
Colonial Constructs: Colonialism and Archaeology in the Mediterranean

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Colonial constructs: colonialism and archaeology in the Mediterranean

Peter van Dommelen

Abstract

This paper first explores colonialist traditions in Mediterranean archaeology: it exposes the relationships between representations of ancient colonial situations in the Mediterranean and the recent context of modern (neo-)imperialism in which Classical Archaeology was formed as a discipline and in which many archaeologists have been working. It is argued that dualist representations of colonialism must be abandoned. As an alternative, the postcolonial concept of hybridity is introduced as a useful starting point for examining the more mundane and less polarized dimensions of colonial situations. Such an alternative postcolonial interpretation of Carthaginian colonialism in west central Sardinia during the fifth to third centuries BC is expounded in the second part of the paper.

Keywords

Hybridization; postcolonial perspectives; Classical Archaeology; Mediterranean; Carthage; Sardinia.

Colonialism and Mediterranean archaeology

Colonialism is a theme with a long-standing tradition in Mediterranean archaeology. The presence of foreign settlements particularly in the western Mediterranean has been interpreted since the earliest days of Classical Archaeology in terms of colonies founded by people coming from elsewhere, often the East. The numerous Greek settlements in southern Italy, which gave rise to the name *Magna Graecia*, represent the best known and most widely studied instance of colonialism in the Mediterranean. Other colonial movements, both earlier and later, include the Phoenician colonization of the western Mediterranean, the Hellenistic conquest of western Asia and the Roman occupation of North Africa. The study of these colonial situations is characterized by a strong particularizing approach, which is probably best illustrated by the abundant use of supposedly ‘original’ – or ‘emic’ – terms such as ἀποικία and ἐμποριον for referring to settler colonies and trading settlements respectively.

Notwithstanding the attention accorded to colonial phenomena in Classical and

Mediterranean archaeology, the notion of colonialism as such has hardly received any attention; significantly, the term 'colonialism' itself is generally avoided and preference is given to its active counterpart 'colonization'. This also holds for archaeology at large, where on the whole much less attention has been given to issues of colonialism. This situation contrasts sharply with that of anthropology, where a more or less coherent body of studies has been developed which can be referred to as an 'anthropology of colonialism' and which roots in the growing awareness of the sometimes close involvement of anthropologists and their discipline in colonial as well as neo-colonial situations (Stoler 1989: 134–9). Such an understanding is absent in (Mediterranean) archaeology.

A lack of attention to the notion of colonialism and a general disregard of the relationships between archaeological representations and modern attitudes towards colonialism do not mean, of course, that the Western colonial experience is irrelevant to an understanding of colonial settlement in Antiquity. Classical Archaeology in particular has developed as a product of nineteenth-century Western society and, as Morris has shown, it was given shape and substance as a discipline in close accordance with then prevailing concepts and ideas of Western origin and superiority; the crucial role attributed to the Mediterranean and Classical Antiquity in the formation of Western and Christian society was particularly important in these views (Morris 1994: 14–31; Shanks 1996: 53–91). Considering the prominent place of colonialism in Western society during precisely the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its influence on contemporary literature and ethnography (e.g. Said 1993), its impact on the study of ancient colonization is likely to have been considerable and may still be so; it certainly needs to be assessed (Trigger 1989: 110–47). I aim to shed some light on the history and background of archaeological approaches to colonial situations in the Mediterranean in Classical Antiquity. In the first section I shall discuss a number of assumptions which can be discerned as underlying many studies of ancient colonial situations; I shall also introduce an alternative conceptualization which has been developed in anthropological studies. The second part of this paper consists of a case study which deals with the colonial situation of west central Sardinia under Carthaginian domination (fifth to third centuries BC).

Throughout this paper I shall use the term 'colonialism' to refer to the presence of one or more groups of foreign people in a region at some distance from their place of origin (the 'colonizers') and the existence of asymmetrical socio-economic relationships of domination or exploitation between the colonizing groups and the inhabitants of the colonized region (Prochaska 1990: 6–11). This use of the concept does *not* imply any direct or inherent parallelisms between modern and ancient colonial situations; I take colonialism to be a fundamentally historical notion that needs to be specified and contextualized (cf. Thomas 1994: 2–3). I shall moreover reserve the term 'local' for all inhabitants of a colonized region, that is including both those people who were part of the colonizing group and the indigenous colonized.

Colonial traditions in Mediterranean archaeology

The relationships between archaeological representations of ancient colonial situations and the contemporary world were most explicit during the heydays of Western

colonialism in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Much archaeological and historical work was geared to learn from history how colonial empires could be maintained and to celebrate contemporary colonialism. British and French archaeologists in particular were quick to point out similarities between the colonial possessions of their respective countries and the Roman empire (Mattingly 1996). For French archaeologists and historians, the parallel between Roman imperial rule and their own colonial authority was still more obvious in North Africa, where the French regarded themselves as successors to Roman authority:

We can therefore without fear and despite the numerous shortcomings, which we should not ignore, compare our occupation of Algeria and Tunisia to that of the same African provinces by the Romans: as they, we have gloriously conquered the land, as they, we have assured the occupation, as they, we try to transform it to our own image and to win it for civilization.

(Cagnat 1913: 776)¹

No doubt encouraged by shared Christianity, more than a millennium of Islamic history has been glossed over in much (French) archaeological and historical work (Thébert 1978: 65): in colonial Bône (modern Annaba in eastern Algeria), for instance, the nearby ancient city of *Hippo Regius*, Saint Augustine's place of birth, was frequently referred to by the local colonial authorities in an attempt to suggest a historically continuous relationship between the two cities and the Roman and French colonial authorities (Prochaska 1990: 212–13). As a result, colonial situations in Antiquity were one-sidedly represented from a colonialist point of view and the ancient colonized were regarded in much the same way as the contemporary 'natives' in North Africa and India were treated.

While the West had to decolonize Africa and Asia after the Second World War, one-sided representations of ancient colonial situations have persisted much longer. In the revised 1980 edition of his often-cited *The Greeks Overseas*, Boardman expressed his philhellenic and colonialist perception of the relationships between colonizing Greeks and colonized Italic peoples perhaps most clearly by concluding that 'the natives weighted their new prosperity, brought by the Greeks, against the sites and land they had lost to them, and were generally satisfied' (Boardman 1980: 198). The kernel of this statement is the apparently unsurpassable value and desirable nature ascribed to the 'new prosperity', which is the newly acquired colonial Greek culture; the implicit assumptions are that the colonized Italic peoples were uncivilized, or at least culturally inferior, and that they could only benefit from participating in the superior Greek civilization – which would eventually result in Western culture. The equation of 'civilization' and 'colonization' has even more explicitly been made by Morel, who defined the 'two meanings of the word colonization . . . [as] the subjection and the "civilizing" of the natives as well as the act of founding colonies' (Morel 1984: 124). There evidently is not much difference between such a point of view and the *mission civilisatrice* of nineteenth-century Western colonizers and colonialist archaeologists alike, who attributed a similar attitude to their Roman and Greek predecessors (Sheldon 1982: 103).

Such explicit statements of a colonialist and philhellenic conception of colonial situations in the ancient Mediterranean have become relatively rare over the last two decades. Since the mid-1980s, an awareness of the partiality of representations of colonial situations

in which only colonizing Greeks or Romans played an active role has been growing, as shows the statement that ‘we are witnessing a change in the longlived and excessive tendency to consider the natives only as passive and receptive elements’ (Morel 1984: 132). Evolutionist assumptions of Greek or Roman superiority which have been a prominent feature of Classical Archaeology since its early days (Shanks 1996: 68–74) are likewise waning, as illustrated by the remark that “‘primitive’ is not an adjective that I would willingly apply to the Italian Iron Age’ (Ridgway 1990: 62). At the same time, however, much work in both Greek and other colonial archaeologies in the Mediterranean has continued to take place in a partial and evolutionist framework: most work on Phoenician colonialism, for instance, hardly considers the colonized at all.²

Far more persistent and pervasive, however, is the dualist conception of colonialism, which represents colonial situations as a confrontation between two essentially distinct entities, each of which is internally homogeneous and externally bounded. In this view a profound colonial divide between the two sides constitutes a fundamental determinant of colonial situations (Pels 1993: 9–10). These ideas have not only set the standard for the study of colonialism in (Mediterranean) archaeology but have also remained virtually unquestioned. The roots of the perspective can be traced back to a holistic notion of culture, which treats culture as a well-defined and clear-cut whole and which allows colonial situations to be reduced to a mere clash between two basically independent entities (cf. Stoler 1989: 135–6). These ideas were already inherent in colonialist views, in which it appeared inevitable, indeed natural, that the colonizing side would prevail over its ‘native’ counterpart, and which would thus give rise to the partial, one-sided representations of colonial situations discussed above. The increased attention to the indigenous part in colonial situations has however only reinforced the dualistic nature of colonial representations, as has been demonstrated by the call for ‘a twofold view of the single reality of Roman Africa’ (Bénabou 1976: 18): in a pioneering study of indigenous resistance to Roman rule, the indigenous population was in the end reified as an integrated totality at the expense of ethnic, class and other divisions, resulting in a polarized, that is dualist, representation of the colonial situation (Thébert 1978; Sheldon 1982: 103–4). As a result, the subordinated position of the colonized to the colonizers was effectively reconfirmed, as the unequal relationships between the reified entities on either side of the colonial divide were accepted at face value (Pels 1993: 7–11; cf. van Dommelen 1997).

Rethinking colonial categories: post-colonial approaches to colonialism

Dissatisfaction with dualist representations of colonial situations has given rise to a growing attention to the more ambiguous and ‘murky’ dimensions of colonial situations. The principal source of inspiration for what has since become known as a ‘postcolonial’ critique of colonial discourse has been Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Anthropological and historical work has joined in the debate recently, calling into question the ‘unitary and essentialist terms of colonial discourse theory’ which implied a uniform global Western representation of the Other and the colonial imposition of a more or less coherent symbolic order (Thomas 1994: 3; cf. Turner 1995). Instead, attention is focused on the varying local and historical nature of specific colonial encounters in which colonized and colonizers interact (Stoler 1989: 135–6; Prakash 1995).

An important strand in this perspective is the blurring of colonial categories across the dualist cleave by recognizing class, ethnic, gender and other divisions among both colonizers and colonized and by accepting that these may constitute potential divides of the local situation. It is along these lines that people group themselves together or oppose each other in different ways in different occasions. As a consequence, people living and interacting in colonial situations recurrently need to (re)define their social positions, thus contributing to an articulation of the local indigenous situation in the wider colonial context. These processes of blending subordinate and dominant cultures are characterized by a thorough reworking of various elements rather than merely combining two complete cultures. The resulting deviations and subversions of the dominant culture as well as the colonial reproductions of indigenous features (cf. Thomas 1991: 83–184) have been captured by the terms *hybridization* and *creolization* (Bhabha 1985; Hannerz 1987).

If merely taken as descriptive of a process in which ‘different clusters of meanings and symbolic forms, historically of varying provenance’ meet and mingle (Hannerz 1994: 189), these terms hardly contribute to a more profound understanding of colonial situations, because they continue to conceive cultures as independently existing entities which may no longer be clearly bounded but which yet constitute an ‘organisation of meanings and meaningful forms’ (Hannerz 1994: 183). It is only when this essentialized view of culture is abandoned and attention shifted to what people do and how they conceive of the world and themselves, that the dynamics of colonial situations can be grasped, for ‘cultural mixture is the effect of the *practice* of mixed origins’ (Friedman 1995: 84; emphasis added).³ Hybridity is a much more powerful concept when understood as ‘the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominant discourse as they articulate the signs of cultural difference’ (Bhabha 1985: 110), as it provides a tool for probing the ambiguous dimensions of colonial situations. In this sense, hybridization refers to the ways in which social, economic or ethnic groups of people construct a distinct identity within the colonial context and situate themselves with respect to the dominant, i.e. colonial culture. As distortions in the process of imitating the latter can undermine colonial authority, hybridity often assumes a more or less explicit counter-hegemonic character in the form of subcultures or popular, often religious, movements (cf. Keesing 1994).

These matters of culture and identity can moreover be related to the so-called ‘hard reality’ of economic exploitation and political domination in colonial situations, as Bourdieu’s theory of practice provides a theoretical basis for examining how the framework of structural conditions of power and exploitation as set by the colonial context defines the actual *co-presence* and everyday practice of social actors and their daily interaction in constructing and reproducing colonial society (Pels 1993: 5–6; Thomas 1994: 58–61). It is in this way that hybridization can be conceived in terms of social practice and that it can shed light on the ways in which ‘Colonial projects are construed, misconstrued, adapted and enacted by actors whose subjectivities are fractured – half here, half there, sometimes disloyal, sometimes “on the side” of the people they patronize and dominate, and against the interests of some metropolitan office’ (Thomas 1994: 60).

An approach to colonialism along these lines thus requires a focus on the local context of colonialism. The importance of supra-regional interconnections in this respect is that they provide relatively easy access to international networks for some people, rearrange

the local infrastructure and impose specific demands on economic production. Each local context is reproduced by various social groups, some of which can be defined as colonized and others as colonizing while still others appear to occupy positions in-between. This presents a much more complex, ambiguous or disorganized and contradictory appearance to the local colonial contexts than allowed for in the simple opposition between colonizers and colonized (cf. Stoler 1989: 139–55; Prochaska 1990: 135–79).

As a demonstration and further elaboration of these arguments in archaeological terms, I now turn to the colonial situation of west central Sardinia under Carthaginian domination (fifth to third centuries BC). I shall first outline the locally relevant structural characteristics of Carthaginian colonialism in the western Mediterranean in general and then proceed to explore matters of everyday practice and interaction of various social groups. Through a comparison of the material culture used in different contexts, I shall attempt to situate some of these groups in the local colonial situation and to shed some light on the murky dimensions of ancient colonialism and to cut across the conventional colonial divide in the Mediterranean.

Carthaginian colonialism in the western Mediterranean

The island of Sardinia was closely involved in the colonial networks of the western Mediterranean during most of the first millennium BC. From the mid-sixth century BC onwards, it was part of the colonial empire in the western Mediterranean which was headed by the city of Carthage (Fig. 1). Before that time it had, together with Carthage, already been part of the Phoenician colonial network which had spanned the entire Mediterranean. The central part of the west coast around the Gulf of Oristano and the inland area to the southeast (Fig. 2) represent a region which had been involved in the colonial fortunes of Sardinia from the very start. It is in this region that I shall examine the colonial situation as it developed under Carthaginian domination from the late sixth century BC.

Carthaginian colonialism developed out of the demise of the Phoenician colonial network in the western Mediterranean and initially resembled it quite closely, as most Phoenician colonial settlements were simply taken over by Carthage which was itself originally a Phoenician foundation. While the nature of Carthaginian colonialism is still disputed, the various archaeological interpretations which have been put forward provide a fine example of philhellenic scholarship. Encouraged by both Latin and Greek literary sources and the well-known example of Greek colonization of South Italy, Carthaginian presence in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia and Spain has been interpreted as an instance of territorial colonialism, based on major settler colonies living off the surrounding region but closely tied to the metropolis (cf. Fig. 1). Recent work in Spain, however, has proposed a different and more nuanced model of largely politically and economically independent settlements, which became more closely related to, and eventually dependent on, Carthage in the third century BC in the wake of the Punic Wars (López Castro 1991). By contrast, in North Africa, the extreme south of Spain, Ibiza, Sicily and Sardinia, Carthaginian colonialism seems to have been much more territory-based from the outset (López Castro 1992: 51–3). The abundant evidence for scattered small farms in at least Ibiza and Sardinia

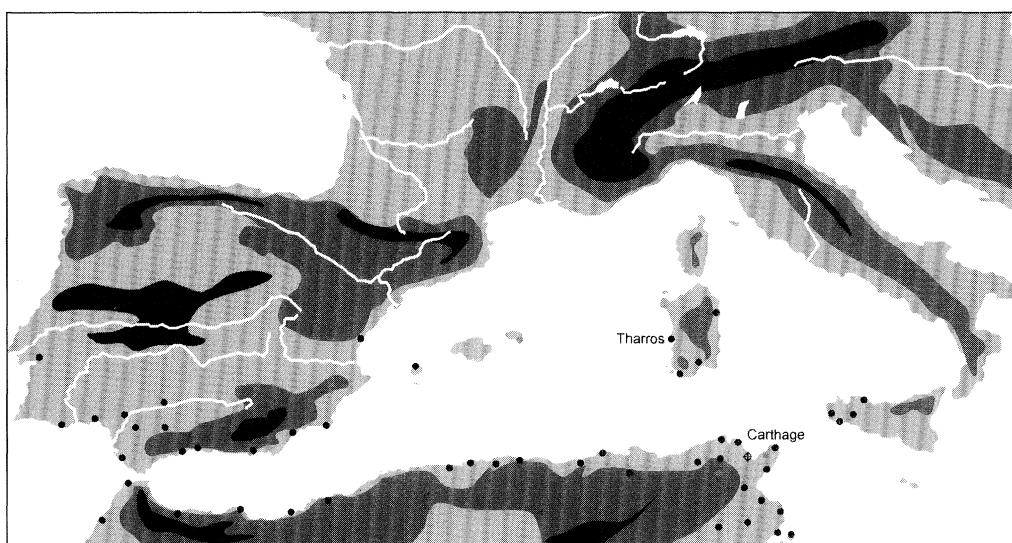


Figure 1 Principle Punic settlements in the western Mediterranean.

also suggests that Carthaginian presence may have been less city-based than its Greek counterpart. The accounts of Polybius (III.22–25) and Justin (XVIII.7–XIX.1), that Carthage conducted various military campaigns in Sicily and Sardinia and concluded several treaties with Rome, make it clear that Carthage regarded North Africa and Sardinia as being an integral part of its territory. In Sardinia, Carthaginian colonialism is explicitly interpreted in territorial terms (Bondi 1987); the imposition of an agricultural organization based on a Carthaginian model as well as immigration from North Africa, perhaps including slaves, are regarded as important features (López Castro 1992: 55–6).

In west central Sardinia, the principal colonial elements were the city of *Tharros* on the northern peninsula at the entrance of the Gulf of Oristano and the two minor towns of *Othoca* and *Neapolis* across the bay. The latter are located in the northern and southern part respectively of the coastal *Arborèa* (Fig. 2). *Tharros*, the only urban settlement of the region, was among the earliest Phoenician foundations in Sardinia at the beginning of the eighth century BC; *Othoca*, also of Phoenician origins, was established by the end of the seventh century BC (Moscati 1988: 6–10). As the only major colonial settlement without Phoenician antecedents, founded in the middle of the sixth century BC, *Neapolis* may therefore be expected to relate to particular Carthaginian concerns. With the modest towns of *Othoca* and *Neapolis* as secondary central places, Punic settlement in the region was overwhelmingly rural: throughout the region hundreds of small to medium-sized farms have been attested. In addition, a small number of cemeteries and at least two important rural sanctuaries are known. The earliest Punic foundations, dating from the second half of the sixth century BC, are to be found in the coastal area of the southern *Arborèa* and include the town of *Neapolis* and a handful of farms in its vicinity (Zucca 1991). During the fifth century BC, rural settlement around *Neapolis* expanded and a limited number of rural sites was newly established around *Othoca* in the northern

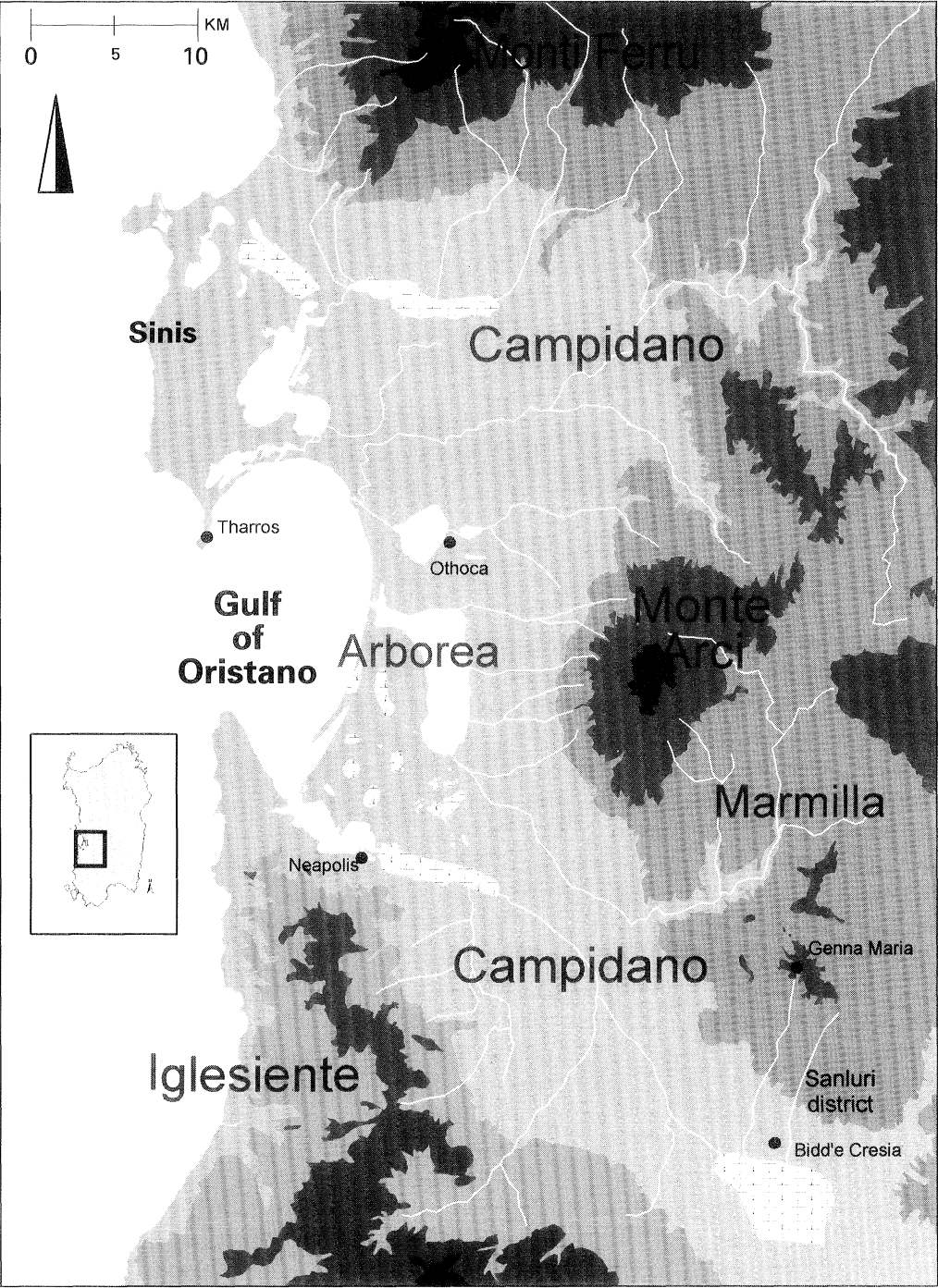


Figure 2 The region of west central Sardinia showing the sites and areas mentioned in the text.

Arborèa; in the interior, a few abandoned indigenous *nuraghe* complexes, huge dry stone-walled constructions dating from the Bronze Age, were put to use as isolated outposts and may have fulfilled military functions (Barreca 1986: 88–9). The major expansion of Punic settlement, however, dates from the fourth century, involving in particular two areas (Fig. 2): in the southern Arborèa, where many farms were added to the existing ones and a remarkably high density of rural settlement was achieved (Fig. 3; van Dommelen, forthcoming); and in the fertile border zone along the eastern fringe of the Campidano plain and the lower slopes of the Marmilla hills, where a substantial number of farms was dispersed over a much larger area (Zucca 1987: 115–47). In this area, several Punic cemeteries are known, one of which has partially been excavated (Paderi 1982). Around the same time, the abandoned *nuraghe* Genna Maria of Villanovaforru, which is located on the highest hilltop in the border zone between the Campidano and the Marmilla, was reused as a rural sanctuary (Lilliu 1993).

The colonial situation of Punic west central Sardinia might thus, at first sight, appear relatively straightforward: initially, Carthaginian presence remained restricted to the coastal area of the Arborèa, around the towns of Neapolis and Othoca, and only from the early fourth century bc onwards did Punic settlement spread inland. The apparently massive expansion has been related to large-scale immigration of North African peasants and slaves mentioned in the historical sources (cf. Bondi 1987: 181).

Colonial Punic culture in west central Sardinia

What is striking in this interpretation of Carthaginian colonialism in Sardinia is the virtual *absence* of any reference to local inhabitants or a colonized population. The predominantly Punic nature of the archaeological record, which appears devoid of indigenous finds, can apparently only endorse such a representation. Its unambiguously partial and colonialist interpretation, however, gives cause for thought.

On closer inspection, the archaeological record of west central Sardinia from the Punic period proves to be less uniform than usually maintained. The finds encountered or at least those mentioned in find reports indeed appear to be unmistakably Punic. Similarly, the bulk of the Punic finds of the intensive *Riu Mannu* survey (Annis et al. 1995) is made up of locally produced amphorae, storage, cooking and other utilitarian wares and roof tiles which all adhere closely to Punic models. Both the appearance and shape of the pottery are thoroughly Punic and only the fabrics reveal the local origin of the vessels. Imported pottery, whether coming from elsewhere in Sardinia or from outside it (Carthage), is restricted to a limited number of amphorae and fine table wares (van Dommelen, forthcoming). Together, both the results of the intensive survey and other find reports suggest a dispersed settlement pattern of modest farmsteads throughout the region (Annis et al. 1995; Zucca 1987: 115–47). Both the gravegoods and the burial rites attested in the excavated Bidd'e Cresia cemetery are of a similar outspoken and uniform Punic nature (Fig. 2; Paderi 1982).

In contrast to the uniform appearance of these sites, however, three subtle differences within the settlement pattern point to a much less coherent situation. In the first place, there is a clear concentration of settlement in the coastal area of especially the southern

Arborèa (Fig. 3);⁴ the only two existing towns are also located in the coastal Arborèa (Fig. 2). Further inland, settlement is much more dispersed, for instance in the closely studied Sanluri district in the central Campidano (Barreca 1986: 38; Fig. 2). Second, the coastal sites, including the towns, are significantly older than those inland; the few inland sites datable to the fifth century BC moreover appear to be of distinct, often military, character (Barreca 1986: 36–9). And in the third place, there is a difference in location of the farms in the coastal area in comparison with those in the interior (Fig. 3): the latter are consistently associated with abandoned *nuraghi*, although there is no clear evidence of actual reuse, whereas the former are situated at new locations and show no relationship to earlier *nuraghe* settlement, despite the very visible presence of the abandoned towers in the vicinity. This pattern emerges from the few published finds (Zucca 1987: 115–47) and is substantiated by the results from the systematic *Riu Mannu* survey, which has been carried out in the coastal Arborèa and the inland Marmilla since 1992 (Annis et al., forthcoming). Taken together, these three observations suggest a distinction between Punic settlement in the coastal Arborèa and that in the interior of west central Sardinia, in particular in the eastern Campidano and adjacent Marmilla. The contrast is significant, as it provides a first pointer to an internal differentiation of colonial society. The uniform material culture thus suggests a strong homogenizing and assimilating trend in the everyday sphere of rural housing and agricultural production as well as in burial customs. The distribution of rural settlement, however, considerably qualifies this picture and reveals a distinction between the coastal area and the interior of west central Sardinia.

Further insight into colonial society in west central Sardinia derives from the excavation of the rural sanctuary in the reused *nuraghe* Genna Maria near Villanovaforru (Fig. 2). The remains of the ritual and offerings which have been found in the *nuraghe* show a surprisingly strong ‘local’ component in the rural cult right from its start in the later fourth century BC until well into the Roman period. The available evidence, such as the small silver ears of grain, convincingly suggests an agrarian propitiatory cult with fertility and feminine connotations, which was only loosely associated with Punic religious and cultural traditions. The peculiar nature of the cult was most explicitly manifest in the large number of oil-lamps, which constitute the bulk of offerings made (Fig. 4);⁵ while unusual elsewhere in the Hellenistic world, such offerings were a regular feature of indigenous Bronze and Iron Age rituals in Sardinia (Lilliu 1993: 18–20). The hundreds of lamps found in the Iron Age ritual chamber of the nearby *nuraghe* Su Mulinu in Villanovafranca underscore this point (Ugas and Paderi 1990: 475–9). Most of the lamps were simple coarse vessels bearing a striking resemblance to indigenous Iron Age products, while Punic-style or Roman Black Glaze lamps were apparently avoided. At the same time, however, the presence of a small number of Punic incense burners, some in the shape of a female head supporting a ritual vessel (*kernophoros*), shows the familiarity of the worshippers with Punic religion and their awareness of similarities between the local cult and the Punic version of that of Demeter. Given the absence of other references to Demeter, there is nevertheless no reason to suppose a Punic cult at Genna Maria. The limited presence of the incense burners and other Punic items (usually Black Glaze pottery) shows instead how people could introduce certain ‘foreign’ objects which evidently appeared suitable in the local context, whereas others, such as imported Black Glaze lamps, must have been considered inappropriate as a substitute for the coarse lamps. The resulting cult consequently presents

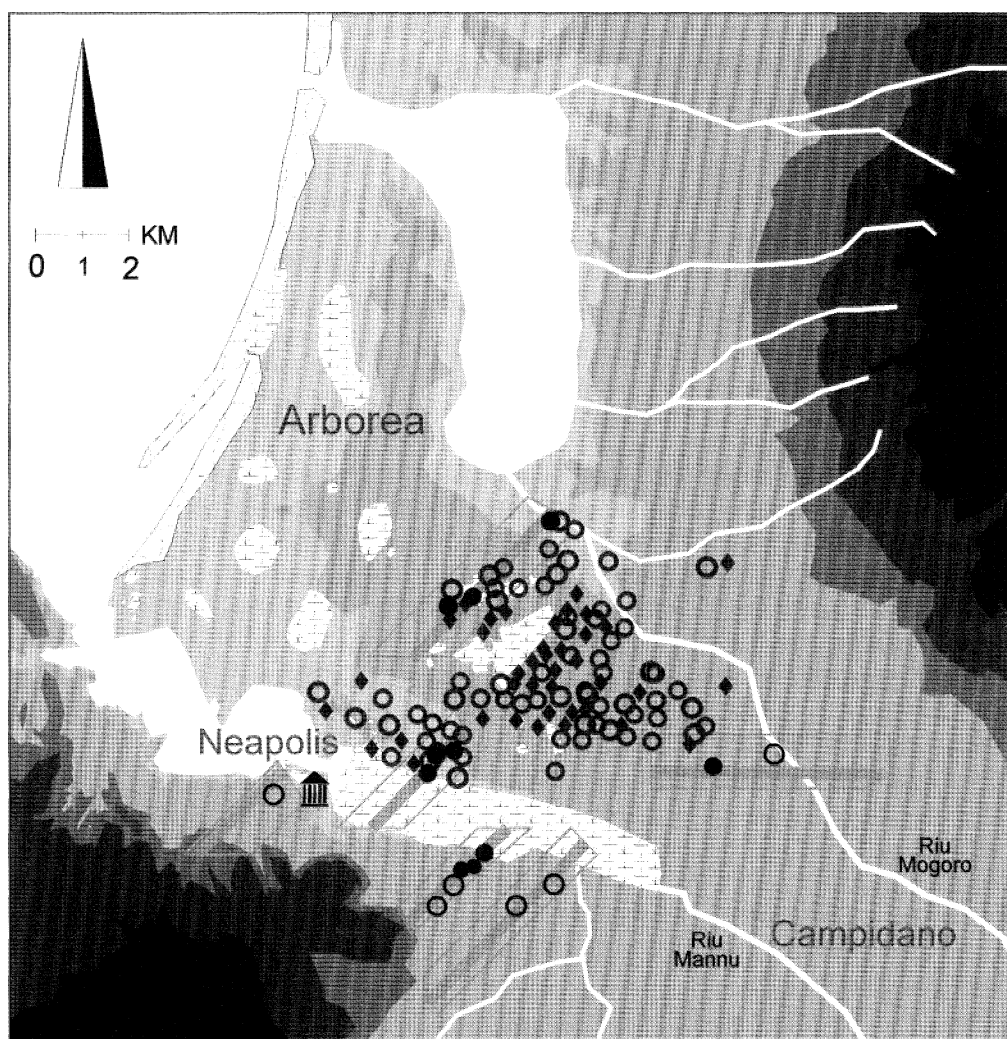


Figure 3 The southern Arborèa showing the remarkably high number of sites registered on the narrow sandy Terralba ridge as well as the transects examined in this area by the *Riu Mannu* survey project. All sites were inhabited from the early fourth century BC onwards but only those indicated by a dot survive into the Roman period (cf. van Dommelen, forthcoming).

a combination of both indigenous and Punic features which appears as a specifically local response to colonialism.

The ostensibly uniform material culture of Punic west central Sardinia also shows other deviations from Punic Hellenistic traditions, which seem still less closely related to indigenous traditions. The terra cotta figurines found together with a lesser number of anatomical terra cotta *ex-votos* and several other terra cotta objects, in what presumably was a sanctuary of a healing cult just outside the town of Neapolis, clearly differ from common

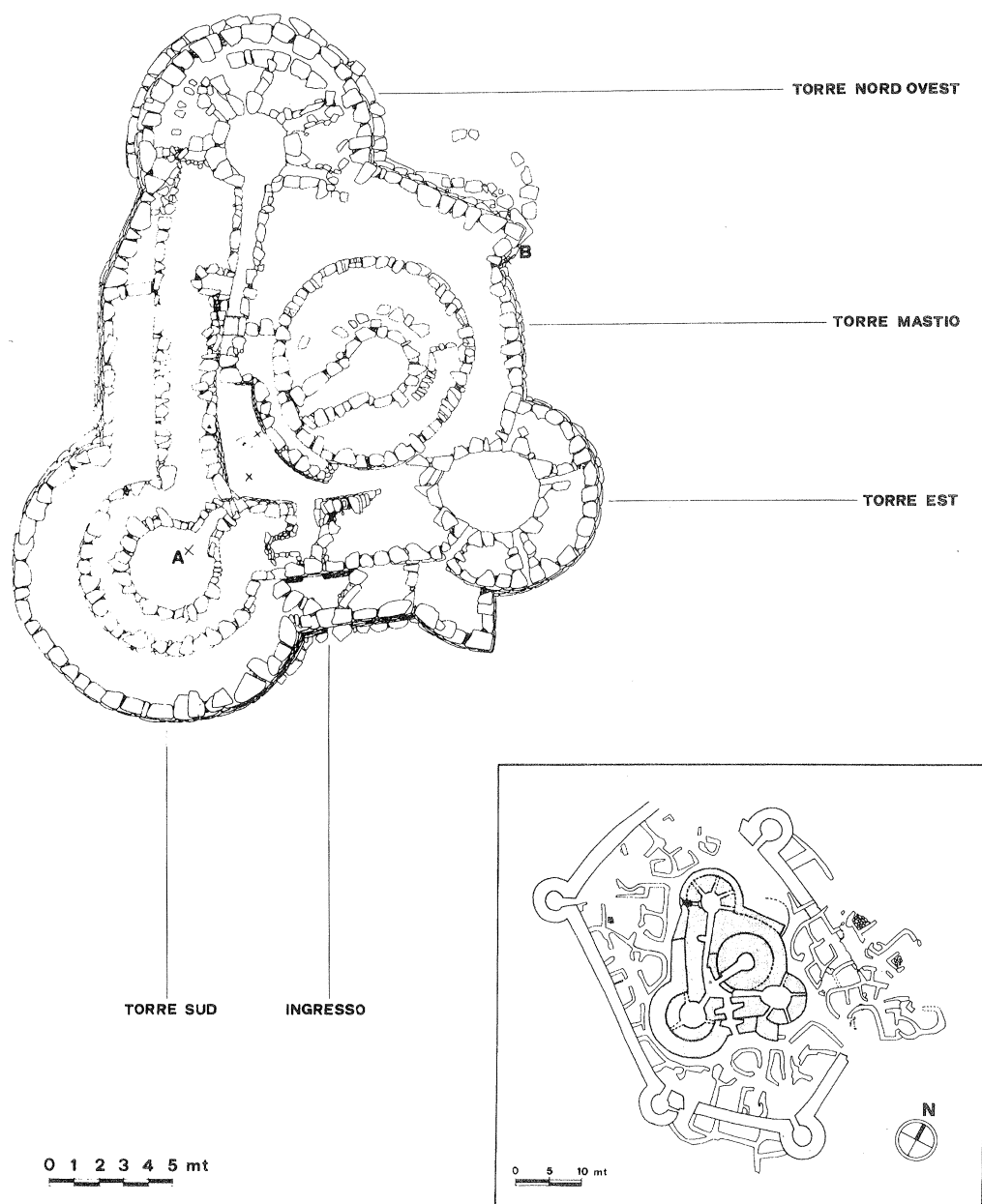


Figure 4 Plan of the *nuraghe* at Genna Maria (Villanovaforru, CA) showing the location of the Hellenistic offerings (from Liliu 1993: tav. 2).

Punic standards (Zucca 1987: 151–6). In contrast to current mould-produced types of figurines known throughout the Punic and Hellenistic world in general, as were also produced in Tharros (Moscati 1992: 25–32; Fig. 5.1), nearly all figurines found near Neapolis were hand-made and represent a radical departure from Hellenistic models (Fig. 5.2).



Figure 5.1

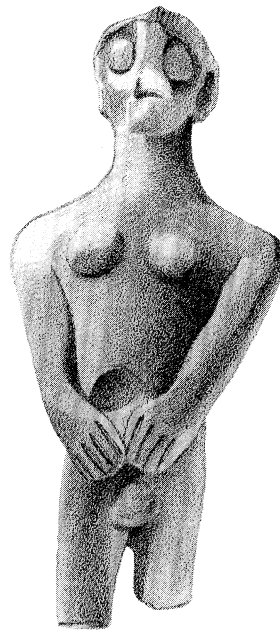


Figure 5.2

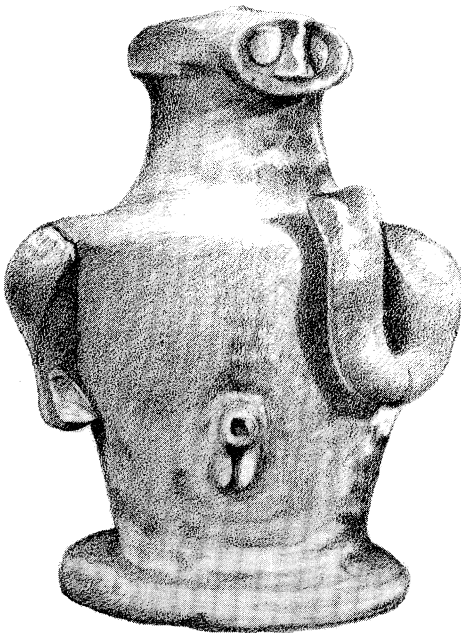


Figure 5.3 Terra cotta figurines from Tharros (1), Neapolis (2) and Bithia (3) (drawn by E. van Driel, after Moscati 1992, figs IX,b; XXXII,a; XXXVIII,a).

Nevertheless, general affinities with Punic and Hellenistic types suggest a common background as well as a similar categorization of the figurines. This is confirmed by the association with a limited number of mould-made figurines (5 per cent of all 551 figurines found: Moscati 1992: 65–71). Elsewhere in Sardinia, other figurines have been found in Punic sanctuaries which show a similar tendency to elaborate freely on conventional models but these have hardly ever resulted in items identical to those from Neapolis. In a sanctuary near Bithia on the Sardinian south coast, several hundred figurines have been excavated which clearly differ from traditional Punic products. Despite a certain resemblance to the ones found in Neapolis, there are important differences, such as the technique of using a wheel-thrown base, which exclude any direct relationships between the terra cotta figurines found in Neapolis and Bithia (Moscati 1992: 75–80; Fig. 5.3).

The similarities between the figurines from Neapolis and Bithia and several other comparable finds elsewhere in Sardinia (Moscati 1992: 87–96) have suggested a common underlying process. This has in turn been interpreted in terms of a ‘popular culture’ in rural contexts as opposed to a ‘high’ city-based Hellenistic culture characterized by conventional Punic Hellenistic products such as the mould-made figurines from Tharros and Carthage itself (Moscati 1992: 99–101). This interpretation does not attempt to foreground the colonial Punic aspect nor the indigenous contribution but emphasizes a city–country opposition, which seems perfectly plausible in a peasant society. It does not, however, address the question of the formation of the popular culture. Of particular importance in this respect is the pluriform background of the figurines, which relate to Punic and Hellenistic examples only in general shape and typology. The contexts of a healing sanctuary and offerings of terra cotta limbs, which were unknown in Iron Age Sardinia, point to Italic, perhaps Etruscan, contacts, while a number of stylistic details of the Neapolis figurines can be associated with similar characteristics of indigenous Iron Age bronze statuettes (Moscati 1992: 70–1; 80–3). These elements are, moreover, not merely juxtaposed but have actively been combined and mixed up: the recurring presence of figurines which emphasize a particular part of the body, often a limb (Fig. 5.2 and 5.3), point to a combination of the Italic practice of offering separate limbs for healing and the Punic use of portraits or standing figurines in funerary contexts with obvious religious connotations. It is therefore evident that the ‘deviant’ figurines from Neapolis represent a remarkable local invention.

Conclusions: on colonial categories and local inventions

On balance, there appears to be no compelling reason to abandon the conventional representation of Carthaginian colonialism altogether, as it evidently depicts the colonial situation of west central Sardinia in broad lines. The accepted interpretation must nevertheless be regarded as representing only a particular dimension of Carthaginian colonialism, which is the economic and political one and which largely corresponds to the so-called ‘hard reality’ of the west central Sardinian colonial situation. Political as well as economic subordination of west central Sardinia to the city of Carthage is attested historically and confirmed by numerous archaeological finds. Moreover, inscriptions show that the political organization of the Sardinian colonial cities and towns was closely modeled after and

formally dependent on that of Carthage (Bondi 1987: 189–95). The treaties which Carthage concluded with Rome in 509 and 348 BC imply a similarly subordinated position of the island: as Polybius reports (III.22.9 and III.24.11), the same restrictions for access and trading by foreigners in general and Romans in particular were imposed on both regions, which means that Sardinia was ranked with the North African hinterland of Carthage. The archaeological evidence in rural North Africa and Sardinia also shows strong similarities between the island and the immediate hinterland of Carthage, which support the suggestion that the island was closely tied to the colonial city (cf. Moscati 1994). Although the historically known violent events of the Carthaginian take-over of Sardinia as related by Justin are much more difficult to detect archaeologically, there is nevertheless no reason to question the military and economically exploitative nature of Carthaginian colonialism (cf. Lilliu 1992 and Bondi 1987).

The archaeological evidence discussed above, however, also provides ample reason for a further elaboration and refinement of the conventional representation of the colonial situation of Punic west central Sardinia. In the religious contexts of Genna Maria and the Neapolis sanctuary the local population has appeared as only partially assimilated to the colonial Punic or more generally Hellenistic culture. They were also responsible for distinctly local inventions of (material) culture. The evidence discussed cannot easily be considered as indicative of indigenous persistence only: in both cases there was a substantial presence of Punic material culture, which cannot be dismissed as accidental or secondary. Rather, there appears to have been a complex situation of mutual influencing, imitation and creative subversion of the hegemonic Punic culture by the local inhabitants of the region, which can be encapsulated by the term *hybridization*. The Neapolis figurines in particular underscore this point, as the ritual context to which the statuettes belong relates to the Italian mainland, the overall typology of the figurines derives from Punic examples and several specific characteristics in shape and execution refer to indigenous traditions.

A significant feature in this respect are the differences in assimilation noted in the various aspects of rural life: whereas the material culture used in the rural settlements was of a virtually homogeneous Punic character, the religious contexts of Genna Maria and the Neapolis sanctuary presented a much more varied composition. The burial evidence, however, is again of a strikingly uniform Punic nature, while the settlement evidence is qualified by the variations in location: the stronger association of inland farms with previous indigenous settlement (*nuraghi*) suggests that the colonial impact was profounder in the coastal areas than inland, where people evidently related differently to the landscape. A restriction of immigration from rural North Africa to the coastal areas around the towns of Neapolis and Othoca may well have played a part in this. These apparent contradictions in choices and behaviour can be interpreted in terms of different values attributed to distinct levels of colonial Punic society in west central Sardinia. The varying ‘degrees of hybridity’ of these domains then represent the outcome of just as many processes of hybridization, which were gradually accomplished by the local inhabitants acting within their own social and economic framework. In this way, light can be shed on the values of the colonial society in fourth-century BC west central Sardinia (cf. Barraud et al. 1984: 506–18).

In the concrete situation under discussion, it can thus be noted that the level of everyday production, or at least the ceramic material culture involved, was fairly thoroughly assimilated to the hegemonic Punic culture. At the ritual level of healing and fertility, however, a

considerably stronger counter-hegemonic attitude was mounted, presumably because the local population perceived it as central to their own identity, providing a means to distinguish themselves from the dominant Carthaginian colonizers. From this point of view, burial and the related death rituals apparently were less important, while the relationships with the surrounding landscape might again be interpreted as having been valued by the inhabitants of the inland areas. An awareness of an ancestral presence in the landscape, perhaps related to the *nuraghi*, may well have contributed to this (cf. de Coppet 1985).

On the whole, the conclusion inevitably must be that the adoption of Punic material culture cannot simply be equated with cultural assimilation. As there is not enough evidence to suppose a counter-hegemonic religious movement of some sort in Punic Sardinia either, reactions to Carthaginian colonialism were of a more ambiguous and intermediate character, varying between the coastal and inland areas of the region as well as between the various social domains. More generally speaking, it is clear that recent developments of postcolonial perspectives in literary studies, history and anthropology need not be regarded as incompatible with archaeological evidence. One of the most important insights offered by these studies, I argue, is the awareness of the ambiguous (or ‘murky’) nature of colonial situations. This applies in particular to the colonial divide which on the one hand often imposes a structure of political domination and economic exploitation but which on the other hand can also be dissolved in other domains. An important tool for conceptualizing colonial situations in this sense and for problematizing the conventional colonial categories of colonizers versus colonized is provided by the notion of hybridity as grounded in the co-presence and daily interaction of people living in the colonial situation (cf. Pels 1993: 12–16). Conceiving of colonial situations as ‘colonial constructs’ in terms of a process of hybridization may thus help to overcome the opposition between colonialist and nativist representations of colonialism.

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Notes

- 1 ‘Nous pouvons donc sans craindre, et malgré les fautes nombreuses qu’il ne sert à rien de cacher, comparer notre occupation de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie à celle des mêmes

provinces africaines par les romains: comme eux, nous avons glorieusement conquis le pays, comme eux, nous avons assuré l'occupation, comme eux, nous essayons de le transformer à notre image et de le gagner à la civilisation' (Cagnat 1913: 776).

- 2 The case of Phoenician colonialism is a peculiar one, as it has largely been shaped by a mixture of a Greek model of ancient colonialism and an Orientalist attitude. The partial nature of Phoenician colonial archaeology apparently derives from the Greek paradigm.
- 3 This or similar culture concepts are particularly widespread in studies of globalization and centre-periphery relationships where attention is focused on the macro or supraregional relationships (cf. Friedman 1995: 82-4).
- 4 In the coastal area, on the sandy rise north of Neapolis, the extraordinary density of over four settlement sites per km² was reached by the end of the fourth century BC. Most of these were farmsteads, including several larger and 'wealthier' ones (van Dommelen, forthcoming).
- 5 Over 600 lamps have been attested against 269 coins and occasional other objects; there appears to have been a virtually exclusive preference for offering lamps during the Hellenistic and Roman Republican periods, as nearly all coins date from the Roman Imperial period (Liliu 1993: 13).

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