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**On colonial grounds: a comparative study of colonialism and rural settlement
in first millennium BC west central Sardinia**

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Archaeological Studies Leiden University

On colonial grounds

A comparative study of colonialism and rural settlement
in first millennium BC west central Sardinia

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aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden,
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Peter Alexander René van Dommelen

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'A noi, studiosi della storia dei Sardi, questo periodo di guerra, che pure riscuote tutta la nostra ammirazione, non dà affatto sorpresa, perchè la storia tutta della gente è una catena di ardimenti, di tenacia, di virtù militare. Per tre secoli i Sardi dei nuraghi contendono la loro isola contro i Fenici-Punici; per tre secoli tengono testa contro le formidabili agguerrite legioni romane. Al tramonto di Roma, lo attesta l'iscrizione greco-bizantina di Porto Torres, sotto la guida di un duce di Bisanzio, gettano in mare i Longobardi assalitori; contro gli Arabi invasori si presentano come una razza di Rumi, salda, sempre vigile in armi e pronta alla difesa; e lampi di ardimento fiammeggiano in età aragonese e spagnuola, anche quando le catene del dominio straniero e della schiavitù feudale avvincono più strettamente questa gente dalle nobili tradizioni guerriere.'

From: Antonio Taramelli, *Il passato che torna, Il Sud*

For Ayla

preface

I first formulated the basic ideas for this study on ancient Mediterranean colonialism whilst a postgraduate British Council Fellow in the Department of Anthropology of UCL in 1991. These thoughts took a more precise shape when later that year Maria Beatrice Annis, Piet van de Velde and I set up the *Riu Mannu* project in the Department of Archaeology of Leiden University which provided the framework for my research. These dual roots continued to define my work when I was awarded a research assistant position by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) in 1993, because it allowed me not only to pursue my theoretical interests but also to concentrate on the archaeological record of west central Sardinia. With the involvement of Prof. Herman Geertman and Prof. Michael Rowlands both specific questions in Mediterranean archaeology and theoretical anthropological issues have continued to inspire and frame my research in equal measure. To my mind, it is precisely this entanglement of perspectives which has helped me to gain an insight in the colonial situations of first millennium BC Sardinia.

As a result, this study is as much an investigation into colonialism as a sociological category as it explores a specific historical situation of a given region. Even if the dual structure as outlined in chapter one might at first sight suggest otherwise, both aspects are integral to the study as a whole: chapter two cannot be reduced to a free-floating theoretical discussion any more than the three detailed chapters on Sardinia (4-6) can be understood without reference to this earlier one. It is on the contrary precisely thanks to the theoretical perspective that I became aware of the relevance of comparing Phoenician colonization, Punic domination and Romanization, despite the disparate conventional terminology. The conclusions in chapter seven accordingly draw on *all* preceding chapters, since it is precisely the comparison of the three colonial situations which have been examined in the light of the theoretical considerations which has allowed me to identify recurrent and structural aspects of the colonial situations. Chapter seven can thus be seen to embody the two-fold but yet integrated nature of this study.

Basically, the approach that I have adopted can be ranked among the so-called 'postcolonial' perspectives which have emerged in the social sciences over the last two decades. In

conjunction with other current ideas about society, human agency and material culture, I have highlighted the archaeologically relevant features of these perspectives in an attempt to sketch the contours of a postcolonial archaeology of colonialism. Given the widespread imperialist tendencies in earlier work, it only seems appropriate that archaeology should again follow suit in the present post-modern era. Having already presented the most salient points of a postcolonial perspective in archaeology elsewhere (van Dommelen 1997a), I regard the detailed elaboration of these notions in three different but related situations and the ensuing comparative analysis as the principal contributions of the present study. These have in the end led me to consider the role of historical contingency and structure in colonial situations and to assert the centrality of identity in colonial situations. As the relevance of these insights for modern-day Sardinia shows, there clearly is scope for a postcolonial archaeology which goes well beyond the narrow limits of strictly archaeological case-studies.

In practical terms, it has been in the context of the *Riu Mannu* project that I have benefited from the support and assistance of many persons, starting with Dr. Vincenzo Santoni, *Soprintendente* of the Archaeological Service of Cagliari and Oristano provinces: thanks to his favourable intercession the *Riu Mannu* project obtained a five-year ministerial fieldwork permit. I also gratefully acknowledge the access granted to the departmental archives for study in May and June 1995. I am furthermore indebted to Dr. Carlo Tronchetti, director of the National Museum in Cagliari, and to Dr. Lucia Siddi of the Cagliari exports office who issued the temporary export permit for part of the *Riu Mannu* finds: enabling our team to examine the finds in the laboratories of the Leiden Institute of Pottery Technology has been of crucial significance for understanding at least some of the subtleties of the archaeological record. Just as my ideas about the archaeology of west central Sardinia have been greatly advanced by Dr. Ubaldo Badas of the Communal Museum of Villanovaforru and his illuminating field excursions, so my views of the physical environment of the region have extensively benefited from the numerous and pleasant discussions with Dr. Rita Melis (dept. of Earth Sciences, Cagliari University) and Dr. Luigi Maccioni (geologist, Cagliari).

As regards the study area of west central Sardinia, I am much indebted to Gino Artudi and Sandro Perra who have freely shared their outstanding and intimate knowledge of the territory of Terralba during numerous sessions of looking at new finds and pleasant fieldtrips to yet another new site. They have also generously provided me with copies of their published and unpublished accounts. A similar recognition must go to Tarcisio Agus, now mayor of Guspini, and in his wake to the *Gruppo Archeologico 'Neapolis'*, as he has provided me with many pointers to ancient settlement in the territory of Guspini and in the adjacent Iglesias mountains. Given the significance of the survey results of the *Riu Mannu* project for this study, I also wish to acknowledge the generous permission of numerous *pastori* and *contadini sardi* to enter their lands and vineyards: without it, the *Riu Mannu* fieldwork would simply not have been possible. Equally indispensable have been the 25 students and graduates, mainly from Leiden, who have participated in one or more of the *Riu Mannu* fieldwork campaigns, since they have not only meticulously collected the finds but also made each of the campaigns a memorable period. I particularly wish to thank Heleen Knikman-Stoetman, Benoît Mater and Antoine Mientjes whose efforts for the *Riu Mannu* project in Leiden and Sardinia have helped me forward in various matters.

I also acknowledge the fruitful and pleasant collaboration with Maria Beatrice Annis and Piet van de Velde in the *Riu*

Mannu project: both the many hours spent peering at the sherds in the laboratory in Leiden and the long but wonderful days of hiking through marshes and over hills in Sardinia have made a lasting impression. I remain indebted to Maria Beatrice Annis for persistently drawing my attention to the contemporary context of Sardinia.

The support and influence of my friends and fellow editors of *Archaeological Dialogues* are hard to overestimate: many ideas were either first heard of or first floated in the editorial meetings and discussions with Jos Bazelmans, Jan Kolen, Jan Slofstra and David Van Reybrouck. I particularly wish to acknowledge the critical remarks of the latter and of Alexander Verpoorte on a first draft of my theoretical perspective. I am also indebted to Marc van Dommelen who meticulously read through the entire text: he not only saved me from many errors but his comments on my English and his alternative phrasings have contributed much to enhancing the readability and clarity of the text.

Most of all, however, I remain indebted to my wife, Ayla Çevik, who has not only read and commented on numerous drafts of all chapters but has also endured my long periods of absence in Sardinia. I also thankfully acknowledge her help in the field during a two-week survey of sites in the Marmilla. It is therefore to her that I dedicate this study, in grateful recognition of her support and forbearance.

Glasgow, January 1998

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