kennedy and Elena Sylvie have borne patiently Daddy's isolation upstairs with his computer and books. My brother Tom, Cathleen McCormick, and my other cousins and aunts have listened tolerantly and sometimes even enthusiastically to descriptions of my work. Tonawanda has continued to provide a warm refuge from the rigors of academe, in the home of my mother, and amidst the watchful friendship of Mary Lou and Rose Marie Metzger.

Our home in Tonawanda holds fond memories of the two scholars to whom this book is dedicated. To have known and worked closely with one such scholar is privilege enough for a lifetime. Twenty-six years of knowing and learning from Léopold Genicot and nineteen with Alexander Kazhdan seem an unfair share for any one historian. Both followed the development of this study closely, and urged me onward. To their memory and example it is respectfully dedicated.

15 August 1999
Tonawanda, New York
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAWG</td>
<td>Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, 3rd series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Analecta bollandiana, Brussels, 1882–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACO</td>
<td>Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum, ed. E. Schwartz et al., Berlin 1914–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAH</td>
<td>Berichte über die Ausgrabungen in Halberstädter, Neumünster</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDHIR</td>
<td>Bibliothek des (Preussischen) Deutschen historischen Institutes in Rom, Tübingen</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHG</td>
<td>F. Halkin, Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca, 3rd edn, SH 8a; Brussels, 1957; Auctarium, SH 47; Brussels, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina, SH 6 and 12; Brussels, 1898–1902; H. Fros, Novum supplementum, SH 70; Brussels, 1986</td>
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<tr>
<td>BibS</td>
<td>Bibliotheca sanctorum, Rome, 1961–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>J. F. Böhmer, E. Mühlbacher, et al., Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, Regesta imperii, 1, 3rd edn, Hildesheim, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMGS</td>
<td>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Oxford, 1975–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Byzantinoslavica, Prague, 1929–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZiel</td>
<td>J. F. Böhmer and H. Zielinski, Die Karolinger im Regnum Italium, Regesta Imperii i, 3, 1; Cologne, 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCont</td>
<td>Corpus christianorum, Continuatio mediaeaevis, Turnhout, 1971–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCL</td>
<td>Corpus christianorum, series latina, Turnhout, 1953–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDL</td>
<td>Codice diplomatico longobardo, ed. L. Schiaparelli et al., FSI 62–6 (1929–86)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFHB</td>
<td>Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae, Washington, Vienna, etc. 1967–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChLA</td>
<td>Chartae latinae antiquiores, ed. A. Bruckner et al., Olten etc., 1954–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPG</td>
<td>M. Geerard, Clavis patrum graecorum, Turnhout, 1974–87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, Vienna, 1866–</td>
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<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>D Arnulf</td>
<td>Die Urkunden Arnulfs, ed. P. Kehr, MGH Die Urkunden der deutschen Karolinger 3 (1940).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D ChB</td>
<td>Recueil des actes de Charles II le Chauve, roi de France, ed. G. Tessier et al., Chartes et diplômes relatifs à l'histoire de France, 8; Paris, 1943–55.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD Imp</td>
<td>Diplomata imperii, 1, ed. K. A. F. Petz (1872).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDKar</td>
<td>Diplomata Karolinarum, ed. E. Mühlbacher et al. 1– (1906–).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHGE</td>
<td>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques, ed. A. Baudrillart et al., Paris, 1912–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dölger</td>
<td>F. Dölger, Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches, 1, Berlin, 1924.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td>Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Washington, DC, 1941–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSI</td>
<td>Fonti per la storia d'Italia, Rome, 1887–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMRZD</td>
<td>Die Fundmünzen der Römischen Zeit in Deutschland, ed. M. R. Alfeldi, Berlin, 1960–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grumel²</td>
<td>V. Grumel and J. Darrouzès, Regestes du patriarchat de Constantinople, Paris, 1972–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBN</td>
<td>Hamburger Beiträge zur Numismatik, Hamburg, 1947–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Leyden, 1957–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRA</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Archaeology, Ann Arbor, 1988–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Studies, London, 1911–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavrov</td>
<td>P. A. Lavrov, Materialij po istorii vozniknovenija drevnejšej slavjanskoj pis'mennosti, Akademija Nauk SSSR, Trudij slavjanskoj komissij, 1; St. Petersburg, 1930.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansi</td>
<td>J. D. Mansi, Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, Florence, 1759–98.</td>
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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MBAH</td>
<td>Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte, Ostfildern, 1982–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae historica, Hanover, Berlin, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Auctores antiquissimi, 1877–1919.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capit.</td>
<td>Capitula episcoporum, episc. 1984–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conc.</td>
<td>Concilia, 1893–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epist.</td>
<td>Epistolae, 1889–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form.</td>
<td>Formulae, ed. K. Zeuner, 1886.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poet.</td>
<td>Poetae latini, 1881–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRG</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholaram, 1839–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRL</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum, 1878.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRM</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum merovingicarum, 1884–1951.</td>
</tr>
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<td>SS</td>
<td>Scriptores, 1826–.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Numismatic Chronicle, London, 1838–.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ÖAWD</td>
<td>Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.-hist. Klasse, Denkschriften, Vienna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Patrologiae cursus completus ... series ... ecclesiae latinae, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris, 1844–64.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QFIAB</td>
<td>Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken, Tübingen, 1898–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Paulys Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, ed. G. Wissowa, Stuttgart, 1893–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBPH</td>
<td>Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire, Brussels, 1922–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>Revue des études byzantines, Paris, 1946–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGA</td>
<td>Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, ed. H. Jankuhn et al., 2nd edn, Berlin, 1968–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIN</td>
<td>Rivista italiana di numismatica, Milan, 1888–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Revue numismatique, Paris, 1838–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Sitzungsberichte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Sources chrétienes, Paris, 1941–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETT</td>
<td>Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medievo, Spoleto, 1953–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>Subsidia hagiographica, Brussels, 1886–.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syn. CP</td>
<td>Synaxarium eclectae Constantinopolitanae, AASS, Nov. Propylaeeum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIB</td>
<td>Tabula imperii byzantini, 1–, ed. H. Hunger, ÖAWD, 125, etc. Vienna, 1976–.</td>
</tr>
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<td>TM</td>
<td>Travaux et mémoires, Paris, 1965–.</td>
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