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# Corinth

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The archaeology of medieval Corinth has been discussed in some depth by Charles Morgan and Robert Scranton in their respective *Corinth* volumes; together these influential publications have formed a foundation for all secondary literature. Current interpretation of new archaeological material, however, and reinterpretation of old make it clear that Morgan and Scranton must be used with discretion. Their work too is being reappraised in the light of recent architectural, stratigraphic, sigillographic, numismatic, and ceramic studies.<sup>1</sup>

Any overview of the site of Corinth should start by recognizing that only a comparatively small portion of the medieval city has been excavated to date: the area in and immediately around the Roman forum, the Bath on the Lechaium Road, the theater, and trial trenches on Acrocorinth and in the modern village. It has always been assumed that the forum survived as the medieval city center. Since the medieval structures in the forum area are late and of a religious, domestic, or industrial, and not civic, nature, this view is difficult to support. The forum area seems rather to have been a poor suburb and cannot be considered representative of Corinth as a whole.

The decline of late Roman Corinth began when the city was damaged by earthquakes in 365 and 375 and burned by the Goths in 395/396. Thereafter the central shops of the forum were leveled and replaced by a long, low staircase flanking the

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Scranton, *Mediaeval Architecture in the Central Area of Corinth, Corinth XVI* (Princeton, N.J., 1957); C. H. Morgan, *The Byzantine Pottery, Corinth XI* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942). For recent examples of the secondary literature using these sources, see Ch. Bouras, "City and Village: Urban Design and Architecture," *JÖB* 31.1 (1981): 617–19; A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900–1200* (Cambridge, 1989), 214–15. For recent work, see especially the excavation reports of C. K. Williams II with the numismatic appendices by O. Zervos in *Hesperia*. In these, Williams has been systematically updating the Frankish archaeology of Corinth on the basis of his work on the complex south of the museum. This follows Frankish pottery studies by T. S. MacKay ("More Byzantine and Frankish Pottery from Corinth," *Hesperia* 36 [1967]: 249–320) and G. D. R. Sanders ("An Assemblage of Frankish Pottery at Corinth," *Hesperia* 56 [1987]: 159–95), and will be followed by books on the Byzantine and Frankish pottery by Sanders and Williams. A. Dunn is preparing the lead seals for publication, and new studies on the medieval coins are being conducted by O. Zervos and J. D. Mac-Isaac.

Bema, the propylaea and west shops were refurbished, and a new city wall, enclosing an area of only 1.5 km<sup>2</sup>, was erected in the first quarter of the fifth century.<sup>2</sup> In the fifth and sixth centuries, large Christian basilicas and associated cemeteries were located outside the new wall.<sup>3</sup> The great plague of 542 may have cut the population by half. It was preceded by a devastating earthquake centered close to the city and succeeded by a series of earthquakes in the general area of central Greece in 551/552.<sup>4</sup> Slavic colonization of the Peloponnese later in the sixth and seventh centuries resulted in the resettlement of at least some of the Corinthian population on Aegina.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-sixth century the city center had shed its original functions; the administration and much of the population relocated, perhaps focusing on a new, much restricted center or even near some or one of the extramural basilicas. Belt buckles and coins indicate that the Kraneion and Kodratus basilicas, a possible mortuary chapel in the Asklepieion, and a small church on Acrocorinth continued to be used well into the seventh century.<sup>6</sup> The almost complete abandonment of the forum area for civic and commercial purposes is demonstrated by its use for burial from the late sixth century,<sup>7</sup> indicating that either the prohibition of burial within cities (CIC, *Dig* 47.12.3, no. 5) had lapsed, or yet another city wall, which excluded the forum area from its enceinte, had been constructed. There is unpublished evidence for such a *kastron* (undated) im-

<sup>2</sup> Scranton, *Mediaeval Architecture*, 5, 9–26; C. K. Williams and J. E. Fisher, “Corinth, 1975: Forum Southwest,” *Hesperia* 45 (1976): 63; T. E. Gregory, “The Late Roman Fortification Wall at Corinth,” *Hesperia* 48 (1979): 292–72.

<sup>3</sup> Lerna Hollow: Scranton, *Mediaeval Architecture*, 7; Lechaemum: D. I. Pallas, “Ανασκαφικὰ ἔρευνα ἐν Λεχαίῳ,” Πρακτικά (1965 [1967]): 157–62; Kenchrean Gate: J. M. Shelley, “The Christian Basilica near the Cenchrean Gate at Corinth,” *Hesperia* 12 (1943): 166–89; D. I. Pallas, “Ανασκαφή τῆς βασιλικῆς τοῦ Κρανείου ἐν Κορίνθῳ,” Πρακτικά (1977 [1980]): 162–83; Skoutela: idem, “Ανασκαφή τῆς βασιλικῆς τῆς Σκουτέλας ἐν Κορίνθῳ,” Πρακτικά (1955 [1960]): 193–200; Kodratus: E. G. Stikas, “Κοιμητηριακὴ βασιλικὴ Παλαιᾶς Κορίνθου,” Πρακτικά (1961 [1964]): 129–36; idem, “Ανασκαφὴ κοιμητηριακῆς βασιλικῆς Παλαιᾶς Κορίνθου,” Πρακτικά (1962 [1966]): 51–56; Asklepieion: C. Roebuck, *The Asklepieion and Lerna, Corinth XIV* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), 160–71; and J. Wiseman, “Excavations in Corinth: The Gymnasium Area, 1967–1968,” *Hesperia* 38 (1969): 64–106.

<sup>4</sup> Prokopios, *Anecdota*, 18.41–43, trans. H. B. Dewing, vol. 6 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); Prokopios, *De bello gothico*, 2.22–23 and 8.25.16–25, trans. H. B. Dewing, vols. 3–5 (Cambridge, Mass., 1953–60).

<sup>5</sup> *Cronaca di Monemvasia*, ed. I. Dujčev (Palermo, 1976), lines 86–144.

<sup>6</sup> G. R. Davidson, *The Minor Objects, Corinth XII* (Princeton, N.J., 1952), 267; D. I. Pallas, “Données nouvelles sur quelques boucles et fibules considérées comme avars et slaves et sur la Corinthe entre le VI<sup>e</sup> et le IX<sup>e</sup> s.,” *BBulg* 7 (1981): 298 n. 18; Stikas, “Κοιμητηριακὴ βασιλικὴ Παλαιᾶς Κορίνθου,” 56; Roebuck, *Asklepieion and Lerna*, 169; C. Blegen et al., *Acrocorinth: Excavations in 1926, Corinth III.1* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), 21, 61–66.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson, *Minor Objects*, nos. 2192–96; G. R. Davidson, “The Avar Invasion of Corinth,” *Hesperia* 6 (1937): 232, fig. 3; C. K. Williams, J. MacIntosh, and J. E. Fisher, “Excavation at Corinth, 1973,” *Hesperia* 43 (1974): no. 8; C. K. Williams and J. E. Fisher, “Corinth, 1975: Forum Southwest,” *Hesperia* 45 (1976): no. 2, pl. 57a; H. S. Robinson, “Excavations at Corinth: Temple Hill, 1968–1972,” *Hesperia* 45 (1976): 222; also Corinth inv. nos. MF 486, MF 4996, MF 7937, and C-72-192. These can now be dated with confidence. See A. I. Aibabin, “Problemy khronologii mogil’nikov Krima pozdnerimskogo perioda,” *SovArh* (1984.1): 104–22; A. K. Ambroz, “Problemy rannesrednevekovoi khronologii vostochnoi Evropy,” *SovArh* (1971.2): 96–123; idem, “Problemy rannesrednevekovoi khronologii vostochnoi Evropy,” *SovArh* (1971.3): 106–32.

Table 1  
Coin Finds 565–959

Justin II (565–578)	279	Theodosios III (715–717)	—
Tiberios II (578–582)	42	Leo III (717–741)	2
Maurice (582–602)	55	Constantine V (741–775)	7
Phokas (602–610)	70	Leo IV (775–780)	4
Herakleios (610–641)	36(7)	Constantine VI (780–802)	1
Constantine III (641)	—	Nikephoros I (802–811)	2
Heraklonas (641–642)	—	Staurakios (811)	—
Constans II (642–668)	96(23)	Michael I (811–813)	3
Constantine IV (668–685)	4	Leo V (813–820)	10
Justinian II (685–695)	2	Michael II (820–829)	6
Leontios (695–698)	—	Theophilos (829–842)	161
Tiberios III (698–705)	1	Michael III (842–867)	18
Justinian II (705–711)	?	Basil I (867–886)	278
Philippikos (711–713)	—	Leo VI (886–912)	972
Anastasios II (713–715)	—	Constantine VII (913–959)	2,285

*Source:* This list was assembled from the card index at Corinth to which were added details from K. M. Edwards, *Coins, Corinth VI* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933) 125–26, 165; K. M. Edwards, “Report on the Coins Found in the Excavations at Corinth during the Years 1930–1935,” *Hesperia* 6 (1937): 241–56; J. H. Harris, “Coins Found at Corinth, 1936–1939,” *Hesperia* 10 (1941): 143–62; J. D. MacIsaac, “Corinth: Coins, 1925–1926. The Theatre District and the Roman Villa,” *Hesperia* 56 (1987): 97–156. Details were also included from the appendices of the annual excavation reports in *Hesperia*. Figures in brackets refer to coins from Acrocorinth; see A. R. Bellinger, *Catalogue of the Coins Found at Corinth, 1925* (New Haven, Conn.—Oxford (1930), 66.

mediately to the east of the forum.<sup>8</sup> Remarkably little pottery and an insignificant number of coins of the seventh to ninth centuries have been found within the excavated area of the Roman forum (Table 1), but several Corinth Type belt buckles in graves attest to the area’s continued use for burial well into the eighth century.<sup>9</sup>

Reassimilation of the Peloponnese into the empire in the late eighth century is not reflected in the archaeological record of the excavated portion of medieval Corinth. Central within the communications network and of great strategic importance, Corinth remained the thematic capital of the region until the eleventh century.<sup>10</sup> This status as

<sup>8</sup> Scranton, *Mediaeval Architecture*, 29–30, may describe the west side of the *kastron*. A fortification wall and tower, standing about 4 m high, was observed by the author in a trench excavated by the Greek Archaeological Service south of Tasso’s Hotel in the mid-1980s.

<sup>9</sup> See note 7.

<sup>10</sup> G. D. R. Sanders and I. K. Whitbread, “Central Places and Major Roads in the Peloponnese,” *BSA* 85 (1990): 348–49, fig. 3.3; A. Bon, *Le Péloponnèse byzantin jusqu’en 1204* (Paris, 1951), 186–207.

the seat of local government made the city the residence of several government officials, including the *strategos* and his civil and military staff. Collection of taxes, initially in kind, presumably required centralized but hitherto unlocated *apothekai* in or near Corinth.<sup>11</sup> Finally, as the seat of an archbishop and his retinue, Corinth must have had a metropolitan church of some size. Presumably these civil and religious administrators had accommodation and possessions commensurate with their rank, but no archaeological finds yet attest the presence of social orders higher than artisan, merchant, burgher, or monk. Comparison with the extant and historically attested remains of an altogether lesser city, Athens, strongly suggests that the excavated portion of Corinth is a poor suburb and that the commercial, administrative, and ecclesiastic center was located elsewhere.

The archaeological record at Corinth indicates that the local remonetization of the Corinthian economy started tentatively in the reign of Leo V, accelerated under Theophilos, and, after a brief decline in the mid-ninth century, expanded radically during the reign of Leo VI. In this context, given the sheer volume of coins in the area, it is possible to hypothesize that the forum was used for commercial purposes. The paucity of ninth- to early eleventh-century structures therein suggests that the open area may have operated as the site of an *emporopanegeyris*.<sup>12</sup> This would have been attended by merchants or their agents; indeed, in the late eleventh century Corinth was a center at which the Venetians gathered regional products, especially oil and silks, and between 1165 and 1171 Vitale Voltani, an agent of Romano Mairano, almost monopolized the Venetian share of the oil market of Corinth.<sup>13</sup>

Ceramic finds suggest that Aegean and Adriatic commercial contacts with Corinth were curtailed by the war fleets of Arab colonists in Crete and southern Italy. Nevertheless, essential diplomatic and personal missions continued to be made via the Isthmus, for instance, the representatives sent by Basil I to the pope and Louis II.<sup>14</sup> There is no reason to doubt the assertion of Nuwayri, a fourteenth-century Egyptian chronicler, that the incursions of the Cretan Arabs into the Aegean in the ninth and tenth centuries effectively brought Byzantine trade to a standstill.<sup>15</sup> Some Italian influence can be seen in the locally produced pottery in the late ninth century, in other words, after the reopening of the Adriatic. Furthermore, imports of pottery from Constantinople only resumed after the recapture of Crete in 960–961.

<sup>11</sup> The function of the *apothekai* is debatable, and no such structures have been located anywhere. See, on the *apothekai*, below and above, 706 n. 44, 985–87.

<sup>12</sup> A. I. Lambropoulou, "Οι πανηγύρεις στην Πελοπόννησο κατά τη μεσαιωνική εποχή," in *Η καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο* (Athens, 1989), 300–303.

<sup>13</sup> F. Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne au moyen âge: Le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien, XIIIe–XVe siècles* (Paris, 1959), 39, 47–48.

<sup>14</sup> P. Grierson, "The Carolingian Empire in the Eyes of Byzantium," in *Nascità dell'Europa ed Europa Carolingia: Un'equazione da verificare* (Split, 1981), 913–14.

<sup>15</sup> V. Christides, *Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (c. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984), 167. For historical evidence for the existence of trade during that period, see A. E. Laiou, "Exchange and Trade, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries," *EHB* 713ff.

In the last decade of the eleventh century the material culture of the city underwent a revolution best demonstrated by the appearance, quantity, and quality of pottery. Earlier communal shapes such as glazed chafing dishes were replaced by individual glazed bowls and dishes. At the same time, the glaze, formerly used functionally, became standard as part of the decoration of tablewares, in conjunction with a white slip and incised or painted lines. The proportion of glazed wares in pottery assemblages also increased from less than 1% to about 6% of the whole. This revolution suggests a change in eating habits and the general adoption of premium ceramic products that once had been the preserve of richer citizens. The phenomenon extended to lesser provincial cities and rural settlements only about twenty years later. The change perhaps resulted from large-scale manufacture, efficient distribution networks, and the fact that poorer people now had some spare cash to spend. A gradual reduction in the size and value of gold, silver, and, most significantly, copper coins to about one-third of their former value over the course of the mid-eleventh century resulted in a bronze coin of low denomination that could be used as money for petty market and shop transactions. Various economic measures taken in the reign of Alexios I may have further stimulated the evolution of part-time to full-time craft specialization in Corinth, thereby providing a dependent urban market for the agricultural produce of the rural hinterland.<sup>16</sup>

The strength of Corinth's economy in the mid-twelfth century led to a piratical attack by the fleet of Roger of Sicily in 1147. Notwithstanding the losses in skilled labor, Roger's court geographer, Edrisi, was still able to describe the city as "large and flourishing" seven years later in 1154.<sup>17</sup> In the late twelfth century, Choniates records that the city had two harbors and that the *emporion*, prosperous from trade, was below the *kastron* (usually assumed to be Acrocorinth).<sup>18</sup> The fact that the Franks found the lower town fortified with towers and a circuit wall in the early thirteenth century is seldom reported.<sup>19</sup> This fortification is perhaps essentially the same as that noted to the east of the forum and may well be that alluded to by Choniates. The change in administration seems not to have affected commerce, and, although Corinth was no longer the seat of regional government, it remained in the hands of the prince of the Morea and acted as an important center for international trade. The appearance of material culture remained essentially unchanged, and the lack of a local Frankish coinage in the early thirteenth century was mitigated by the circulation of the Latin Imitatives and

<sup>16</sup> G. D. R. Sanders, "Byzantine Glazed Pottery at Corinth to c. 1125: Chronological, Social and Economic Conclusions" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1995). The weight of the copper follis declined to 40% of its former size but, despite fluctuations, the ratio of copper to gold remained constant. Alexios I further reduced the size of the copper coinage. *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, ed. G. F. L. Tafel and G. M. Thomas, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1856–57), 1:51ff, 96.

<sup>17</sup> *La géographie d'Edrisi*, ed. J. A. Jaubert, 2 vols. (Paris, 1936–40), 122–26; Bon, *Péloponnèse byzantine*, 156–58.

<sup>18</sup> *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. L. van Dieten (Berlin–New York, 1975), 74.

<sup>19</sup> *The Chronicle of the Morea*, ed. J. Schmidt (London, 1904), 74–75; Bouras, "City and Village," 618.

perhaps by the continued use of Manuelan types. The suzerainty of Charles II of Anjou over the Peloponnese strengthened the existing commercial ties with Italy to the extent that a significant proportion of manufactured articles, especially pottery from Apulia and the Veneto, was imported into Corinth.<sup>20</sup> The near extinction of Corinth in the fourteenth century can largely be attributed to the Catalan sack in 1312, which was followed by an earthquake ca. 1320 and by the arrival of the Black Death in 1348.

Almost none of the extensive domestic, workshop, and shop quarter in the forum area existed before the very end of the eleventh century. Expansion in the area originally followed the then still extant line of the Roman *decumanus*, running west along the south side of the South Stoa, from the proposed *kastron*. This was followed by development into the Roman forum, where the open space was rapidly and drastically reduced by encroaching constructions. The maximum extent in the thirteenth century is that represented in the plans illustrated in *Corinth XI* and *Corinth XVI* for the period of the eleventh and twelfth century respectively. This area was excavated sixty years ago, and there is regrettably little that can now be done to elucidate the function of the complexes found there. It is clear from the accumulation of 1.50–2.00 m of occupation deposits between ca. 1050 and 1250 and numerous, now obscure, building phases that activity was intense and civic hygiene somewhat squalid. Some of the narrow (2.5–5 m wide) alleys and part of the central plateia were lined with small, one- to (exceptionally) four-celled shops. Each cell offered no more than 12–15m<sup>2</sup> of retail and storage space; these operations, therefore, necessarily had to be small-scale. Some shops opened onto a stoa-like covered frontage.

Behind the shops, domestic and monastic complexes centered on courtyards. The domestic, and plausibly the monastic, areas were also used for craft specialization. A potters' kiln dating ca. 1100–50 predates the construction of St. John's monastery in the early thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The identification of the "Pottery Factory" and the function of several other kilns in the area is questionable, but early twelfth-century preglazing pottery wasters, metal slag and glass furnace lining, cullet and pontil wads found south and westward from the Bema church are evidence for industry. Much of the glass from the Glass Factory itself is now considered to be late thirteenth to early fourteenth century in date. In appearance the glass of this late date has close parallels with western types, and further research is required to ascertain whether it is locally produced or imported.<sup>22</sup> A small medieval bathhouse is still preserved southwest of the Bema, and to the east were found remains of winepresses and olive presses. There are also well-known references to silk workers and dyers, while the westernized form of

<sup>20</sup> C. K. Williams and O. Zervos, "Frankish Corinth, 1992," *Hesperia* 62 (1993): 20–21, 31; Sanders, "Assemblage of Frankish Pottery," 193. Between 30% and 60% of the glazed pottery from the complex south of the museum at Corinth was Italian in origin.

<sup>21</sup> C. K. Williams and O. Zervos, "Frankish Corinth, 1991," *Hesperia* 61 (1992): 164–71, for a recent discussion of St. John's.

<sup>22</sup> Williams in C. K. Williams and O. Zervos, "Frankish Corinth, 1992," 15–33; Cf. V. François and J.-M. Spieser, "Pottery and Glass in Byzantium," *EHB* 597.

the city's name, Coranto, gave rise to the name of a variety of locally produced small, dried, seedless grapes: currants.

More recent excavations have uncovered an eleventh- to early twelfth-century establishment that perhaps engaged in gold and bronzework at the southwest end of the forum. There is, however, no evidence to support the interpretation of one of the larger structures to the north of the smith's shop as a silk-workers' lodge. Here a row of four shops fronting the street running south toward Acrocorinth was built in the mid-twelfth century. These were each linked by doors in their back wall to a long communal hall running the length of their west side; an earlier bath structure may have remained in use. The whole complex centered on an open courtyard limited on the west side by the West Shops. The second floor of the shops, supported by pilasters and the colonnade of archaic columns (originally the interior colonnade of the temple of Apollo) overhung the street.<sup>23</sup>

South of the museum, and immediately west of the above area, current work has concentrated on a small monastery north of a later thirteenth- to early fourteenth-century complex based around two courtyards. A line of shops including a pharmacy, identified by the finds of imported and local *albarelli* (drug jars), a possible bank, associated with several jetons and counterfeit coins, a tavern, with a hearth and windowsill-cum-counter, and a metal workshop separate the large graveled eastern court from a smaller, paved western court. Glass, ceramic, and metal objects found throughout the area show strong links with Italy. A large kitchen on the inner courtyard, the medical, catering, and financial facilities, and the location on the western approach to the city all suggest that the complex was a hospice perhaps associated with the monastery.<sup>24</sup>

Practically no information exists to indicate the population of Byzantine towns, and the formulas used by various scholars to estimate numbers vary. It is safe to assume that Peloponnesian towns were small even in their heyday. In 1395 Niccolo Martoni described a much reduced Corinth of about forty-five to fifty houses confined to the enceinte on Acrocorinth. Of the deserted lower town he writes, "as the ruins show, it was (once) a large and important place," though he mistakenly confuses these as ancient rather than recent ruins.<sup>25</sup> Estimates of the number of households in the early nineteenth-century settlements of the Peloponnese, provided by Leake and Pouqueville, are informative. These suggest that there was a distinct hierarchy of towns in the Peloponnese, with the largest cities containing a population of about 11,000 (2,500 houses or families) and the lower-ranking towns 5,000 (1,100), 2,500 (560), and about

<sup>23</sup> H. S. Robinson, "Excavations at Corinth, 1960," *Hesperia* 31 (1962): 95–113; C. K. Williams, "Corinth, 1976: Forum Southwest," *Hesperia* 46 (1977): 1–39.

<sup>24</sup> C. K. Williams and O. Zervos, "Excavations at Corinth, 1989: The Temenos of Temple E," *Hesperia* 59 (1990): 345–50; eadem, "Corinth, 1990: Southeast Corner of Temenos E," *Hesperia* 60 (1991): 19–39; eadem, "Frankish Corinth, 1991," *Hesperia* 61 (1992): 134–51; eadem, "Frankish Corinth, 1992," *Hesperia* 62 (1993): 3–34; eadem, "Frankish Corinth, 1993," *Hesperia* 63 (1994): 1–56.

<sup>25</sup> J. P. A. van der Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople: Ancient Monuments and Old Traditions in Medieval Travellers' Tales*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1980), 615–20.

1,400 (310) respectively.<sup>26</sup> It is also safe to assume that settlements grew relatively quickly during the period under examination. A rough estimate of Corinth's population, based on these figures, is that the city may have grown from about 2,000–3,000 in the early ninth century to a peak of perhaps 15,000–20,000 in the twelfth century. Much of this growth seems to have taken place in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

<sup>26</sup> Sanders and Whitbread, "Central Places and Major Roads," 352.