

*Comacchio nell'alto Medioevo. Il paesaggio tra topografia e geoarcheologia.* (Premio Ottone d'Assia e Riccardo Francovich 2014: Contributi di Archeologia Medievale 11). By Alessandro Alessio Rucco. 21 × 29 cm. 138 pp, 71 colour and b&w pls and figs, 2 tables. Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2105. ISBN 978-88-7814-673-0 (ISSN 2035-5424). Price: €28.00 pb.

This volume provides an additional branch to long-running studies on the site of Comacchio and the northern Adriatic region conducted by medieval archaeologists from the Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia led by Prof Sauro Gelichi centred on tracing and contextualising the trade bases or *emporia* that emerged here in the 7th and 8th centuries (as Mediterranean versions of the better known *wics* and *emporia* of the North Sea and Baltic regions). Comacchio, for a time, held commercial prominence before losing out to an aggressive Venice. Gelichi's Preface cites Rucco's prize-winning monograph as filling an important gap in our understanding of the hinterland and environment of Comacchio, particularly for the early medieval centuries, and as building an interdisciplinary model for studies elsewhere. Modern visitors will know of a sleepy town with canals, a southerly lagoon, and a mass of boxed fields generated through modern land reclamation. Rucco here cleverly reveals the much more watery and complex setting of early medieval Comacchio through analysis of a variety of data types — the limited (yet informative) medieval texts and placenames (Chapter 4), late medieval to modern land maps, plus air photographs (Chapter 3), stray finds (including boat/barge wrecks) and old excavations, but, most importantly, also a set of new sondages to gather palaeoenvironmental, sedimentary and C14 evidence. This geoarchaeological work especially centred on the area of S Maria in Padovetere and the line of the ancient Canale di Motta della Girata due west of Comacchio (Chapter 5), a key finding being the likely 7th-century cutting of the Canale to link Comacchio with the former N-S River Po course (previously an Etruscan origin was postulated). Rucco maps salt-pans, marshes, fish-stocks, but also early medieval woodland and farmsteads (these on dunes and employing drainage systems for their lands); he also charts episodes of heavy alluvial deposition (eg in the 6th century AD) and coastal shift.

NEIL CHRISTIE (*University of Leicester*)

*Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rum, 1240–1330.* By Patricia Blessing. 18 × 25 cm. xxiii + 240 pp, 10 colour pls, 76 b&w pls and figs. Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. ISBN 978-1-4724-2406-8. Price: £65.00 hb.

For me this book is an eye-opening stroll through the monumental architecture of early Islamic Anatolia. Interweaving the historical and economic forces in play during the later 13th and early 14th centuries, through a study of archives, a rich scholarly literature and a personal knowledge of the land and its remains, Blessing examines the predominantly local architectural patronage under the Mongols in the main centres of Konya, Sivas and Erzurum, and the smaller towns of Tokat, Amasya and Ankara. The almost exclusive aniconic decoration, often quite luxuriant, was based on arabesque foliate designs and calligraphy, sometimes embellished with turquoise and black tiles. Nonetheless, buildings display geographical diversity across Asia Minor reflecting movement of architects, craftsmen and models. The author also examines the use of Roman and Byzantine *spolia* and the occasional re-proposal of classical models. Somewhat understandably the book concentrates mainly on religious and funerary architecture, with some discussion of caravanserai and the fascinating Birmahane hospital at Amasya, though, unfortunately, little is offered on military, civil and domestic building. An understanding of secular and vernacular architecture will need to take into account archaeology, which has only recently begun to illuminate the economy and society of Mongol Asia Minor. Nonetheless, this attractive and clearly written book is far more than just an examination of architectural developments in Mongol Anatolia, but also a study in history that probes back into the Seljuk period and forwards into Ottoman times.

PAUL ARTHUR (*Università del Salento, Lecce*)