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BETWEEN SYMBOL OF POWER AND CUSTOMS STATION: EARLY MEDIEVAL FORTIFICATIONS IN THE EASTERN ALPS ACCORDING TO WRITTEN SOURCES [1]

ABSTRACT - It is widely known that fortresses primarily served defensive and controlling functions. The topography of the Alps meant that, due to a particular use of these structures, traffic along a given road was fully controllable. In the Dark Ages, when certain alpine regions became border areas, a particular type of fortification was developed in the mountains – the so-called clusae (*claustra*, *clusurae)*, which were established in the 6th century. From a careful analysis of the sources, it becomes clear how the fortifications had more complex functions than simply playing just a defensive role and also served as the ancient duty stations. Other fortifications, on the other hand, could serve to protect the people.

KEY WORDS - Alpine fortification, *Clusae*, Tolls, Alpine roads.

RIASSUNTO - È risaputo che le fortezze hanno, principalmente, una funzione di controllo e difesa. La topografia delle Alpi fece sì che, grazie a un particolare utilizzo di queste strutture, il traffico lungo una data via fosse pienamente controllabile. Quando, nei secoli altomedievali, alcune regioni alpine divennero zone di frontiera, nelle montagne si sviluppò una particolare tipologia di fortificazione: le così dette chiuse (*claustra*, *clusurae*), che si affermarono nel VI secolo. A un'analisi accurata delle fonti, apparirà chiaro come le fortificazioni ricoprissero funzioni più complesse rispetto al solo ruolo di difesa, assumendo il ruolo delle antiche stazioni di dazio. Altre fortificazioni potevano invece servire alla protezione della popolazione.

PAROLE CHIAVE - Fortificazioni alpine, *Clusae*, Stazioni daziali, Strade alpine.

INTRODUCTION

When land routes are used, traffic to and from the Italian peninsular has to go over the Alps. The mountains thus were an inconvenient obstacle where travelling was not as easy as in the surrounding plains – and occasionally even impossible. On the other hand, the mountain valleys where quite practical: Both military aggressors as well as unwanted traffic could be blocked quite easily. Already in pre-roman times the alpine population made use of this advantage by charging road toll to the Romans, until Caesar and his successors decided to end this by conquering the Alps ([2]).

ROMAN FORTIFICATIONS WITHIN THE ALPS

After the conquest respectively integration of the various reigns and tribal formations of the Alps, a peaceful time started for the inhabitants of these mountains. The Roman administration preferred to found cities and villages in the valley or slopes and most pre-roman hilltop sites and fortifications were abandoned. The transalpine traffic was bundled on just some of the former transit routes and only these roads were improved. On some it was even possible to travel the whole way with a cart ([3]). When the weather was right, traffic through the Alps was now possible without any major obstacles ([4]).

These conditions changed, when barbarian (and roman) armies started to plunder and wage war within the Roman Empire. The good state of the alpine roads now occasionally turned into a severe disadvantage, when they made hostile access easier ([5]). The unsafe situation of the late antique Roman Empire lead to the development of new settlement and defense structures within the Alps. One was the emergence of hilltop sites, often right at the place where a pre-roman predecessor had been given up some centuries before ([6]).

These hilltop fortifications were built for several reasons and people ([7]). In the western Alps, we have one rare example, where the local

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([2]) WALSER 1994, pp. 9-48.
([3]) For example at the Julier/Septimer. KAISER 2008, pp. 176-177.
([4]) BENDER 1975, 9f; KAISER 2008, p. 176;
([5]) WINKLER 1985, p. 20.
([6]) CHRISTIE 2006, pp. 284, 298.
([7]) For an overview see KAISER 2008, 182 (Chur); CIGLENEČKI 1987 (Eastern Alps); BROGIOLO, POSSENTI 2008, 715-748 (Northern Italy) in STEUER et al. 2008.

elite took care of the population's safety. At the beginning of the fifth century, a *vir illuster* called *Claudius Postumus Dardanus* and his wife fortified their estate. As homage to Augustine they called it «Theopolis» and they explicitly wanted it to be of use for the whole population of this area. The inscription can still be read at the side of a modern road near Sisteron [8]. That local elites took over some of the functions of the Roman administration is a streak quite common in late antiquity.

More common was the transfer of a Roman *civitas* from the bottom of an alpine valley to a nearby hilltop, often additionally fortified with walls. The former settlement in the valley in many cases slowly ceased to be inhabited (e.g. in *Virunum*, *Aguntum* and *Octodurum*). The movement to the hilltops often meant that for topographic reasons the city had to be reduced in size. Only the administrative core of the *civitas* was moved, which in late Antiquity meant mainly churches and – as the late antique *civitas* usually was the seat of a bishop – his palace and the Episcopal Church [9]. In the Alps of the sixth century many bishops resided in fortified castles on a hill, for example in Sion, Chur, Teurnia and Säben. Säben is a bishop's see whose origins are not at all clear, because there is no known preceding *civitas* [10].

These bishops were important figures and not only responsible for churchly matters but also for civic and military ones [11]. In the *Vita Severini* priests and bishops organized the defenses of cities [12]. In Merovingian times kings often granted bishops the right to collect taxes and tolls in the area of the *civitas* and in more than one case the bishop could act as an autonomous ruler of his see [13].

At that point many *civitas*es were actually fortified castles on a hilltop [14]. This change also reflects in the denotation of this kind of dwelling: now the sources start to call these regional centers also *castra* [15]. The confusion between *civitas* and *castrum* becomes clear in the writing of Gregory of Tours. For him the wall as well as the bishop becomes the marker for an urban identity of a place. He describes the city of Dijon as a bishopric and a place with impressing fortifications: firm walls and

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(8) Lebecq 1990, pp. 23-24; CAG-04, p. 407.
(9) Demandt 2008, 369; Loseby 2006, 76-82; Christie 2004, 269; Marazzi 1998, 145.
(10) Berg 1989, pp. 89-90.
(11) Kaiser 1980, pp. 12,17; Kaiser 1981, pp. 67-70.
(12) Vita Severini century 24, 25, 30, 27 etcentury; Krahwinkler 2001, p. 106.
(13) Kaiser 1980, p. 16; Wickham 2005; For Chur: Kaiser 2008, pp. 101, 125.
(14) Christie 2006, pp. 285-299.
(15) For this evolution see Mitterauer 1980, pp. 58-61; Csendes 2001, pp. 9-16; Landi 2005, pp. 85-88 (Eastern Alps).

towers. He uses the word *castrum*, but adds «*Qui cur non civitas dicta sit, ignoro*» ([16]) – «Why it is not called a *civitas*, I do not know». He cannot understand why his contemporaries do not call a place that was fully equipped with the necessary signs of a city – a bishop and impressive walls – by its right label ([17]).

The old Roman meaning of the word «*civitas*» (as a centre of a region and the public administration) had now become synonymous with the word «*castrum*». This shows very clearly that the perception of a city changed in this time and a defense system was important for the status of a place. In later sources the equation *castrum* = *civitas* becomes ubiquitous. In the eighth and ninth century charters of the northern Alps the same place can be called *civitas* or *castrum*, and even *urbs* or *oppidum*, for example the fortified hilltop site, regional centre and bishop's see Freising ([18]). In reverse it is not always easy to say, if a mentioned *castrum* might not have been a rather simple defense structure.

In his *Historia Langobardorum* Paul the Deacon tells a story from the sixth century, this part of his text very probably stems from Secundus of Trient's *Historiola* ([19]). When the Franks tried to ravage Northern Italy, they went over the Alps and used the occasion to besiege many of the *castra* in and near the Etsch valley. They conquered some of them - «*Nomina autem castrorum quae diruerunt in territorio Tridentino ista sunt: Tesana, Maletum, Sermiana, Appianum, Fagitana, Cimbra, Vitianum, Bremtonicum, Volaenes, Ennemase, et duo in Alsuca et unum in Verona. Haec omnia castra cum diruta essent a Francis, cives universi ab eis ducti sunt captivi. Intercedentibus episcopis Ingenuino de Savione et Agnello de Tridento, data est redempio, per caput uniuscuiusque viri solidus unus usque ad solidos sexcentos*» ([20]). The Franks destroyed the castles and captured the people. Later the bishops Ingenuin of Säben/Sabiona and Agnellus of Trient could free the inhabitants of these *castra* by paying a sum of money. These castles seem to have been served as a shelter for the valley's civic population and not for the exercise of power.

The remarkable thing about the terminology is that Paul the Deacon calls the inhabitants of the villages of the valleys respectively the *castra* «*cives*», a word formerly reserved for dwellers of a proper Roman *civitas*

([16]) Gregory of Tours Hist. III 19.

([17]) Gauthier 1997, p. 50.

([18]) Bitterauf, Traditionen Freisings LXXX lists the different terms mentioned in the charters. See also Mitterauer 1980, p. 61; Csendes 2001, p. 11.

([19]) Paul the Deacon Hist. Lang. III 31, MGH ss. Rer. Germ. 48 137.

([20]) Paul the Deacon Hist. Lang. III 31; This part of the source was already covered extensively e.g. by Landi 2005, pp. 88-111; Albertoni 2005, pp. 34-35.

only ([21]). Here the shift of the word's meaning is visible too. This part of the text also shows that these *castra* still functioned as a structure for the whole population. This changed in later centuries, when from the tenth century on a *castrum* more and more becomes the seat of a specific local ruler or noble family. The development of the medieval aristocracy meant a fundamental change in the relationship between population and elites and in the self-representation of the elites ([22]). A *castrum* was also a symbol of power for these elites.

Chur is an excellent example for this development. In the bottom of the alpine Rhine valley a Roman settlement was founded and in late Roman times a very small *castrum* was build on a nearby hilltop. Later this became the seat of the bishop of Chur, who in the seventh century held the secular and ecclesiastical power and controlled mountain passes and traffic in his domain ([23]). The area of the former Roman fortification was nearly exclusively used by churches and buildings of the bishop's see. But still, until the high Middle Ages the local population called the area within the fortification «*civida*» ([24]). In Chur the local ruler – in this case the bishop – was also responsible for the collection of tolls, as is visible in a letter from Alcuin to the Churian bishop Remedius at the end of the eighth century. The wise man asked the bishop to free his salesperson from tolls on his way to and from Italy «*in montium claustris*» ([25]).

This term brings us back again to late Antiquity and how in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages the alpine fortifications could have military as well as an economic character.

Claustra Provinciae: ideal and reality ([26])

In Alcuin's letter the term «*claustra*» clearly has an economic sense, but in Roman and late Roman terms it was used differently in the sources: it designated a defense, be it ideological or real.

([21]) Occasionally is is supposed that he meant by this choice of words a distinction between Lombards and Romans, e.g. Bierbrauer 2005, p. 231; Landi 2005, p. 91. However, in the rest of the text the word *cives/civis* is used in the sense of «inhabitant of a civitas», for example in IV 37.

([22]) Wickham 2005, pp. 483-4857, 595.

([23]) See FN 25.

([24]) Kaiser 2008, pp. 103-106.

([25]) Kaiser 2008, pp. 53, 223-225, BUB I 21: «*in montium claustris a vestries non teneatus tolneariis constrictus*».

([26]) Following part of the study owes much to two papers that cover extensively the

Within the concept of «*claustra Alpium*», these mountains served as a symbolic barrier between the civilized world and the barbarians: «*Alpes id est claustra Italiae*» ([27]). But reality was different and though from the perspective of the Po-Plain the Alps may look like a giant wall, they never were an obstacle for invading enemies – «*claustra patefacta sunt*» as Ammianus Marcellinus put it ([28]). For the Roman writers of the time around 400, the image of the Alps as a barrier was very appealing. But it seemed to have no background in reality: «*claustra Alpium*» was solely used in a poetic context and therefore it is very likely, that this concept was not more than a literary topos ([29]).

Romans are known for their impressive frontier fortifications as the Hadrian Wall. But as the Alps were not a frontier in the Roman Empire, no such elaborate defense systems are to be expected ([30]). The Roman administration had neither will nor the means to make a systematic defense line through the Alps. Nevertheless the concept of a *limes* in or near the Alps here and then emerges in contemporary research and an organized and systematic defense system throughout the whole Alps is thought of ([31]). But except for the famous line of the «*tractus Italiae circa Alpes*» under the command of the *comes Italiae* in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (written around 400), we have no evidence for this kind of construction ([32]). Probably the term designated the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* ([33]).

Apart from the many Late Roman local fortifications that existed in the whole alpine area ([34]), only one larger structure can still be traced archaeologically: the above mentioned *claustra Alpium Iuliarum* ([35]). On

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topic of the *claustra* and clusae as well as the different roots and functions of these structures: Duparc 1951 and Mollo 1996.

([27]) Florus I 38; Albertoni 2005, pp. 62-72.

([28]) Ammianus Marcellinus Hist. 31.11; Orosius VII 40.9 used nearly the same words, when he described the *claustra* in the Pyrenees.

([29]) Claudianus, Panegyricus de tertio consulatu honorii augusti VII (MGH S. 144) , Ambrosius, de Excessu Fratris Satyri I 7 , Orosius, VII 35.3,

([30]) Napoli 1997, p. 110.

([31]) For the discussion on this see Scharf 2005, pp. 69-75, esp. 70 FN 244. Mollo 1996, pp. 44-51 favors the theory of a systematic defense structure. Christie 2006 332 states the difficulty of estimating how systematic the alpine defense structures of the fifth century actually have been. Wolfram 2009, p. 316 reconstructs for the reign of Theodoric a three-layered frontier area across the Alps that included the fortifications of the southern rim of this mountain range.

([32]) Notit. Dig. Occ. XXIV; Scharf 2005, p. 4.

([33]) Christie 2006, pp. 302, 325; Šašel 1992, p. 733. Duparc 1951, pp. 23-26 sees a connection to the *clusurae augustanae* of Cassiodorus.

([34]) Christie 2006, pp. 325-347; Brogiolo, Possenti 2008, pp. 715-719.

([35]) Ammianus Marcellinus Hist. 31.11; Šašel 1992, pp. 732-733.

the first sight this fortifications looks like a defense. But it probably served more an economic cause: as a means to prevent merchants to travel from one province to another without paying the proper tax. Joelle Napoli calls this defense system a mixture between military fortifications and a point of control for the traffic within the empire between Pannonia and Illyricum to Italy ([36]). This fortification ceased to exist after the end of the Roman administration; however, rests seemed to have served under Lombard rule in Friuli as a defense against Slavs ([37]). However, in Roman times walls blocking a valley were actually built in the Pyrenees and in Africa (e.g. in Bir Oum Ali). Here the fortifications also have been used for the control of the 'normal' traffic and not so much for military reasons or for the marking of a frontier. These walls were built on or near the frontiers between taxation districts, where the Roman administration levied tolls ([38]).

The Roman administration collected tolls within the empire in the border areas between the provinces. In the Alps this meant toll stations at the frontiers between the dioceses of Illyricum (*publicum portorii Illyrici)* ([39]), Italia (which was toll-free) and Gallia *(quadragesmia Galliarum*) ([40]). Many early medieval fortifications have predecessors from Antiquity and are lying near the former border between the provinces; they also served not only for the control of the border area but also for the observance of the transit routes (see below). A connection between Roman and Medieval structures therefore seems likely.

The reign of King Theoderic did not bring many changes to the eastern Alpine administration, as the border was north of the Alps ([41]). This changed when the Ostrogothic reign perished: many alpine valleys became a frontier zone. These borders were at first near or identical to the ones of the Roman provinces. From the sixth century on these administrative borders became 'real' frontier between the different barbaric reigns, for example between Lombards and Bavarians in the central Alps and Slavs/Avars in the eastern Alps.

During the Gothic Wars different powers – Franks (and associated

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([36]) NAPOLI 1997, pp. 260-267 and 110.

([37]) ŠAŠEL 1992, pp. 737-739; CHRISTIE 2006, p. 336.

([38]) ACOLAT 2007, pp. 40-53.

([39]) DELAET 1949, pp. 181-192. E.g. near Zuglio (*Iulium Carnicum*) at the toll-station in *Timavum* (Today Timau) WINKLER 1985, p. 39.

([40]) DELAET 1949, pp. 144-160. Other localizations see below. It amounted usually 2,5% of the merchandise value in contrast to the tolls at the border of the empire, where it was with 25% significantly higher. DREXHAGE ET AL. 2002, pp. 145-147.

([41]) WOLFRAM 1995, pp. 64-65.

dominions like Bavaria), Lombards, Ostrogoths and Byzantium strug-
gled for dominance in Italy. The Po-plain and the southern sides of the
Alps were the main impact zones for these hostilities. This made the
power structures in the Alpine valleys fractured and often hard to re-
construct. It is not easy to estimate who dominated which area and cas-
tles, especially in the gothic wars, when for example Ostrogothic troops
on mountain forts turned to Byzantium [42] or one former Byzantine
military leader, Sinduald, tried to establish his own kingdom somewhere
near the Etsch valley [43]. By end of the sixth century the fortress of Susa
was still in the hands of another Byzantine military leader, Sisinnius,
though we have no more information, if he acted on his own. However,
the surrounding land seems to have been in Lombard hands [44]. Also
the Island of Comacina, the control point for the route over Lake Como,
was in the hand of a Byzantine leader [45].

This interest for these border castles can be explained not only with
the wish of territorial control but also with the desire to control the traf-
fic for economic reasons – the possession of such a fortification could be
quite lucrative. The dynamic situation made it necessary, that different
types of fortifications co-existed. Sometimes the structures seemed to
have served many purposes in the same time or maybe switched func-
tion under different command. Moreover the concept of frontiers was
not linear but meant in many cases a more or less large area [46]. The forti-
fications were always built in the valleys of the Alps, near the pre-alpine
plains on fitting hilltops or narrow points and never on the heights of the
passes themselves. Accordingly the frontier-zone was always situated in
the valley and not on the pass – a concept that got lost only in the last
centuries [47]. Very similar structures were built also in other mountainous
areas of the former Roman Empire, for example in the Pyrenees [48]. They
have their roots in Antiquity but are distinctive medieval.

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[42] Prokopius de bello gothico II (VI) 28.28 / *Alpes Cottiae*.

[43] Paul the Deacon Hist. Lang. III 3; Krahwinkler 1992, p. 25.

[44] Gregory of Tours Hist. IV 44.

[45] Paul the Deacon Hist. Lang. III 27; Christie 2006, pp. 339-341, 369-371;
Kaiser 2008, p. 31-32, Chiavenna was the main point of control after lake Como and is
thus also mentioned in the *Honorantie civitatis Papie* (See FN 97) Duparc 1951, p. 16.
The Area was in Carolingian times controlled by the mighty abbey of St. Denis.

[46] Pohl 2001, pp. 127-128; Goetz 2001, p. 80; Wolfram 2001, p. 235.

[47] This concept can still be seen in the Swiss canton Ticino or the Austrian prov-
ince of Salzburg, that extends over the Radstädter Tauern Pass. Also the cultural con-
nections always extend over the pass, which is still visible in the Aosta valley, where the
population speaks a French dialect.

[48] Julian of Toledo. Historia Wambae Regis MGH SS rer. Merov. V p. 511, 531,

Cassiodorus refers in his *Variae* to such frontier fortifications of the Alps. In his texts for the first time the administrative and economic functions of these structures becomes clear. First he mentions the *clusurae augustanae*, which lay in the Aosta valley, probably at Bard [49]. In the Roman city of Aosta a Roman inscription was found, citing a so called «*circitor*», a term for someone who chases smugglers at a border. This indicates the Roman toll barrier at this place [50]. Another letter of Cassiodorus also talks about *clusurae*, more broadly and with no connection to a specific place, but with a clear relation to the economic function: «*his qui portibus vel clusuris praesunt*» [51]. The interesting thing here is the combination of ports and *clusurae*. This also appears in the charters from the eighth century and points to the economic relevance of the fortifications.

Finally, Cassiodorus mentions the *dux* in Raetia, who holds the «*claustra provinciae*» – the bulwark of the (Italic) provinces [52]. In Cassiodorus it becomes very clear that this was also a technical term for fortifications in mountains, as opposed to our antique sources, where the term was more generally used as a topos to designate the Alps as an ideal barrier against enemies [53].

The word *cl(a)usura* becomes quite common in the sixth century. Maybe we can trace here some Byzantine influence, because of a Byzantine institution called «*kleisura*» [54]. From the seventh century on in the Byzantine Empire fortified cities in mountainous areas were sometimes called *kleisura* and made the centre of an «*kleisurarchie*», commanded by a «*kleisurarcho*s» [55]. An example can be found in Constantinus Porphyrogenitus' «*de Administrando Imperio*» for a place near Salona in

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532, Duparc 1951, p. 26; Castellvi 1995, pp. 85-104 and Southern Italy Christie 2006, p. 380.

[49] Cassiodorus var. II V MGH p. 49. The text refers to 60 soldiers that are positioned at the *Augustanae clusurae* and praises the braveness of these men who reside at the «*porta provinciae*» and the «*finalis locis*» to fight the barbars (meaning the Francs). Duparc 1951, p. 25; Mollo 1996, pp. 47, 54.

[50] Inscription AE 1989 No. 334, Drexhage et al. 2002, p. 268.

[51] Cassiodorus Var. II 19 MGH Auct. Ant. 12 p. 57.

[52] Cassiodorus Var. VII 4 MGH Auct. Ant. 12 p. 203.

[53] Interesting enough, the word *claustra* was used again by Alcuin (see above) for a toll station at the same province and by Paulus Dicaonus V 2 and V33 for the western Alps. A research on the exact use of the words *clusa/clusura/claustra* is planned by the author. Winckler 2012, pp. 62-65.

[54] Also for other mountain areas of the empire: Codex Iustinian 1,27.2 4a (Africa), Duparc 1951, pp. 26-27.

[55] ODB keyword «*Kleisoura*» 1132; Christie 2006, p. 361; Haldon 2010, p. 105.

Dalmatia ([56]). These frontier fortifications were in the words of John Haldon «a locally focused defense, involving a 'guerilla' strategy of harassing, ambushing and dogging invading raiders» ([57]). With the *clusura/claustra* and the later term *clusa* (see below) we have this mixture between *civitas*, *castrum* and frontier fortification also in the alpine area.

One example for the shifting of functions of an alpine fortification is Säben. This hilltop structure was first mentioned in the end of the sixth century. It is difficult to decide, why the fortification on the hilltop was chosen as a bishop's seat, as there is no obvious connection to any of the *civitates* in this area ([58]). The connection of the *castrum* with the toll station is not farfetched: at the road post at *Sublavione* (just five kilometers south) an inscription of the *Portorium Illyrici* was found, which indicates, that the border between Noricum and Raetia (i.e. the diocese of Italia annonaria) can be situated here and, more important, the toll of the diocese of Illyricum ([59]). The *mansio* is located at the exit of the Gardena valley five kilometers south of Säben/Sabiona. Supposedly the antique customs station was situated here, between two major bottlenecks of the Eisack valley ([60]).

Around 960 the bishop's seat was transferred to Bressanone ([61]). In the year 1028 emperor Konrad II transferred the right of the toll to the monastery that now was on the former bishop's seat on the hilltop of Säben: «...*ut clusas sitas in loco Sebona in pago Orital in comitatu Engilberti cum theloneo et cum omni utilitate* [...] *ad monasterium Sebona*...» ([62]). The custom station now was situated on the north of the Eisack-gorge ([63]), probably on the place that is called «Chiusa/Klausen» till today. That before that time the bishop had some rights of the toll is not unlikely ([64]).

([56]) *De administrando imperio* century 29 ed. MORAVCSIK 1967, 1985, p. 122 (also pp. 238-240 for the East of the empire).

([57]) HALDON 2010, pp. 105-106.

([58]) BERG 1989, pp. 89, 92.

([59]) DELAET 1949, pp. 156, 182-183; KAISER 2008, p. 34. It must be noted that in the whole Alps the administrative border of the roman provinces changed in antiquity and late antiquity several times, so it is very hard to reconstruct the situation at the end of roman rule.

([60]) BANZI 2005, pp. 185-186; MOLLO 1996, p. 57.

([61]) RIEDMANN 1987, p. 95.

([62]) One year before he had transferred the cluse to the bishop. MGH DD K II no. 103 p. 146; no. 115 p.160.

([63]) BANZI 2005, p. 185.

([64]) The episcopate disappears from the sources in the seventh century and the situation of power here is quite unclear. When reappearing in the eighth century the bishop had a strong position which could indicate that Säben was in the seventh centu-

The *clusae:* command & conquer

As much as the term «*claustr*a» was used in Roman times to praise the (natural) barrier of the Alps, from Carolingian times on the word «*clusa*» meant something more than a mere frontier fortification. The conquest of Italy despite the *clusae* became the symbol of military supremacy and a marker of power for whoever commanded, broke or circumvented the *clusae* and in that way the alpine barrier ([65]).

As an example the description of the eleventh/twelfth century Chronicle of Novalesa can be cited. The account is embedded in the history of Charlemagne's conquest of the Lombard reign in Italy and is told in anecdotal form: The nobles of the Lombard reign give Desiderius advice how to defend his kingdom against the Frankish threat. They tell him to fortify the *clusae* in Susa by a wall from mountain to mountain and to add bulwarks and towers ([66]). As early as in the buildings of Procopius we find this ideal: he describes such as structure on a narrow pass between two steep mountains with a fortress on either side. He writes, that Justinian «closed the pass with a very strong cross-wall which he made fast to each of the two mountains» ([67]). Both sources use this model to build the image of strong rulers – in these cases Justinian and the almost mythical struggle between Desiderius and Charlemagne. Another literary image can be found in the *Notitia Dignitatum.* The (Medieval) scriptures of this Roman text show fortifications in mountains. The *tractus Italiae circa Alpes* is depicted as a fortified city and defense walls on the mountains behind it. This corresponds with above mentioned sources and some roman defense walls and fortifications in Africa and the Pyrenees ([68]).

So for the military and ideological roles of these *clusae* the sources are plentiful. But what about the other functions? As it was already mentioned in the texts of Cassiodorus, Alcuin and the charters of Säben

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ry relatively autonomous and thus responsible for the civic and military activities of this *civitas* – as in many other dioceses of the Merowingian realm. Kaiser 1980, pp. 11-13; Mollo 1996, p. 57.

([65]) For the mythical *clusae* see Mollo 1996, pp. 65-90; for the use of the word in Carolingian sources: Dept 1926 89-98; Duparc 1951, pp. 10-12. The word *clusa* itself became quite common in Carolingian sources (e.g. Fredegar continuatons century 37 MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 p. 188 for Susa).

([66]) Chronicon Novaliciense III 9; Mollo 1996 65-71.

([67]) Procopius Buildings III 8.5, translation by H.B. Dewing.

([68]) *tractus Italiae circa Alpes* (Not. Occ. XXIV) Also the picture for the *comes per Isauriam* shows fortified cities and mountains, but no walls. Acolat 2007, pp. 40-51; Castellvi 1995, pp. 85-104; Christie 2006, pp. 362-364.

these *clusae* and other early medieval fortifications in the alpine valleys not only served as a symbol of power for a bishop, *civitas*, nobles or as a military stronghold, but also had an economic function. They collected tolls from the traffic that ran over the Alps.

This had very likely its roots in antiquity ([69]). The seniority of the institution is often emphasized in the charters; we have a capitulary from the beginning of the seventh century that declares the unlawfulness of new toll-stations. The same capitulary also decrees, that a road charge was only justified, if the traveler got something out of it – be it a bridge, a fortified passage or the possibility to tow a boat upstream ([70]). Unfortunately for the travelers this thought was never really established and moreover the charters do suggest that the unlawful collection of tolls was quite common. To gain these unjust earnings the roads (of land as well as water) were sometimes barricaded with ropes or even chains ([71]).

From the seventh century on this economic feature of a *clusa* becomes traceable in the sources and by the ninth century it is quite common ([72]). However, as often as these structures are now mentioned in the charters and texts, as unclear are the actual places and how they looked like. It can be assumed, that a wide range of building was possible, from simple houses to heavily fortified *clusae* that made trespassing without permit impossible.

Another problem is the one of terminology. The eighth century sees the advent of yet another word linked with tolls and roads: *exclusaticum*. On the first sight this word seems to be connected to a *clusa*, but in reality it derived its origin from «*exclusa*», a barrier of a waterway. The corresponding toll was called *exclusaticum* ([73]). The word «*clusa*» and derivatives in sources or place names do not automatically mean that an

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([69]) KAISER 1980, pp. 9-12; GANSHOF 1958, pp. 4-5.

([70]) Edictum Chlotharii II., century 9 MGH Capit I p. 22; and again from Charlemagne p. 124. KAISER 1980, p. 9.

([71]) GANSHOF 1959, pp. 44-46; DUPARC 1951, p. 10.

([72]) GANSHOF 1959, pp. 11, 17; DUPARC 1951, pp. 21-23; MCCORMICK 2007, pp. 642-644.

([73]) Pippini Capitularia 13 MGH p.32 (754/755): Pilgrims traveling to Rome are exempt from tolls «*ad pontes vel ad exclusas*». The term eventually evolved to the German Word «Schleuse» which means water port, the same meaning it has now in French (écluse) and Italian (chiusa). See e.g. Edictum Rothari no. 150 MGH p. 34 the «*sclusa*» of a watermill. MGH DD Kar. I no. 93 p. 134: Charlemagne reconfirms the Abbey of St. Denis the exemption of tolls: «*in nullo modo nullo tellone nullo exclusatico infra regna Francia et Italia seo ubicumque neque decimum exigere nec exactare non debeatis*» DUPARC 8f. *Exclusaticum* and *clusaticum* seem sometimes to have been used synonymously ADAM 1996, p. 47.

alpine frontier or customs station was at this place ([74]). The German word «Klausen/Klause» can mean «*clusa*» but also designates the dwelling of an eremite or a small monastic community, a natural bottleneck of a watercourse or, in the later middle ages, a dam in order to bank water for the transportation of wood out of the mountainous forests. Similarly a *clusa* can also be found in flat terrain, where it designates a natural or man-made bottleneck. The sources themselves tend to be somewhat foggy, for example not all *clusae* mentioned in the charters might have been situated in the Alps ([75]).

At a *clusa* the special toll sometimes got an according name in the charters, the *clusaticum* ([76]). This word can be found in a quite formulaic fashion in many tax-exemptions and transfers of toll-rights. But one has to be cautious again, as a *clusaticum* could also be levied at a bottleneck in the plains (see above). In 845 the monastery Novalesa gets an extensive exemption of toll, which includes «*theloneum vel pontaticum sive rotaticum aut clusaticum*» ([77]). Here the position of the monastery at the foot of the Mont Cenis clearly links the word *clusaticum* with the actual cluse.

From the mid eighth century comes one of the finest sources regarding *clusae* and the organization of traffic and defense: the famous laws of Ratchis and Aistulf ([78]). In this time the relations with the neighbors – Franks, Bavarians etc. – had deteriorated and thus made it necessary to organize the frontiers more tightly.

It is possible here to get some ideas for the maintenance and organization of such a fortification. One clause states that «*clusae qui disruptae sunt*», cluses that are broken, should be renovated. This means, that the structures at the border were only maintained if there was a demand, be it military or economic ([79]). Situations at the frontiers could change fast (see above) and thus made it necessary to build new fortifications – but it could also result in the complete abandonment of a *clusa* ([80]).

Other clauses that are interesting for the theme of this article are the ones that deal with the organization of the traffic that passed the fortifi-

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([74]) Duparc 1951, pp. 6-8 on the terminology of *clusa/clusurae/claustra*.

([75]) See FN 73 and 84.

([76]) Duparc 1951, pp. 21-22.

([77]) MGH DD Lothar II no. 91 p. 225. Already in 779 (MGH DD Kar. 1 S. 174) the monastery had gained immunity.

([78]) Ratchis & Aistulfi Leges ed. Beyerle 183-204. The following clauses were covered extensively by Pohl 2001, pp. 117-141 and Tangl 1958, pp. 1-67.

([79]) Pohl 2001, pp. 131-132.

([80]) Tangl 1958, p. 54; Leg. 4, p. 197.

cations. The laws explicitly address the entry and exit of travelers at the *clusae* that were lying near or at the border. These *clusae* served as a point of control not only for people coming from outside of the kingdom but also from the inside [81]. A special personnel called *clusarius*, was responsible for the supervision of the traffic. In Ratchis' law c. 13 also a so-called *locopositus* is mentioned, a local official, and a *iudex* who stood above this personnel and commanded these posts. This hints towards a sophisticated frontier organization [82]. In Carolingian times this organizations seems to have been resumed [83].

CLUSARII AND OTHER PEOPLE

From some Merovingian charters we also know the term *clusarius* as designating someone who was responsible for the toll. In a Carolingian formula (the *Praeceptum negotiatorum* from 828) a directive for merchants guarantees exemption of toll for some groups. There were only three points, where a toll could be levied: Quentovic, Dorestad and «*ad clusas*» [84]. This reminds of the difference between justified 'old' and unjust 'new' tolls mentioned above. The formula states people responsible for the collection of the toll, we find among e.g. *gastaldiis*, *actionariis* and also *clusariis* [85].

In the Vita of Corbinian there are traces of the Bavarian frontier organization and the involved personnel. Corbinian originally came from Francia and travelled to Bavaria in order to spread the holy word. At some point he also went to Rome. For some reason the Bavarian dux wanted to control the movements of the saint and so he gave orders to the office holders at the border zone between the Lombard and Bavarian reign. These people are called *auctores montani* [86] in the text: the Bavarian authorities in the mountains who were situated somewhere at the road over

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[81] POHL 2001, pp. 134-136 and 139-141.

[82] POHL 2001, p. 139; TANGL 1958, pp. 32-45.

[83] Capitular of King Pepin of Italy 790 no. 95 MGH Capit. I p. 201; DUPARC 1951, p. 21.

[84] Formulae no. 37 MGH LL Form. 1 p. 314 «*nullamque detentionem neque ad clusas neque in nullo loco... excepto ad opus nostrum inter Quentovico et Dorestado vel ad Clusas, ubi ad opus nostrum decima exigitur*». This curious combination led to the theory, that the *clusae* mentioned in the text were actually not the *clusae* in the Alps. DEPT 1926, pp. 89-91.

[85] See above FN 83; DUPARC 1951, pp. 20-21.

[86] Vita Corbiniani IX ed. BRUNHÖLZL 1983, p. 110.

the Reschenpass ([87]). The place, where the saint was finally captured on his way back by so-called *custodes* was at the *castrum Maiense*– the same place, where the inscription for the Roman toll was found ([88]).

As in many cases, the connection to antique and late antique institutions is, though somewhat blurred, still visible. Some regional organization evolved without major ruptures out of antique and late antique predecessors ([89]). But there were also important changes. One of these is the administrative responsibility that from Late Antiquity on often moved to ecclesiastic institutions, notably the bishop. An early medieval bishop could sometimes execute great power over his *civitas/castrum* and the corresponding land (see above). But the administrative responsibility also went to other ecclesiastic institutions: the monasteries that from the sixth century on (starting with St. Maurice d'Agaune at the foot of the great St. Bernard) began to control traffic, roads and also border-areas ([90]).

The connection of these monasteries with fortifications on roads and borders is sometimes recognizable. At the foot of the Brennerpass a charter of 827 mentions a person named Quarti, «*nationis Noricorum et Pregnariorum*», meaning that he was a noble of local origin. He donated to the convent of Innichen his property at Vipiteno «*ad UUipizina in castello et in ipso vico*» ([91]). Again we have this early medieval combination of local power, a road that was important in Roman and Medieval times and a fortified place. The new development was that the administration was assigned to a monastery. The convent of Innichen was very important for the eastern-alpine traffic of that time. Moreover it belonged to the powerful bishopric of Freising that by the high middle ages could extend its domination of the east-west traffic trough the Alps as far as today Slovenia ([92]).

In the eighth century the nunnery of the Nonnberg in Salzburg got an estate in Ainring, ca. five kilometers west of the city. The Charter explicitly mentions people with military training «*exercitales viri/homines*» ([93]). This estate lies at the crossway of the road, that brought the salt

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([87]) These office-holders were responsible for the collection of taxes for the king. Hinkmar von Reims, De ordine palatii MGH Fontes Iuris 3, pp. 74-75. For example in the Gesta Dagoberti (beginning of ninth century), the toll-collectors at Marseille were called «*actores regi*»; Ganshof 1958, p. 18.

([88]) DeLaet 1949, pp. 153-155; Vita Corbiniani VII 23; also see below.

([89]) In Gallia: Kaiser 1980, pp. 5-9.

([90]) Kaiser 1980, p. 16; Störmer 1966, pp. 306-310.

([91]) Trad. Freis. no. 550. (a. 827/828) ed. Bitterauf, p. 471f.

([92]) Brunner 1994, p. 33; Vilfan 1993, pp. 210-211.

([93]) Notitia Arnonis ed. Lošek 2006, p. 82 «*exercitales viris*» Breves Notitiae ed. Lošek 2006, p. 94 «*execitales homines*»; Wolfram 1995b, p. 154.

of Bad Reichenhall (where the church of Salzburg also had some salt works) to the ships and rafts at the Salzach, taking this precious good to its destination in locations as far as Moravia [94]. The other connection was the important Roman road that ran parallel to the Alps and linked Pannonia with Gallia. Some 100 years later and about five kilometers further up the river, also tolls were granted to the church of Salzburg [95].

Where were the *clusae*?

This brings us to the question of the location of these stations. As shown above, there are plenty of sources telling us about frontier fortifications. Some seem to have been combined with toll stations and had some sort of control over border, traffic and local population. But vague descriptions make the exact identification of these places often impossible [96].

An unfortunately late source, the *honorantie civitatis Papie* from the eleventh century (with later interpolations and earlier fragments [97]), defines important points in the southern rim of the Alps, where merchants had to pay the customs (now ten percent – a mixture between the 2.5% internal tarif and 25% external tarif in Roman times). We find following locations: «*...decimam de omni negotio ad clusas et ad vias que sunt* [...] *regi pertinentes*, *videlicet: prima est Secusia, secunda Bardo, tertia Belinzona, quarta Clavenna, quinta Balzano, sexta Volerno, septima Trevile, octava Sanctus Petrus de Iulio [in] via de Monte Cruce, nona prope Aquilegiam, decima Forumiulii*» [98]. For some of these places the localization is not clear, but the 'usual suspects' appear again: Susa (San Michele), Aosta (Bard) and Bauzanum (Bozen/Säben). Some other mentioned places are not so easy to locate, as there are several possibilities [99].

This corresponds with the topography both of land and power. The passages over the Eastern Alps offer several possibilities and there are also numerous strategic bottlenecks on these ways. For example the mentioned *clusa* near Bauzanum (Bozen/Bolzano) could have been at

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[94] Brunner 1994, p. 30; Wolfram 1995, p. 272.
[95] Charters of Louis the Child no. 64 MGH DD LK p. 195.
[96] Most relevant sources are cited in Duparc 1951, pp. 10-16 and Mollo 1996, pp. 60-65.
[97] Violante, Brühl 1983, pp. 77-85.
[98] *Honorantie civitatis Papie* §1 Violante, Brühl 1983, pp. 16-17.
[99] For the discussion see Violante, Brühl 1983, p. 34 and Mollo 1996, pp. 51-60.

the site of the Roman toll-station south of the Eisack gorge. But as the Roman road through the Eisack gorge decayed at some point in the early middle ages, the traffic had to go over the Ritten/Renon, the slopes above this gorge ([100]). This means, that the *clusa* later was probably situated somewhere at this road, most likely at the foot of Sabiona/ Säben, where the place till today is called Chiusa/Klausen (see above).

Another example is the toll station at Mais/Meran (where also the early medieval *castrum* and border area can be situated ([101])) five kilometers east to the old Roman toll station between the provinces *Raetia* and *Venetia et Histria* ([102]) one of the earliest still standing church buildings of the eastern Alps can be found, St. Proculus of Naturns ([103]) – a sign, that the road and probably the toll collected there was of some importance also in the seventh century. The localization of this toll is also somewhat fluid. Usually the border is located at Parcines, where till today a part of the community has the speaking name Tel/Töll. But a Roman inscription referring to the *Quadragesima Galliarum* was found in Ober-Mais (Maia) five kilometres to the east of this spot. It is very tempting to identify this *statio Maiensis* with the *castrum Maiense* so often mentioned in the early middle ages. However, although it is probably impossible to reconstruct the exact history and locations of the toll-stations, *clusae* and centers of power in this area it is important to notice, that though there was a frequent change of place, the focus area of these locations as well as the border area remained the same from antiquity to the early middle ages.

RESUMEE

In late Antiquity many cities within the Roman Empire were fortified in order to protect the population, a development that can also be observed in the eastern Alps. This commonly led to the synonymous use of the words *castrum* and *civitas* in the sources. These *castra*, often the seat of a powerful bishop or an elite family dominated the regions and border areas of the medieval Alps.

The dissolution of the Roman Empire brought another type of fortification to the Eastern Alps. The fortified cities and castles at the new

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([100]) BRUNNER 1994, p. 203.
([101]) KAISER 2008, p. 260.
([102]) DELAET 1949, pp. 153-158.
([103]) KAISER 2008, pp. 260-261; For St. Proculus see NOTHDURFTER 1996/2003.

borders crossing the Alps now also served as a military base for people defending the borders. A special kind of such a fortification in a valley is called *clusa*. The best known of these structures laid on the southern entrance into the Alps, for example the famous *clusa* of Susa.

These *clusae* often had also additional functions: they served as a point of control for in- and outgoing traffic and as a customs station between the different reigns. Some of these *clusae* clearly originated from late antique toll stations. Since that time they were focus points for the regional and supra-regional elites, because the control of such a fortification meant additional income. For this reason the conquest of a frontier area not only served the gain of power but also had a strong economic background.

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