**TRANSCRIPT for BOOK at LUNCTIME: Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe – 4 November 2020**

good afternoon and welcome to this book at lunchtime event on ravenna capital of empire crucible of europe written by professor judith herrin my name is wes williams and i'm the director here at torch book at lunch time as regulars will know is torch's flagship interdisciplinary event series taking the form of bite-sized book discussions with a range of commentators please do take a look at our website and newsletter for the full program for the rest of this term the book we'll be exploring today in a discussion chaired by peter frankopan who's about to join us on screen explains and explores how the adriatic city of ravenna became both a meeting place for greek latin christian and barbarian cultures and something of a pivot point between east and west in arguing for the new understanding of the significance of ravenna judith book also argues that the 5th to 8th century should not be perceived as a time of decline from antiquity but rather and in large part thanks to the rich culture of byzantium as one of great creativity i'm delighted to welcome judith herrin here today to speak about her book along with avril cameron conrad leiser and peter frankopan who as i mentioned a minute ago will be chairing the discussion in a second or two i'll disappear from your screens and hand over to peter who will introduce the book more fully and the rest of the panel this will be followed by a brief reading and discussion by judith and aft then our commentators will present their thoughts on the book coming at it from their particular disciplines and starting the discussion going we'll then give judith a chance to respond or within this judicial of course have the chance to respond to some of the points raised before entering in the last stages of uh today's hour into what we hope will be a discussion that includes questions from you the audience so please do ensure that you add your questions to the q a as we go along all that's left for me to do then is to thank you all for coming and to introduce our chair peter frankopan is professor of global history at oxford university where he's also a senior research fellow at worcester college and stavros nyarcos foundation director of the oxford centre for byzantine research he works on the history of the mediterranean russia the middle east persia iran central asia and beyond with a key aspect of his work being the history of relations between christianity and islam his books the silk road 2015 and the new silk roads 2018 received huge acclaim he writes regularly for the international press advises governments on geopolitics and is chair of this year's candle history prize over to you then peter i'll join you later when we come to the questions thank you

uh thank you very much and thank all of you for joining us i'm sure like i am you're all desperate to hear the results of the presidential election but we won't know until the 15th of november who has won in moldova when there's the runoff um because of results being inclusive so far so thank you all for for joining us today torch is such an important part of what we do in oxford the center for research into the humanities as well said is the flagship for interdisciplinary work uh and so it's a great pleasure today to welcome judith herrin who is an old friend of late antique byzantine studies and at the auction center for byzantine research here in oxford and so it's a real thrill to get her to come and talk about her important new work on ravenna a judith herrin doesn't need any introduction but she won the heineken prize for history which is the dutch nobel prize in 2016 for her pioneering work on the early medieval mediterranean world and especially the role of byzantium also the influence of islam and the significance of women she's the author of byzantine byzantium the surprising life of the medieval empire the formation of christendom medieval miscellany and women in purple professor harim worked in birmingham paris munich assembled princeton before becoming professor of late antique byzantine studies at king's college london where she's now the constantine laventis visiting senior research fellow in the department of classics uh it's a joy to be joined by professor herrin but also by two um friends and colleagues here in oxford again both heavyweights who need no introduction professor dame everyone cameron was warden of cable college from 1994 to 2010 and before was professor of was professor of latency for byzantine history at king's london where she was also the first director of the center for hellenic studies professor cameron was also the founding chairman of the oxford center for byzantine research which some of you will know has had a fantastic ten years since we were founded in 2010. professor cameron's currently the professor the president of the society for the promotion of byzantine studies uh conrad lines there's a colleague of mine at worcester college where he's associate professor of history uh as a tutor of history at worcester he specializes in the religious and social history of latin west in late antiquity and the early middle ages uh which is from about 300 to 1100 his current research project centers on celibacy and the professionalization of the priesthood in the so-called unreformed church of the 10th century he's the author of authority and estheticism from augustine to gregory the great and co-editor of england and the continent in the 10th century so first we'll ask professor herring to talk about about ravenna capital of um empire crucible of europe and then i'd like to bring in professor cameron to respond and professor liza after that we'll then have a discussion amongst the four of us but um those of you have questions please put them in the q a box we'll try to get through to them as quickly as we can before finishing but um you can't all applaud as professor herrin makes her way to her keyboard and her camera but it's a great pleasure judith to welcome you to talk about ravenna to us today thank you very much peter it's a great joy to be here and as suggested i shall read from the concluding pages of the book which i hope will be give us taste of what's to come i'd pick up the point at the point where as is generally agreed cities in the medieval west declined in the post-roman period the exception was ravenna the source of its flourishing was the eastern roman empire which renewed and consolidated its authority not only in the capital but across its provinces where new palaces churches aqueducts baths and charitable institutions surpassed the monuments of ancient rome as rome became depopulated constantinople expanded ravenna shared in this expansion as honorius gala placidia and local bishops patronised new buildings making it an outstanding exception to the degeneration of most classical cities and settlements with constantinople's approval theodoric integrated eastern influence into ravenna's christian gothic administration that made the king more roman than most romans while he conformed to gothic ideas of kingship he brought to the west a grasp of imperial traditions that consolidated a very particular combination of elements an understanding of the importance of law and the administration of justice and acknowledgement of the differences in christian belief which made a degree of toleration essential a respect for superior greek education and a capacity to collaborate with the best qualified and most skilled individuals who could assist his ambitions through these features observed and adopted in the east theoderic oversaw the symbiosis of germanic and roman elements in the west which would be continued by the exacts thereafter as well as his great church of santa polinare nuevo theoderic's mausoleum is a telling witness to this integration of barbarian and imperial roman qualities here the king who had dominated the west governing in the name of constantinople had constructed a domed tomb fit for an emperor visitors even today can marvel at the single slab of history and marble that forms the roof how on earth did they raise it in the early 6th century and once installed how did it survive most early christian buildings that remain standing today do so because they have been continuously occupied renovated and kept in use as sacred buildings in ravenna often by monastic communities the more secular palaces residences assembly halls houses and trading places that make up medieval settlements rarely retain such attention were often pillaged for building material and then replaced by grander better constructed more fashionable or serviceable edifices at some date theodric's tomb was transformed from its funeral function into a nunnery and this kept it in use but its original purpose was not forgotten and the king's fame was preserved in the huge marble sarcophagus still visible in other western regions a similar symbiosis occurred from visigothic spain to the anglo-saxon frankish and burgundian kingdoms where court rituals imperial costume and patterns of patronage were imitated but in northeast italy the imperial framework provided by the eastern capital in constantinople requires particular emphasis for without byzantium there would have been no western europe after the arab conquests of the eastern southern coasts of the mediterranean constantinople provided the shield that excluded islam from further advances into the west in 732 charles martell's victory at poitiers also frustrated umayyad expansion north of the pyrenees but this was an opportunist raid seeking treasure not the full-scale mobilization by land and sea that fell upon but failed to take the queen city in 718. the significance of constantinople in the transformation of western europe was not merely that of an outward shield however the imperial framework exercised a cultural hegemony that facilitated a fusion of non-imperial forces and transmitted a variation of its own policy of acculturation to the west via the gothic king theodric the bishops and the exarchs through its capital in ravenna the empire sustained the ideal of efficient government sanctioned by law within the west itself in multiple ways its benefits sanctioned by bones excuse me its benefits commanded respect and a tinge of admiration for the eastern emperors even among the most hostile enemies and in italy an underlying loyalty to constantinople persisted through the sixth century and beyond the influence of byzantium was diffused especially through ravenman the city acted as an essential catalyst to the development of a society that would eventually outstrip it in this way the christianized new rome was a constant built-in inspiration for the powers that took over in the west charlemagne has traditionally been hailed in alkwen's phrase as the father of europe as if he acted alone but the foundations of western christendom that he exemplified were laid in ravenna whose rulers exarchs and bishops scholars doctors lawyers mosaicists and traders roman and goth later greek and lombard forged the first european city

fantastic thank you judith and it's a it's a magisterial way to end a book that has been both widely and universally praised in the in the in the press i mean i i just could you develop a little bit more i think this idea that um uh without byzantium there would be no western europe i think that comes as a shock to many western medievalists uh or to many listeners who think that europe means uh france italy germany and iberia what role does byzantium fit within the seeding of ravenna and then why why why is it right to claim the um the development to pin it um of western european society back onto constantinople

i think people generally forget that the mediterranean world was one it was united it was united by the sea even after the arab conquests it remained a very very significant unifying factor and within that world the capital of the roman empire was in constantinople and that was recognized by nearly everybody who had to deal with imperial forces and with the influence of roman law roman concepts of architecture a great multitude of features of roman culture which had been transposed to constantinople constantinople i think was the greatest achievement of the roman empire in some ways the construction of a new capital in the east mediterranean that dominated not just that area but the entire world and that unity meant that there was constant coming and going and transmission of ideas and individuals and forces across the mediterranean not just at the behest of constantinople of course but very much dominated by its imperial force and power and i think it's very important to remember that in this in united world of course there were hostile forces there were many many opponents of constantinople but there was a deference and an understanding of the role that constantinople played and i suspect that what we see in ravenna is of i had not expected to find it but it is so pronounced that you get a very clear indication of the way in which ravenna linked the two halves of the mediterranean world and that it's it's its position as a pivot as a link between the two halves gave it a very specific constant in neapolitan flavor and in this way i would argue it the influence of the east mediterranean continues to flow into the west and over the alps to northern europe where after all um the frankish king clovis decided to celebrate his rise to power by assuming the title patrician and holding races and entering um paris in a chariot scattering gold coin as if he was an emperor and those are the ways in which you can see very clearly that there was a a very dominant ideology of power and this was manifested in ravenna by the authorities sent from constantinople after 5 40 80. so before i ask professor cameron for a comment i mean one thing that i think is um interesting about ravenna is is and could you say something about where does it come from why does ravenna blossom from um from nothing and then where does it go and i don't mean the metaphorical event i mean the actual ravenna where where does ravenna spring from and why does it not take on the trajectory of constantinople or rome or other big cities that carry on how to explain this efflorescence of a two or three hundred year period or three or four hundred appearances well clearly it drew on its history as a maritime port the most important port in the adriatic um julius caesar had decided that it would be the the base for the eastern mediterranean fleet and museum near rome was to be the base for the western mediterranean feat and a very large port had been constructed on an inland lake where 250 ships could be protected and there really aren't other ports down the italian coast of the adriatic it's a very long sandy uh shore extending with with very little harbour protective harbor space so ravenna well through its port at clase which was linked to the city became the base for shipbuilding for training navies for sailing for maritime activities and from that history of engagement in the sea on the sea ravenna drew a great deal of its uh importance and status but it had also been recognized as a great city with strong walls and the emperor claudius had built a very elegant uh porter aurea in the walls a sort of major ceremonial entrance and it had uh access to the river uh through the river po to the po valley and therefore good transport river iron transport up to milan and i think the main reason why it became it flourished so well was that when the emperors decided they couldn't actually defend the city of milan from barbarian attack and honorius decided that he would move to ravenna it became a center of imperial power surrounded in this very marshy area of the poe estuary which meant that it was quite difficult to approach by land and sieges were generally unsuccessful and it managed to sustain its imperial ideology within what had been a smaller center but which grew and expanded of course as soon as the imperial court arrived because all the other followers of the court arrived with it and huge numbers of bureaucrats and military contingents and so on so it expanded very rapidly and then at the point where it finally gave up this imperial role we could put it perhaps around the time of charlemagne because the carolingian conquest instead established new a new northern governorship um in in ravenna which was of course paralleled in many other italian cities where the carolingians established uh gyrosense cultural centers pavia was obviously a very important center for the lombards and for charles and in a way it became one of many cities rather than the source of urban renewal and sustained in urban culture but it's its main role passed to venice very gradually through the um development of of venice's uh the great maritime trading center which gradually replaced ravenna's harbour as it silted up or was allowed to silt up partly because the venetians had indeed adopted that role taken it over and transformed it into a very much larger connection through their determination to trade with the arab states and through alexandria and the east mediterranean ports with places much further east so in a way the handover to venice which was of course not at all conceived as a handover by ravenna um gave that gave venice the key role which uh ravenna had played previously one of the things you do elegantly in the book is is to show that um how ravenna is the the beneficiary of of rome and milan and the western seizures of the cardiac arrest of the invasions and equally that baton being passed on uh to charlemagne the carolingians and also to venice of the the the golden period for ravenna is in response to specific circumstance and this long continuity i think is why uh the the case you make of how this is the the crucible of of europe i know that conrad is going to talk about uh the carolingians and charlemagne um professor canberra and abram would you like to come in and um join us to come with a response to what judith's just spoken about and about the book itself yes thank you well first of all thank you judith for such a lovely book it's uh marvelous to have an opportunity to celebrate it um why is it important well um it gives us a different picture of ravenna i think that's the important thing about it and ravenna as you say was an imperial city it was um the capital in the fifth century of the western roman empire um it became the seat of theodoric the goth uh and then it became an imperial xlr coat again and it was the the sort of the the um the center for byzantium in italy um i think the first of all ravenna is not just about its mosaics most of us or many of us will have been to river and seen them and they are absolutely wonderful and marvelous but what you've given in this book is a history over several centuries with of change and development and i think the history of the city is not told in an accessible way and that's what you've done in the book the the mosaics are absolutely beautiful and wonderful of course they are and the buildings are in marvelous shape now if one visits them um but it says long history as um an administrative center an imperial center a royal capital um and a very um with a very mixed population which i think is very interesting and to me one of the fascinating things about ravenna is that it has this collection of papyri of evidence of letters and wills and documents on papyri and they're preserved uh from the late 6th century onwards because of i suppose of the climate and the witness and the the marshy character there somehow we have this parry which we don't have from other italian cities and they tell us about the population and the people and their um their lives their property uh their legal uh quarrels with each other it's about women slaves uh free people military because there was a military presence uh women men and and their names are fascinating as you bring out in the book that the names some of the names are still gothic some of the names are latin because they're they're roman some of them are mixed so we have this vibrant sense of a living community with personal access to some of its citizens and that's almost unparalleled except in egypt in the period so i think that's really exciting to go back to the mosaics probably the most iconic picture we have of justinian and theodora the emperor and empress byzantium in the sixth century is in the church of san bertarli but san matari was started under the ostrogoths already it wasn't built by justinian most people think it was built by justinian it was started under the goths it became byzantine it was built and finished rather um while the war fought by justinian to reconquer italy was still going on and it i think it's an extraordinary very very complex building which is also not often brought out but your sort of sense of organic development gives it that perspective and i'm very struck also but something you mentioned that these these buildings and these churches were remodeled to suit the different administrations so the great church the palace church of theodorate the ostrogoth uh was remodeled once the byzantines had won the war in italy um and the the actual depiction of theodoric's palace was removed but it still remained and became absolutely central uh for the byzantine administration so it's it's a really organic story that you can tell and you have some interesting perspectives for instance you say that um ravenna was acted upon it didn't it wasn't an agent so much it was acted upon from outside it became the seat of the byzantine administration in italy it didn't which included rome incidentally um from the late sixth century onwards um and then you also say it could after all have been the venice of its day um but it didn't manage to achieve that um and you just explained a bit of why that was that that that port has been so important silted up um religion is important the archbishoprics of rabbena became important in the 7th century but that was a time when in rome which was in a way much less important than ravenna at that time rome in rome the popes of the 7th century were mainly greek in origin which is really extraordinary so there's so many links and so many so many complications here um and then in your conclusion which you um you you you gave us you link it uh in a very a very interesting way with your first book the formation of chris and christendom because in that book i'm afraid i can't remember the date of publication now but you can tell us probably anyway anyway in that first book you you you wrote about the this period during if we we would probably now call it the transition from late antiquity to the middle ages or many people would but you prefer the term christendom you you don't use the term late antiquity very much and i think that's you make explicit that link with your first book and it's it's very engaging to find a scholar doing that it's it so it obviously means that you're coming i won't say full circle that wouldn't be that wouldn't be fair but you are you are coming back and you're making your early work relevant and um to live again in what you've written about ravenna um so and finally then you make this move to the west which is more comrade's territory than it is mine but i think it's a very important book because it gives us another perspective on uh developments between byzantium and the west in that crucial period after the um just any what what people call the reconquest it didn't last for very long in the sixth century into that period when charlemagne begins to dominate so i loved it thank you

brilliant fantastic that's uh wonderful april and uh filled with insights as as usual conrad do you want to take us on later towards the end of ravenna and into the carolingians charlemagne what what what what ravenna means from a western perspective sure i mean i'm i'm obviously the boerish westerner the byzantine feast and i'm happy to play that part i didn't make it to ravenna until 2017 didn't know what to expect don't really like high culture um but it blew me away and um and i've just i mean you go to these unpre-possessing brick buildings and then you are literally in in another world um um and so i'm equally boring to kind of gorping at the city still and i'm aware that i mean it's harder to make it to ravenna right now and judith when you write in the introduction if you've never visited you've missed an amazing experience an extraordinary delight which this book aims to recreate and you can't have known when you wrote those words what what we will be looking at now and you've given us i think really a pilgrim guide in in the age of kovid for which we have so many reasons to be thankful and i'm reaching here to draw ways back into discussion given his work um on pilgrimage um and i hope he tells us about erasmus character mr stay home um menodimus you know who who is the figure for our our age and i mean what i learned from western's book also is that pilgrim guides necessarily meditate about the powers of representation and their limits so that the way that a book can take us to a place but also how it it can't and how and how it it something will always fall short and so that's how that's really how i i read you that um in you you meditate throughout the whole book about the power of images and as abel says i'm in the kind of the central one is the image of justinian and theodore at san vitale and they never visited the city they were never there so it's an astonishing recreation of of imperial presence um um yeah a power to distance i mean that sure the con would contend for the the greatest achievement of kind of how how to be a ruler um over a place when you never go there which is so difficult in a pre-modern context and that's the image which is and i i entirely buy this which charlemagne boris western are visiting he doesn't know how to be an emperor until he goes inside that church and then he's that's what i'm going to do um and and as you you your conclusion kind of says that you read i mean what you've really done among many things is is to kind of make and you refer to him ori perenne's great dictum without muhammad charlemagne would have been impossible i mean he argues that in general terms without the conquest of islam there wouldn't have been northwestern europe wouldn't have been thrown back on its own resources would keep looking at the mediterranean um but you've shown us how you know without ravenna charlemagne would have been impossible in directly and intimately he had no script about how to be a ruler until he saw those mosaics and then he went off and did that and i say i think that's that's um very compelling as a story at the same time and in some ways my favorite thing about the book is the sadness um the undertow of what we've lost we don't you know despite these mosaics we know the name of none of the people who made them you emphasize that at the beginning we don't have the ravenna animals except in kind of two kind of pages from 10th century mezzobug manuscript we don't have the chronicle of ravenna um the 9th century your 9th century four by agnelis who kind of writes the history of the city his manuscript which exists only in the 15th century kind of horrible 15th century manuscript it ends it ends abruptly um we we don't have the end of his story um and i mean where the chronicle ends and i and i um i want to end with this is that you know he tells us that the um one day the bread in the city charred in the oven the the the judge's bread charred the archbishop's bed and he hates the archbishop i mean this whole great story about the mediterranean connectivity kind of dwindles down into this petty quarrel between clerics um and agnelis ends you know having done this great sweep kind of from from from you know from the later roman empire onwards he ends with his image of black bread in the oven by the bishop whom he you know with whom he's in conflict and i i hope our own hopes for the world don't turn to ash um today quite specifically um but i think you've what you've shown us is is really they say both the littering legacy but also also the you know the power of forgetting and your book kind of holds that balance in in a very poignant way so thank you

judas do you want to come back um of those lovely comments from from both our commentators accommodators thank you so much these are very very encouraging and and supportive and helpful uh comments and i'm very grateful to you for uh looking at the book and seeing it in these new ways it was surprising to me that i i never expected to write a history based on a city nor did i think nor did i really think i would find such curious things but i was really amazed by the goths who sign in gothic on their on their papyri i mean they're still using the scripts that have been devised for them in the mid-fourth century and they are obviously venerating their their own christian faith in in gothic using gothic hymns and the translations of the liturgy um that were made by ulfila for them so there's a very a very live sense of the aryan christian definition uh uh and it's it's it's it's a living thing and these people are dis greatly discomforted by the demand that all aryan churches shall be handed over to the catholic authorities which is what happens uh in the 560s and why we have a remodeled mosaic in santa polinari in nuova that april um referred to with the hands that are left on the columns of the of the uh palace uh when the individuals were taken away and replaced by beautiful curtains and the image of theodric as i believe was replaced by gold mosaic so these it is very curious that as there's so much going on in the city and i do think that charlemagne learned to be an emperor by going there and he would not have got that by going to rome although there were very very fine mosaics uh in rome in the late 8th and 9th centuries and there were indeed statues of old roman emperors but i think the notion that justinian provided him was how to be an early medieval emperor with the the liturgical function of an emperor in leading a procession towards the altar with a a big offering of gold and of course the most extraordinary thing is that theodora is opposite in the space which is the vimati the apps where women are not allowed so it's a it's a really astonishing thing that her portrait is there and has survived but again it's because they have uh they were the inspirers of that particular church and i i imagine it was um quite a common thing for people to say we should display our emperor an empress it just has not survived in any other place um constantinople must have been full of images of theodora we know of statutes but none have survived so we're left with this um very striking picture which i think greatly influenced charlemagne why is it judith that if ravana's so central and so well known artistically why has it why is it so poorly exploited by why has it been so poorly exported by historians why does it get glossed over why why why have you spent um nine years on this wonderful monograph and no one else has thought to do so lots of people have written about ravenna but primarily because it has the beautiful mosaics and many of them are art historians and i'm not so i can see that it's it's such a stunning uh city to visit partly because it's small and you can walk from one church to another and in every area and in the remains of the palaces you see these spectacular mosaics so it it it is a very it's accessible um to the art historian and it demands an explanation of how and why these mosaics were put up and the buildings themselves after all the octagon of san vitale is a very unusual building churches were not normally built with eight sides and raising domes was still quite problematic in the west or rather it wasn't done and therefore these initiatives which we supposed to have come from the east not necessarily from constantinople but possibly via constantinople um these were new ways of building new ways of decorating um that set as standard which was not very common so art historians are necessarily um required to visit ravenna and discuss it but they may not be so interested in the bishops and although i think deborah deleonis did a wonderful job with translating and the account of agneles um there is there is a lot more to discover about the history of the city and its inhabitants mainly from the papyri but also from chance references visits by for example bishop garanos from auxerre who went all the way to ravenna to appeal to the emperor for tax relief and the empress gala placidia received him and pinched his relics and and when he died sent him home in a in a sealed coffin so that he could be buried back in octo so there were visitors to the city there were constant there were constant embassies coming and going and that's the sort of aspect that you don't get if you're just looking at the churches and the beautiful art

does this i mean is ravenna truly exceptional from a byzantine perspective i mean does periodization mean that we should look at venice in similar kinds of ways to ravenna as a sort of an outpost that is arriving i mean is ravenna seen as a rival at any point in constantinople uh do we see cities this size and shape in the eastern mediterranean elsewhere that play similar functions and roles and if not if not why not oh i think um as soon as you look at great cities like alexandria antioch um the major cities of asia minor you immediately see um flourishing centers of merchants and and christian beliefs and arguments and teaching and scholarship and all the things that we associate with um great urban centers the striking thing of course is that in the west there was a a very marked city decline and these elements of urban life dwindled or until they were taken over by bishops and restored in a way that meant that the baths could still continue to function and certain charitable institutions were constructed but the notion of schools and the teaching of law and the idea that that there should be an urban uh culture which was which drew on its imperia its roman roman roots that dwindled or was actively destroyed after all there were many many many many cities were sacked burned to the ground and there was terrible destruction in the course of the so-called barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries so fourth century so you get a ravenna was spared those very violent attacks and it had this self-conscious role that it took on uh as as an imperial capital when honorius moved there so it became it adopted a new status and became exceptional in the medieval west the early medieval west

can you remind us judith of the size of the population do we know i i i'm sorry it's a it wasn't a very large city was it no it wasn't a very large city and the city walls today which survive in large part indicate that it was quite a compact small roman opera and it was based on a very clear traditional roman city plan but it had large suburbs and we and villas have been excavated in the suburbs and very large cemeteries outside the city walls and this area beyond the city walls was eventually linked to the harbour at classes by another center called caesarea and therefore there was a there was a concentration of population in the in that area around ravenna between ravenna and classics which meant that there was a there was a there was a lot of space for new inhabitants uh a new population to grow and they did so that it became it although the city itself is small i guess the surrounding population that drew on ravana as its center was quite significantly larger than other cities in italy at the time and here of course we get into terrible problem of demographics because what were the populations what was the population of rome in the mid 5th century after the vandal attack of 455 it must have been very very much reduced from its uh third century um heyday but by how much um certainly the reuse of a building material from some of the insulate and the repairs to theaters because they were falling down and the repairs to the palatine palaces all that carried on as rome restored itself but in ravenna there was new building a de novo and it was very um and it was very striking that it was so ambitious and it obviously catered to a larger population uh and a mixed population because there had to be churches for the area and churches for the catholics until the 560s but but it's the very i think what thinking of the charlemont visit it it's the compactness of the center the buildings in the center that must have made a colossal impression and he wouldn't have got that going to rome rome was very dispersed and as you i'm sure as you say there would have been much more to see than we can see now but even so not so easily not so easy to take in and it's that sort of compactness of those buildings and the the pictures the pictorial decoration and the liturgical function must have made a colossal impression and you wrote in your book about how you saw it in 1959 i think and i saw it in 1963 on a on a car drive down to all the way to rome and um and it made a great impression but it wasn't in great shape in those days no no i didn't go back until much much later until the 1990s and by which time wonderful restoration had been done yes i was really astonished and it it made it more impression on me then i think and a different kind of impression that's presumably the impression that charlemagne would have got well i think the city had been restored and and it had remained a very important city center and the exarchs had built and repaired and uh it it was still very much it wasn't expanding perhaps but it was not shrinking into a tiny settlement and certainly the bishops had acquired vast holdings of land and were drawing on taxation and contributions in kind from many many estates which meant that the church of ravenna was extraordinarily rich not as rich as the as the church of rome but it drew on similar resources and it had the capacity to build and to maintain uh the the ecclesiastical buildings and of course the walls still remained a very important defense um ravana wasn't was not becoming a a backwater so the bishops continued to think of it as a very important center and indeed they had the wealth to um keep it uh in as a as important and uh influential in northern italy

great well we've got just about quarter an hour left so i'm going to hand back to wes uh i know there have been some questions uh from the uh audience of those viewing if you've got questions please type them in the q a box and we'll try to get around to asking them but where's welcome back and uh your name has been already mentioned by conrad and so give us uh your your ideas i think about about pilgrimage about movements of people um but why don't you i think uh lead us through some of the questions thank you very much um yeah i i have thought about ravenna mainly in relation to 16th century pilgrims um for whom it was a fortress city uh um for the most part um but also um of course as well as the mosaics as ravenna there's the monster of ravana which is one of the most sort of uh celebrated uh monstrous births of the 16th century and it's a complicated allegorical story but we can save that for another time movement of peoples i think is one of the questions i'll take the two questions that people may be able to see in the q a in reverse order movement of peoples is one of the questions that's come up so marcus lux um says can you tell us a bit more about the heterogeneous society um that you're that you sort of write about in ravenna which ethnic groups can we find in the city and also which sources material and or written do they appear how do we know about them effectively we know about the goths because they preserved writings in gothic the gothic bibles which have must have been some of them very very spectacular like the one preserved at uppsala gold and silver lettering on purple dyed parchment really spectacular but of course there were other smaller less less important liturgical books and recently a very fine new addition has been made of one of the translations of the vitas patram these are the lives of the desert fathers which were very very popular throughout the mediterranean world they were translated from greek and syriac into latin and the copy was made in around 700 and it has been preserved in ravenna it's it's a fine new addition showing that there were uh copyists there were there was a demand for for books and that stories of the desert fathers were were popular the the uh the the uh number of people and the different sorts of people uh numbers are very difficult but we know that there were synagogues and there were there was a jewish community there's been a an archaeological find which is a the neck of an amphorae which has shalom written on it in hebrew and it's in the archaeological museum uh as an indication that there were communities using their uh their hebrew and indeed one synagogue was converted into a church and synagogues in the fourth and fifth centuries were attacked by the christians um but in the case of uh one attack uh the bishop was ordered to finance the repayment the repair to the synagogue um a very interesting notion of the need to allow the jews to celebrate their own faith apart from the goths and the jews what we find are references to many many merchants of different origins syrian merchants silk merchants from the east people who sign their names on the papyrus in greek now is this an affectation that they simply wanted to present themselves as uh very uh eastern people or educated greek people or were they actually greek uh merchant merchants from from from antioch is mentioned as a place um and of course connections with alexandria were very pronounced that the papyrus may have been imported from alexandria um so there's a there's a great range of different pop of peoples in the city and the interesting thing is that they appear to have cohabited without the terrible conflicts that we hear documented in places like milan under under saint ambrose where when the aryan christians met the catholic christians in procession they just they fought and there was terrible violence over the control of churches ravenna appears to have had a very clear policy these are the churches which the catholic bishops are are building these are the churches which the aryan christians are using they have their own baths for the for the for the presbyters for their clergy we have our bars for the catholics it's all um well of course there must have been rows because the synagogues were attacked but nonetheless that appears to have been built in a certain degree of toleration and of admitting that people had different faiths and had to be allowed to celebrate them before we move to the other question which which does uh address that question of doctrinal difference as well i wonder if i could repeat peter's question from early which is how exceptional then i mean you seem to be arguing then that ravenna is actually fairly exceptional in that regard including in relation to the sort of multi i'm not going to say multicultural but nonetheless multi um uh faith uh um the mixedness the mitisage if you like which is going on within the city um is it properly exceptional for the mediterranean at the time uh this might be a question to our other speakers as well but initially it's a question uh to you yes i think possibly it's it's a it's paralleled in constantinople very prominently where theodoric of course had spent a decade as a hostage in his youth and in that critical period of adolescence he'd been living in constantinople as a hostage for his father's good behavior so he was he was not badly treated it appears that the hostages lived in in the palace or in palaces they were always paraded at uh festive events at ceremonial events so that they could be shown off as the empress hostages there was one from uh georgia another from armenia and so there was a notion that these were the youth uh the younger representatives of potential enemies and they were kept in constantinople and there theodric learned about the cohabitation of aryan and catholic because he is an aryan had to celebrate in the churches outside the walls and that was of course a very very critical part of his belief that for cooperation and cohabitation to work there had to be an acceptance of difference and the notion that just in the first the emperor of the early sixth century was going to close the churches which had been used by the aryan christians and prevent them from celebrating their faith was of course a spark that made uh theodore very very angry but i think in ravenna he found it quite natural to recreate uh this mixture because the goths although they may have been quite numerous and they were very militarily sufficient uh expert and they were allowed to carry weapons and and do the hard fighting they were a minority and their aryan faith was always considered a minority so the catholic um the local catholic the italian the local inhabitants the christians who lived in ravenna before the goths arrived knew very well that they were in the majority and they had to bear with the fact that these people had been conquered by king theoderic uh and previously by um the leader oduasa so they knew about alternative definitions and they accepted that these had to be uh built into their world and that i think made it possible for um all these bishops all these fish all these merchants and pilgrims and people wanting to visit ravenna to come and feel at home not to be isolated or excluded in the way that perhaps foreigners were often considered dangerous and not not welcome in the city thank you i don't know if anybody else wants to come in on this this question uh if conrad are you about to no just just to say briefly and i think

one of the many things that the glittering legacy hopefully of the book is that we could ask the ravenna question of other places in as well in the west so it's someone like marseille yeah um i mean quarterback kind of obviously so um but also you know um you know magdeburg or meseburg where as where you know where the animals end up i mean ravenna ravenna is portable as as you've shown and i think some that that includes it's it's it's mixedness um and you know i think it may help us kind of rethink how we think of other communities as well in the kind of in the other in the apparently homogenous latin west which is much less so once you poke at you give me a but i wonder how important the word port is in your portable in other words it's a story about ports um uh your last two examples weren't necessarily ports but i mean uh but but is it is it i mean i asked this partly because we have a torch a flourishing national network on colonial ports um uh mainly 19th and 20th century ones which have shown that there's this extraordinary richness of porch culture um uh which again sort of undermines but also complicates a an overly straightforward imperial story um and i wonder if that's true already in in your period

um it seems to be yes i'll uh we'll move quickly then to the uh another great question i think from neil carey which um the terms of which are complicated so would you say something about how far doctrinal and hierarchical disputes between on the one hand the pope in rome and on the other the patriarch in constant constantinople complicated and frustrated the status of byzantine ravenna so we're back to byzantium um and it yeah are these there's a lot of terms in there i wonder if you have anything to say about it yes i think that's a very very good question and it's very difficult one um i think what we find in ravenna is that the exact is the governor sent by constantinople from uh the late 6th century onwards and his position is to uphold whatever the patriarch in constantinople and the emperor have agreed as long as they have agreed what their their formal creedal um belief is and when that is is denounced in rome by the pope who says we are not going to go along with this definition that's come out of constantinople the bishop of ravenna is put in a very very difficult position because the exarch is his neighbor is his governor is his overlord and yet he is leading the uh community the christian community in ravenna and he is also very very anxious to sustain his distance from rome because he does not wish to be seen as a subordinate of the bishop of rome he wishes he wishes so much that theodosius ii way way back in the fifth century had established the autonomy of the church of ravenna but that was not done ravenna was given very considerable uh authority that the city the bishop was given subordinate bishops estates uh patronage and wealth but he was still to be um uh he was due to go to rome to be inaugurated by the pope so the bishop of rome had official control over the establishment of bishops in ravenna and this was deeply resented in ravenna and of course it was also much used by popes like gregory the first who had a uh he had his own agent um in ravenna looking after things that were of interest to rome and trying very hard to keep the bishops of ravenna in control but there was there was obviously a very great difference between a religious uh decrees issued in constantinople and how they were observed in rome and ravenna and as often as not there was a contradiction and it was an opposition which meant that there were quarrels and there were schisms they excommunicated each other and in the mid-seventh century archbishop mauros was indeed excommunicated and was not given uh uh was written out of the depths uh and the churchmen in ravenna secretly used to hold uh funeral feasts on the day of his death so that they could remember their bishop although he had been officially excommunicated and cut out of the history of the city gosh thank you um when i can hear some of the the bells ringing two o'clock already but we might have time for one last quick question if if there is a quick answer to this and that's because you mentioned art historians um as people who've thought about uh ravenna and written about ravenna a good deal and of course they're the famous mosaics um so but andrea matiello asks um what if any of the significant archaeological evidences there that art historians should reassess for a better understanding of ravenna in the context of early medieval italy um does that make sense as a question is there a quick answer or yes i think it's very very difficult the archaeologists are are constantly discovering new things and indeed most of the new information about ravenna uh of recent years has come from the ground and it's the archaeologists who've been excavating who've discovered for example that there were workshops at the port of classis where um iron work and glass work and possibly ivory work was done and there are new developments in the excavations of the monastic settlement against the basilica of saint severus which show that there was a very very substantial monastic community in the ninth century and on so there's quite a lot of of new material and i think that the interesting evidence that we will get is more evidence although the palaces are very sadly overbuilt there is more to be discovered about the palaces the secular buildings of the rulers of ravenna and we may yet discover more about the schools because there must have been schools philosophical schools law schools places where bureaucrats were trained not just in in bureaucratic in secretarial skills but in actual copying uh and producing manuscripts and then commentaries on ecclesiastical texts but that's yet to be that's yeah i think the other very quickly the other very interesting thing is that quite a lot of the gothic manuscripts which were produced in ravenna are turning up as palimpsests they were scrubbed and they are reused and for example in the writings of isidore of seville a great number of palimpsests of reused parchments have gothic under writing or greek and it is supposed that they came from ravenna or places near ravenna where gothic culture was uh cultivated was uh used and employed regularly and that when people in the 7th and 8th centuries found they could no longer read these gothic manuscripts or they had no use for them they put them into the pile which was to go through the scribes who would um scrub them all and then copy more interesting texts like saint augustine or saint isidore of seville so gradually we are building up more of a resource through the study of palip cests which is of absolutely fascinating discovery absolutely yeah i mean yes and palimpsest is a kind of another portable um a degree in which port ravenna becomes portable uh both both metaphorically and materially um strikes me as a very interesting uh maybe it's a good place to end um i don't know if anybody else wants to come in peter avril or conrad if you want to say anything else by way of conclusion um if not i'll um just echo what one of uh the uh questions in the chat this time says um this is an extraordinary book dearly awaited um we now uh understand a bit more about it thanks um both to you yourself um uh and also to our speakers our interlocutors in this conversation um so thank you once again to all our speakers conor eliza avril cameron peter frank pan and judith herron herself for a brilliant discussion thank you to those who were watching and listening um uh and um uh please join us at the same time next week for our next book at lunchtime where the question of europe is further addressed this time western europe's democratic age written by professor martin conway do check the torch website to register for next week's event and thank you once again all of you and stay safe stay well goodbye.