

Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices: Colonial Contacts and Elite Connections at Monte Prama, Sardinia

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Abstract

The Iron Age statues of Monte Prama (west-central Sardinia) have long been famous for their unique nature and reputation as the best known examples of Phoenician colonial influence on indigenous Nuragic traditions. These statues, however, form part of a much more complex site that in turn was integrated within a wider colonial landscape. In this paper we propose a new reading of the Monte Prama evidence both by examining the site itself in minute detail and by exploring its wider social and colonial contexts. This detailed analysis enables us to advance our understanding of the colonial situation in west central Sardinia during the 7th century BC.

Introduction

In 1977, excavation of what had appeared to be a routine trial trench in a plot of agricultural land in western Sardinia—where numerous archaeological materials from many different periods had been noted—brought to light a sensational collection of finds. Two years later, after the original trench had been expanded and the surrounding area carefully explored, it became clear that a unique site had been unearthed, which clearly had somehow played a crucial role in the Iron Age of west central Sardinia.

At first sight, the finds were more puzzling than breathtaking. Two thousand crumbling fragments of carved limestone were spread across a single row of 33 pit graves. It was evident that many of the pieces formed parts of a substantial number of life-size statues. What caused the biggest stir, however, once painstaking restoration had managed to piece most of them together, was the realization that these

were truly unique statues, which displayed features related to both the Nuragic communities of indigenous Sardinia and the wider colonial world of the Phoenician settlers (figure 1).¹

In the two decades or so that have lapsed since the first publications (Lilliu 1978; Tronchetti 1981; 1986), the site of Monte Prama has been the object of much controversy, most of which has centred on its chronology. While the site is generally acknowledged as an important, if somewhat enigmatic, feature of prehistoric Sardinia, discussions tend to be primarily descriptive and rarely venture beyond labelling it a cemetery (e.g. Webster 1996: 179-80). As such, we suggest, Monte Prama is not untypical of the Sardinian Iron Age overall. Sandwiched between the Bronze Age heydays of Nuragic society, from roughly 1600 BC onwards—*la bella età dei nuraghi* (Lilliu 1988: 356)—and the Phoenician colonial presence in Sardinia from the second half of the 8th century BC, Iron Age Sardinia has



Figure 1. Head of an archer statue from Monte Prama (ht 36 cm).

received scant attention. This period, conventionally dated between 900–550 BC, has not only been largely ignored by prehistorians for whom it is little more than an afterthought to the glorious Bronze Age, it has also been overlooked by classical archaeologists intent on identifying Phoenician achievements and colonial influences. Despite this general lack of interest, a range of stimulating suggestions and interpretations of the meanings and role of Monte Prama and its statues have been put forward: it is from these ideas that this paper takes its cue (Tronchetti 1988: 73–77; Lilliu 1997; Bernardini 2002; Chierici 2002).

In this paper, we first present the basic archaeological details of the site of Monte Prama, which to some extent have already been published in English (Tronchetti 1986). Secondly, and more pertinently, we offer an interpretation of the burial and ritual contexts of this site within the wider setting of the Nur-

agic society of Iron Age western Sardinia and its contacts with the Phoenician colonial community. More specifically, we argue that the Monte Prama statues, while no doubt unique, are anything but inexplicable or out of place in this context, and were instead formed in the context of increasingly intensive contacts between local Nuragic elites and Phoenician settlers and traders. Finally, we contend that this specific context offers a valuable insight into the multi-faceted and often ambiguous dimensions of ancient colonial situations; as a result it may demonstrate how far social and symbolic interpretations can be taken through careful archaeological analysis.

We begin by outlining the site of Monte Prama, its finds and chronology. Next, we sketch the wider context of Iron Age west central Sardinia, highlighting a number of relevant features before returning to discuss the relationship between Monte Prama and

the Sinis area. Drawing on a range of anthropological and recent postcolonial theories, we conclude this paper by proposing an interpretation of the ways that people may have perceived and used the Monte Prama site and its features.

Monte Prama

The site of Monte Prama is located on the lower grounds of the Sinis area of west central Sardinia. This area is composed of colluvial

and alluvial deposits derived from the imposing Montiferru volcanic complex to the north and the shallow Bay of Oristano and Cabras lagoons to its south and east (Figures 2 and 10). The Sinis is shielded from the sea in the west by a ridge of low limestone hills and is connected in the east to the northern reaches of the much larger Campidano Plain that provides access to the interior of the island. The Sinis and adjacent northern Campidano are dominated by numerous *nuraghi*, the large settlement towers of Bronze Age Sardinia.

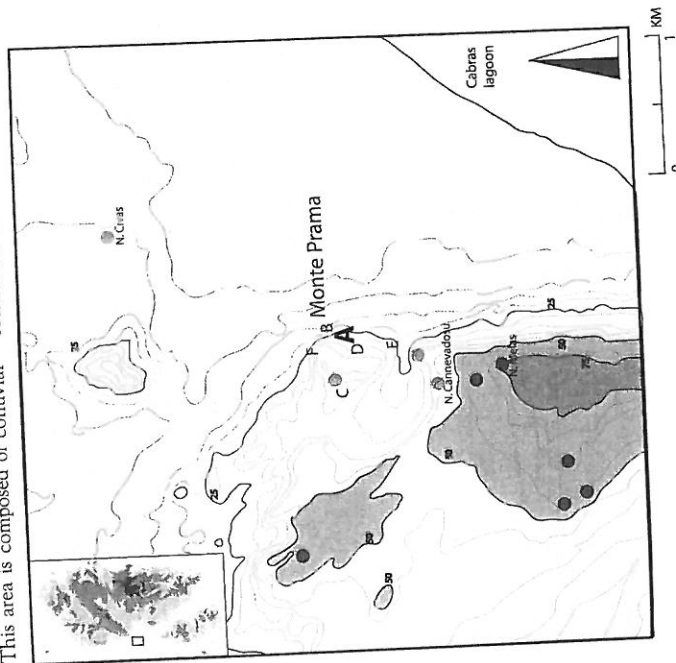


Figure 2. Map of the central Sinis area around Monte Prama. See Figures 10 and 11 for the precise location of the area shown. A: Burial enclosure with the statues; B: Bronze Age burials ('scavi Bedini'); C: Nuragic Monte Prama; D: Nuragic-Roman hut circle; E: Nuragic hut circle reused as Roman Republican shrine; F: Roman structure. Dots indicate the location of *nuraghi*. (Contours every 10 m a.s.l. with shading at 25 m intervals).

This area was also home to the Phoenician colonial settlement of Tharros, situated on the San Giovanni peninsula in the far southwestern tip of the area.

Monte Prama is the name of a hillock on the top of which sit the partial remains of a large complex *nuraghe*. The excavations carried out between 1977–79 took place in a small basin below the eastern slope of the hill. These have shown that part of the valley bottom had been raised with a thick layer of soil to accommodate a rectangular enclosure of approximately 34 × 7 m, marked along its western and eastern perimeters by small- to medium-sized unworked stones.

Within the eastern half of the enclosure there was a cemetery of 33 pit burials, marked from the southern end by a tall stone slab propped up by a larger block, and extending northwards in a single row up to the northern boundary of the enclosure (Figure 3). Interestingly, the original perimeter slab had been broken to allow another burial to be added, while a new flagstone had been erected to

restore the integrity of the northern boundary of the enclosure. Three more burials had been added alongside the row, ostensibly to avoid breaching the limits of the enclosure (Figure 4). Small upright stone slabs were used to mark the western edge of the row of burials, while the rather poorly preserved eastern edge was delineated by roughly squared stones bound with mud. All stones are of the same fine-grained limestone. There are traces of other pits or shallow trenches containing human bones in the area between the pits and the eastern perimeter, but unfortunately this part of the site is poorly preserved.

Beyond the enclosure, there are abundant traces of other human activities (Figure 2). Immediately to the north there is another cemetery of burials in stone cists, probably dating to the Late Bronze Age.² Some 20 m to the southwest was situated a stone hut circle of likely Nuragic date but containing only Imperial Roman finds and some residual Punic remains. Another probable Nuragic hut circle was explored 500 m to the south of the en-

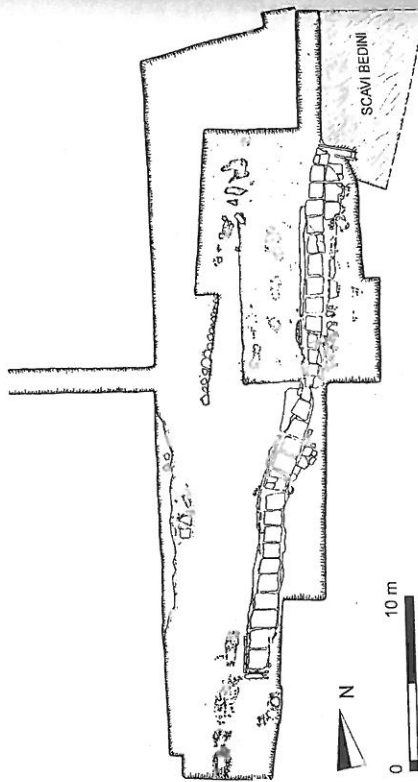


Figure 3. Plan of the site of Monte Prama. Burial number 1 is the most southerly one (on the left; note that north is to the right).

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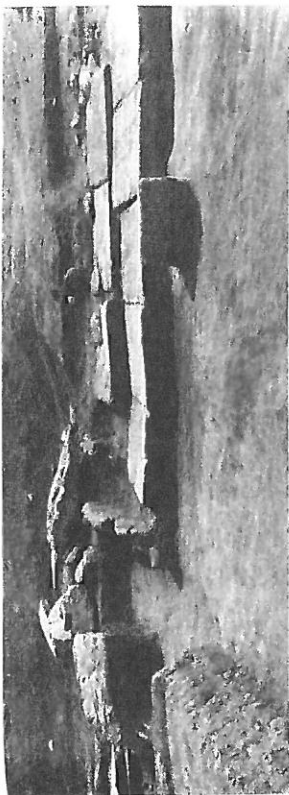


Figure 4. View of the northern end of the line of burials showing nos. 26–30 in the foreground and nos. 31–33 behind them. Note the flagstone marking the boundary of the enclosure.

sure; this also yielded only evidence of much later reuse, in this case as a small shrine of Roman Republican date. About 300 m to the northwest, a square structure of Roman-period bricks has been recorded.

Within the enclosure, the 33 burials were all deposited in simple irregular pits of 60 to 70 cm in diameter and up to 80 cm deep. At the bottom, there was in most cases a shallow ditch. All pits were covered with sand-

stone slabs measuring roughly 1 × 1 × 0.14 m (Figure 4). In each pit one body was seated upright and in several instances a small stone

slab was placed on top of the deceased's head before the pit was backfilled. The bodies faced diverse directions. Although three-quarters of the people buried in the cemetery were male, the deceased in the cemetery included men, women and children ranging in age from 15 to approximately 50 years (Figure 5; Mallegni *et al.* 1991).

Even though no burial goods were found within these graves, the fill of four burial pits yielded small faience beads that may have belonged to necklaces. The fill of burial 25, moreover, contained a scaraboid seal-stone

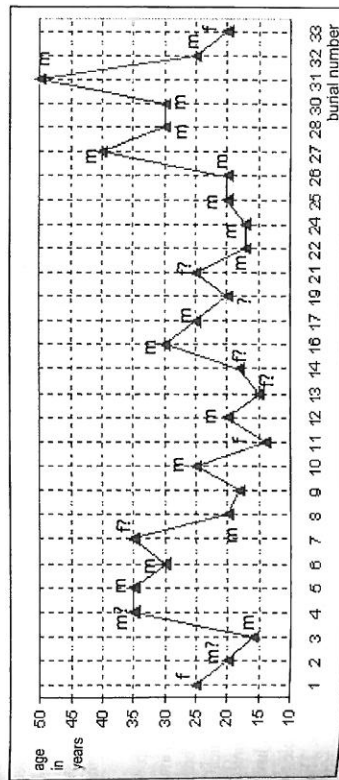


Figure 5. Graph showing the age (vertical axis) and sex of those burials for which these parameters could be established (for burial nos. [horizontal axis], see Figure 3).

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that may or may not have been deposited there intentionally. Its stratigraphically secure position in the fill of the pit nevertheless provides a useful *terminus post quem* of the later 7th century BC for the burial of the individual in pit 25. This means that the cemetery was not only in existence by that time but also that it had presumably been in use for a while, possibly from the earlier or mid 7th century BC.³ There are no indications of when the cemetery burial was deposited or how long the cemetery was regularly frequented by the descendants of the people buried there. What is certain, however, is that the site must have remained more or less visible until a much later point in time, namely the 4th century BC, when it was deliberately levelled (see below).

The Statues and Other Sculpture of Monte Prama

The second main feature of the site is constituted by more than two thousand sculptural fragments. These were not randomly distributed across the site but instead were neatly associated with the burial pits. The latter were in fact entirely covered by a thick layer of soil that was densely packed with the stone fragments. The general gradual reduction of fragments in this fill towards the western side of the row of burials suggests that the sculptures were spread out over the burials from east to west, while a torso broken into three pieces on one of the cover stones indicates that the sculptures were forcefully and possibly deliberately thrown across the burials. A large Punic amphora fragment including the rim, shoulder and handle at the bottom of the stone fragments deposit offers a secure *terminus ante quem non* of the 4th century BC for the violent deposition of the sculptures.⁴ While it is unclear whether they remained intact prior to this date or whether the site had already been abandoned at an earlier date, the dispersed nature of the fragments—nearby fragments did not match—and the good preservation of

small and shallow details on these fragments suggest that they were not long exposed to the elements and that they had been smashed before being covered over.

The sculptural fragments belong to one of three main categories, namely life-sized human figures, *nuraghe* models and standing stones or 'baetyls'. The latter are conical stones with two or four more or less square holes, which have been suggested to represent eyes (Lilliu 1988: 380; see also Lilliu 1978: 96–99; 1988: 380–81 and 564–65 on the so-called 'Oragiana'-type baetyls). They are made of a different, somewhat coarser type of limestone than the other sculptural fragments and cover slabs. While one baetyl has been preserved almost intact, the available fragments suggest that at least seven standing stones had originally been placed at the site (Figure 6).

The *nuraghe* models fall entirely within the typology of this category of objects and represent either a complex *nuraghe* or the upper part of a single *nuraghe* tower (cf. Lilliu 1997: 291–302; Blake 1997: 153). The former class, which includes at least eight items, typically represents the largest *nuraghe* complexes with as many as eight towers surrounding an open courtyard and a much higher central tower. The latter class consistently shows the upper platform with parapet surmounting the tower, which must have been a visually characteristic feature of *nuraghe* towers (Figure 7). This group comprised no less than 20 specimens varying in size from 13 to about 70 cm in height.

The third and by far the largest group of the human figures can be further divided into two main categories of 'archers' and 'boxers' covering their head with their shield. While at least 25 statues have been counted and elements of all parts of the statues have been recovered, it has not been possible to restore one single statue in its entirety. The size of these statues varied and it appears that the largest one measured around 2.5 m in height, well over life-size. Of the 25 partially

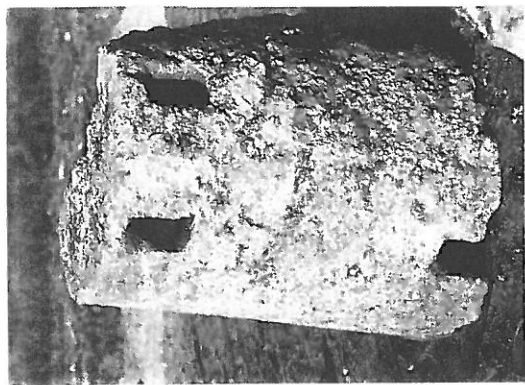


Figure 6. Standing stone of the so-called Oragiana type found at Monte Prama (ht 48 cm).

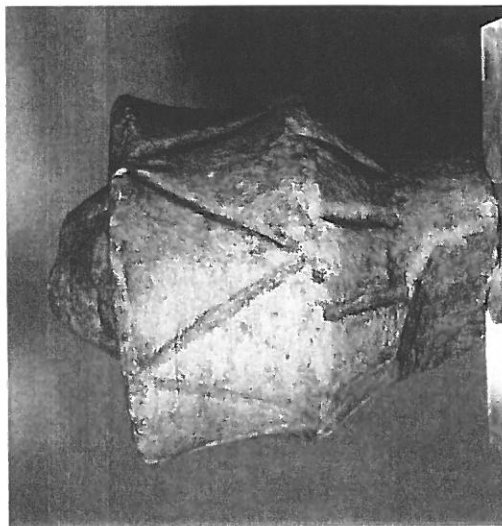


Figure 7. Upper part of a *nuraghe* model of the single-tower type found at Monte Prama (ht 19 cm).

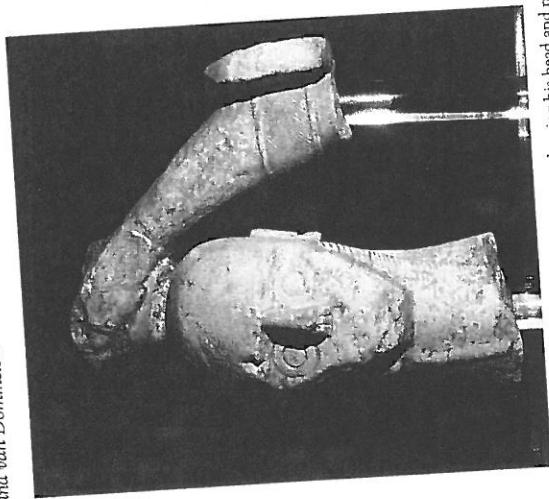


Figure 8. Partially reconstructed boxer statue from Monte Prama showing his head and raised left arm. Note the rendition of the eyes (ht 62 cm).

reconstructed ones, 17 are 'boxers' and eight are 'archers'.

The 'boxers' make up the most uniform group, showing only minor variations in size (Figure 8). All represent bare-chested males wearing loin-cloths with the rear trimmed to a triangle. In some cases, shallow grooves depict the strings used to tie the loin-cloths. The boxers' heads are covered by a smooth cap that suggests the use of cloth or leather. A curved oval shield presumably made of leather on a wooden frame covers one of the boxers' arms from elbow to fist. It is invariably held on the left arm and raised above the men's head, while a leather sleeve running from the elbow down protected their right arm.

The 'archers' show more variation, despite their much smaller number (Figure 9). In general, they represent a male warrior dressed in a short tunic. A square pectoral with slightly concave sides is worn on top of the

tunic, above which another item was worn that reached up to their throat. Both articles may have had a protective function but were nevertheless decorated and clearly of some importance. One of the better preserved heads shows that some of the warriors wore a horned helmet. Although only the bases of two horns can be seen on some helmets, there also exist several round fragments that may well be the remains of such horns (see Figure 1). In their left hand, the archers hold a bow, while in most cases the right arm is extended forward with the palm upward, as if offering something. Some, however, hold a shield, which is not unlike that of the boxers and looks as if it was made of twigs and skin. Some of the archers also appear to wear some kind of armour, possibly made of twigs and skin. One torso shows an embroidered sash on its back, offset with fringes. Yet another archer is shown wearing a leg guard with a figure-of-eight outline on it.

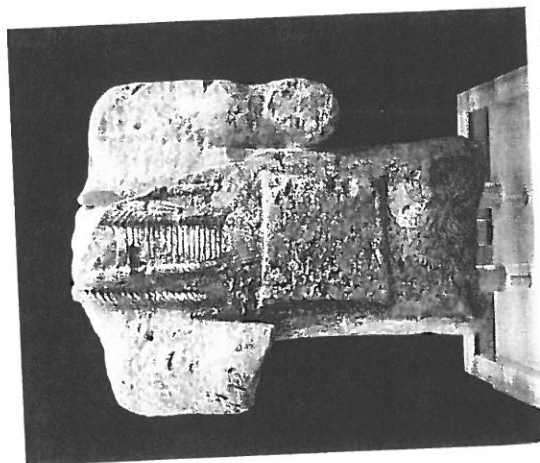


Figure 9. Frontal view of the torso of an archer statue from Monte Prama showing the two pectorals and the hair bound in strings (ht 88 cm).

while a poorly preserved head reveals traces of hair in a fish-bone pattern. There is only one case where an archer is shown with a sword kept in its scabbard and tied to his back.

Overall, the statues conform to a single iconography: they are all standing upright and barefoot on a square base. They are rendered in a 'flattened', two- rather than three-dimensional manner. Both the front and back are elaborated, but no attempt has been made to work them in the round. The faces are similarly schematic, defined by the heavily rendered eyebrows and a straight nose that make up a prominent T-shape. The eyes are represented by two nested circles that have clearly been created with a pair of compasses, while the mouth is indicated by a simple shallow line (cf. Lilliu 1997: 303-13).

Both these stylistic details and the overall iconography leave little doubt that the Monte Prama statues draw heavily on the well-known

Sardinian bronzetti or bronze statuettes which, despite the material they are made of, are a hallmark of the Nuragic Iron Age. Like the Monte Prama statues, they are all rather flat, although less obviously so because of their much smaller size. Unlike the Monte Prama statues, which are the only examples of life-size statuary from Nuragic Sardinia, bronzetti typically measure between 20-40 cm, although occasionally much smaller ones have been found. Unlike the Monte Prama statues, the bronzetti number in the hundreds and are found across the whole of Sardinia, from the Late Bronze Age throughout the Iron Age. The latter also depict a much wider range of figures, including animals and boats (Lilliu 1981; 1988: 550-62; 2002: 251-53; Bernardini 1985; 1996; 2002; Santoni 1995; Webster 1996: 198-206; Tronchetti 1997; Chierici 2002). The two Monte Prama types of statue, the archer and the boxer, find perfect matches among

the *bronze* as shown by the so-called Dorgali boxer, the archer from Urzulei or the statue attached to a sword from Teti-Abini (Tronchetti 1986: 45-47; Lilliu 1997: 304, 309). The sheer size of the Monte Prama statues sets them apart from the *bronze* and singles them out as a remarkable feature of Nuragic culture, as life-size sculpture was otherwise unknown in Bronze and Iron Age Sardinia.

While the connection with the *bronze* generally matches the dates suggested by the stratigraphic evidence for the Monte Prama site as a whole, there have been repeated attempts to date the Monte Prama statues more closely through stylistic parallels with the *bronze*. Although there are now many well-dated statuettes, their commonly accepted stylistic classification remains fairly broad and continues to preclude precise dates, no doubt because it has become clear in recent years that *bronze* were produced over a fairly long period of time (Bernardini 1985; 2002). By and large, however, the continued *bronze* production in the 7th and 6th centuries BC shows that there can be no stylistic objections to the proposed 7th-century dates for the Monte Prama statues (Tronchetti 1988: 73-79; 1997: 32; Bernardini 2002: 426). The absence of reliable stylistic dates in combination with the stratigraphic evidence from the scaraboid seal, however, make much less plausible an earlier 8th-century date based only on the 'geometric' appearance of the statues (contra Lilliu 1997: 346-48).

Culture Contact and Colonial Influences

It is clear that while the connection between the Monte Prama statues and the *bronze* has not gone unnoticed, neither the statues themselves nor the site of Monte Prama have received much attention as such (with the notable exceptions of Tronchetti 1988: 74-79 and Lilliu 1997). At the same time, however, the external connections embodied by

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the statues have been explored rather more intensively, with initial attempts to explain the statues by looking beyond Sardinia to the wider Mediterranean world and to the Greek world in particular (where life-size statuary existed and parallels for some iconographic details can be found). Comparisons with the roughly contemporary Greek *kouroi* unsurprisingly abound. Because this extensive search for 'Mediterranean *comparanda*' or the connections and antecedents of the Monte Prama statues elsewhere in the Mediterranean has tended to ignore the local roots of the statues as discussed above, it seems difficult to deny the fundamentally colonialist and Greek-centred roots of such an approach (Balmuth 1986: 275; Simondo Ridgway 1986; cf. van Dommelen 1997a).

Even when it became evident that the Monte Prama statues were really unparalleled and that the Nuragic *bronze* offered the nearest direct connection, the Monte Prama statues nevertheless became emblematic of the Phoenician colonial impact on Sardinian Iron Age society. Because of a widespread belief that the overall transformation of Nuragic society in the Iron Age must be ascribed to 'the cultural and economic relationships between the island of Sardinia and the wider world' (Ugas 1986: 41; cf. Webster and Tegund 1992: 455), it is generally assumed that the Monte Prama site and its statues represent a remarkable instance of the adoption of 'an entirely novel set of standards by which native populations evaluated prestige and the quality of existing lifestyles' (Webster 1996: 192). While there is of course no reason to deny that the Monte Prama statues do present stylistic features that refer to iconographic traditions beyond Sardinia, this does not necessarily mean that these external features 'explain' the meaning of the statues or their role in the Monte Prama site.

Interpreting the Monte Prama statues as the outcome of culture contact and acculturation processes between Phoenician colonizers

and indigenous Nuragic inhabitants runs into problems in both theoretical and archaeological terms. With regard to the former, it has been repeatedly and convincingly argued that the whole notion of 'culture contact' is based on not only an outdated conception of culture, in which people are reduced to passive objects of the 'clashes' and 'meetings' of these cultures, but also on an essentialist understanding of identity (Friedman 1990; Jones 1997; Cusick 1998). In plain terms, it is people rather than abstract cultural entities who engaged in meetings and made contacts and therefore the questions of who was involved, in which circumstances, and for which reasons, need to be posed.

It is not our intention to review the extensive discussions of the theoretical premises and biases of the notions of acculturation and colonialism or to evaluate alternative ways of conceptualizing contact situations in general. We therefore limit ourselves to highlighting the associated notions of hybridization and hybrid practices that have recently been proposed and successfully applied to a range of colonial contexts (Gosden 2004: 82-113; Malkin 2002: 151-81; van Dommelen 1997a; 2002; 2006; Webster 2001).

At a basic level, hybridity has been defined as 'the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialism' (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 118). This definition, however, carries limited analytical force, because it merely describes new combinations of objects or traditions. Instead of focusing on the static outcomes of hybridization processes, it is more useful to highlight the 'processes of interaction that create new social spaces to which new meanings are given' (Young 2003: 79) because hybridity or 'cultural mixture ... is the effect of the practice of mixed origins' (Friedman 1997: 88). Theoretically, such a focus on hybrid practices and hybridization as a process is grounded in Bourdieu's concepts of practice and *habitus*, as these provide a theo-

retical framework for understanding how people's daily life and activities were influenced by regular encounters with other customs and objects (Bourdieu 1990: 52-111 especially). Because people acting within different traditions and using different kinds of material culture meet each other regularly in the limited spaces of the colonial situation, their recurrent interactions and shared experiences contribute to 'processes of cultural appropriation and admixture' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 113).

The significance of this approach is twofold. First it offers a robust theoretical connection between the observed changes of material culture—the new 'transcultural forms' referred to above—and social process, while it also emphasizes the novelty of these new forms, as they are the outcome of processes rather than simply permutations of longstanding meanings. Secondly, the approach insists that these developments involve everyone living in any given colonial context whether as elite member, colonizer, peasant or colonized. At the same time, because people experience and perceive this context in different ways according to their social and economic background, they will engage with these processes in different ways and develop different types of *habitus*, which in turn may yield different material outcomes (see van Dommelen 2002: 122-29; 2006).

In practical terms, with regard to Monte Prama and the Sardinian Iron Age, it is our contention and point of departure that the conventional view of the Monte Prama statues as outlined above fails to consider them in their own right as part of a specific social and political context. In order to address this shortcoming, we first step back from Monte Prama and outline the Sardinian Iron Age and its connections with the Phoenician settlements. Next, we focus on the Sinis and northern Campidano areas in order to consider the wider contexts of Monte Prama and

to offer a contextualized interpretation of the site.

The 'Season of Aristocracies' in a Colonial Context

Giovanni Lilliu, the doyen of Sardinian prehistory, has characterized the Nuragic Iron Age as the 'season of aristocracies' (1988: 417) in order to bring out what has elsewhere been called a 'brief but dynamic "proto-historical" period' which saw the emergence of 'stratified societies' in southern Sardinia (Webster 1996: 153). Although the commonly used epithet 'Nuragic' signals that this period remained firmly within the broad cultural pattern of Nuragic culture and was indeed characterized by numerous continuities from the Bronze Age, there is also widespread consensus that the Iron Age hailed the end of 'la bella età dei nuraghi' (Lilliu 1988: 356). It is also the period that saw the establishment of the first permanent foreign settlements on Sardinian soil, the so-called Phoenician 'colonies'; the interaction between the changing Nuragic communities and the new settlers in the areas surrounding their settlements became a major feature of this period. In chronological terms, the beginning of the Iron Age is conventionally dated to 900 BC and lasts until the Carthaginian occupation of southern Sardinia at an equally conventional date of 550 BC. A distinction is usually made between an earlier 'geomorphic' and a later 'orientalising' phase based on the decoration of pottery and metalwork, with a break situated in the mid- to late-8th century BC (Lilliu 1987: 2002: 249-51; Webster 1996: 155-56).

Sardinian Iron Age Society
The profound social and economic changes of the Iron Age are epitomized by the simple fact that *nuraghi* ceased to be built during this era. This emphatically does not mean that they disappeared from people's lives and con-

sciousness, but it does signal the fundamental changes that were taking place in Nuragic society from the end of the 10th century BC. While practically all settlements continued to be occupied, important shifts occurred within the largest *nuraghe* complexes, where the villages that surrounded them became the preferred sites of habitation. These villages expanded and existing defensive walls were destroyed or incorporated into the new houses, while in most cases the *nuraghi* themselves were no longer inhabited or used. The traditional single-room roundhouse, small numbers of which had existed around many of the *nuraghi*, was replaced by an entirely new type of house characterised by a large central courtyard, around which half a dozen or more distinct domestic and productive spaces were arranged (Lilliu 1986; 1987; Tronchetti 1988: 19-39; Webster 1996: 157-65).⁵

While these houses would have been the centre of domestic life, the focal places of the newly emerging villages as a whole were to be found in the so-called 'meeting' or 'reunion huts'. These buildings first emerged in the Late Bronze Age and are basically an enlarged version of the Bronze Age roundhouse. Apart from their size, they differed from those in that they had a circular bench running along most of the interior wall, various niches in this wall, as well as various altars and pedestals. Their continued existence in the Iron Age when regular roundhouses went out of use, and the consistent presence of precious objects, including imported ones, confirm their special status as gathering places for the local elite. In the Iron Age, these meeting huts effectively took over the prominent and dominant role in local political life that the *nuraghi* previously had fulfilled. This is nicely illustrated by the fact that, in the Bronze Age, the meeting huts in settlement contexts had literally been incorporated into the defensive walls surrounding the *nuraghe*. The defensive wall at Su Nuraxi (Barumini) was especially recon-

structed to include the meeting hut (Lilliu and Zucca 1988: 43; Webster 1996: 120-21), while these same walls became obsolete and were dismantled in the Iron Age, when the meeting huts emerged as the central places of new settlements made up of the equally innovative multi-roomed houses (Tronchetti 1988: 63-65; van Dommelen 1998: 76-78).

Paradoxically, however, the importance of the meeting huts as places of power was confirmed in several instances by explicitly connecting them to the *nuraghe* as the traditional seat of power; this was achieved through the prominent display of miniature models of the towers inside the meeting hut, either in one of the niches or on one of the pedestals. Although the actual *nuraghi* might have been relegated to the margins of people's daily lives during the Iron Age, they certainly did not slip from their minds (Blake 1997: 160-62; 1998: 61).

In a parallel development, a small number of well-sanctuaries, which themselves were also an innovation of the Late Bronze Age, were transformed into large regional sanctuaries. Meeting huts were an important feature of these expansions and it is significant that it is mostly in these places that *nuraghe* models, imported items and other precious objects such as *bronze* are found (Webster 1996: 181-90; Benardini 2002: 422-24). It may therefore be evident that close links developed between the political and ritual spheres of Iron Age society and that, in other words, the Iron Age witnessed a large-scale political and social reorganization, out of which a distinct warrior and ritual elite emerged—the 'aristocracies' referred to by Lilliu (1988: 417-70; cf. Lilliu 1987; Usai 1995: 256; Webster 1996: 181-90).

Phoenician Settlement and Colonial Contexts

The Iron Age was also the period in which the Phoenician 'colonial' settlements were

established and this chronological coincidence has often given reason to ascribe many of the Iron Age transformations to colonial influence (e.g. Webster and Tegund 1992: 455). Careful and detailed consideration of the chronologies involved, however, has convincingly demonstrated that the changes in Nuragic society described in the previous section were rooted in a time well before the first Phoenician foundations; they cannot, therefore, be ascribed to colonial influence (Tronchetti 1988: 42-61; van Dommelen 1997b: 247-55). Moreover, it has become clear that the impact of the newly established Phoenician settlements remained long subdued, which in fact calls into question the appropriateness of the very term 'colonial' (van Dommelen 1998: 111).

The creation of the first permanent Phoenician settlements in Sardinia at places like Sulcis, Tharros and Nora was a sudden development (Figure 10), as the Nuragic communities of Late Bronze Age Sardinia had long maintained extensive overseas contacts with both the Italian mainland and regions farther afield, in particular Cyprus (Rowland 2001: 54-55; Ridgway 2002: 221-22). As the evidence from S. Imbenia in north-west Sardinia reveals substantial contacts with the Phoenician and Greek world and possibly even prolonged foreign presences amidst an Iron Age community, it is gradually becoming clear that this was not so much a 'precolonial' phase leading up to a 'proper' colonial situation, but rather one episode in a much longer development (Ridgway 2002: 217-18). The foundation of the Phoenician settlements similarly signalled a new situation, but not one that was radically different from what had gone before.

This does not mean that there was no interaction at all: there are a limited number of imported bronze objects known from (early) Iron Age contexts and while the numbers of foreign goods entering Sardinia during the first 50 to 80 years of colonial settlement (until the

It is within the context of such a focused approach that the concept of hybridization can most fruitfully be deployed. More specifically, this approach enables us to study the 'hybrid practices' that underlie the hybrid and complex outcomes of colonial processes. A close focus on the contact zone moreover allows one to 'colour in' the shades of grey within the colonial situation, in which small groups of both colonizers and colonized interacted and created new practices. It is indeed through zooming in on the specific 'processes of cultural appropriation and admixture' that it may be possible to capture the 'in-between-ness' of many seemingly distinct indigenous and colonial activities and processes that result from local people adopting and adapting to the changes that colonial and other authorities attempt to impose (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 113). The study of material culture is a privileged means of inquiry for undertaking such a study, because it frames everyday life and daily activities and is thus inextricably bound up with local practices and perceptions (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 274-78; van Dommelen 2006).

Three decades of topographical investigations, rescue interventions and long-running excavations have created an extensive database of archaeological remains in the Sinis and northern Campidano that provide an excellent basis for this kind of study (see Tore and Stiglitz 2000 for an overview).

Iron Age Practices in the Contact Zone

The particularly dense occupation of the Sinis and northern Campidano areas during the Middle and Late Bronze Age is still obvious for anyone travelling through the areas, as *nuraghi* accentuate the horizon in whichever direction one looks. No less than 145 towers have been counted in the Sinis and the adjacent parts of the northern Campidano, an area of some 150 sq. km, attesting to a settlement density of around 1 *nuraghe* per sq. km (Figure 11; see

Sebis 1998: 113-17 and Tore and Stiglitz 1987: 96-101 for details and specific references).

About half of these were single towers while at least two of the other multi-tower types of *nuraghi*—S'Uraki (San Vero Milis) and Tradori (Narbolia)—featured imposing turreted walls. Extensive villages surrounded both of these complexes, while villages of varying sizes have been observed in the vicinity of 20 other *nuraghi*. Another 26 villages appear not to have been associated with a *nuraghe* at all (Sebis 1998: 137, notes 103-105). In addition, eight megalithic communal tombs have been recorded; most are in a rather precarious condition. Well-sanctuaries are represented in three relatively modest sites, with small underground tholos-constructions and a short staircase leading down to a well: Cucuru is Arrius and Gora 'e sa Scafa (both Cabras) and Banatou (San Vero Milis). Large-scale well-sanctuaries did not exist in the Sinis or northern Campidano, but not far beyond these areas in the central Campidano and Abbasanta uplands, we find the large well-sanctuaries of Sant'Anastasia and Santa Cristina (Figures 10 and 11).

Because very few excavations have been carried out, it is uncertain whether all of these *nuraghi* remained occupied throughout the Iron Age. There is in fact abundant evidence in the Sinis that many of the numerous Late Bronze Age sites continued to be occupied into the early Iron Age (the 'geometric' phase of the 9th and 8th centuries). There is, however, a nearly complete absence of any 'orientalizing' Iron Age pottery (7th-6th centuries) in the Sinis: the site of Monte Prama is in fact the only one in this area that has been securely dated to this period.⁷ This may be a consequence of incomplete recovery, as representative surface collections are notoriously problematic at sites like *nuraghi* that usually have extensive standing and collapsed remains and are often heavily overgrown (Sebis 1998: 117; cf. van Dommelen 1998: 144-45).⁸

In the adjacent northern Campidano, the situation is slightly different: there are a number of sites where later Iron Age pottery has definitely been attested and it is no doubt significant that most of these sites are also the ones that have been more fully investigated. They either have been at least partially excavated or represent another type of site than a *nuraghe*. The five sites concerned are the two largest *nuraghe* complexes of S'Uraki (San Vero Milis) and Tradori (Narbolia), the two well-sanctuaries of Cucuru is Arrius (Cabras) and Banatou (San Vero Milis) and the village of Su Cungiàu 'e Funtà (Nuraxinieddu: see van Dommelen 1998: 96-103 and Sebis 1994: 1998: 116-17 for details).

The location of these sites is significant, as they are all situated well away from Tharros, mostly in the Montiferru foothills of the northern reaches of the Sinis and northern Campidano. The large open village of Su Cungiàu 'e Funtà, which completely overshadowed its single-tower *nuraghe*, developed further inland beyond the large Cabras lagoon. This evidence shows a radical spatial reassessment and reorganization of the regional settlement pattern, which may best be described as 'centralization' where all settlement was reduced to three large villages. Of these, S'Uraki remained the elite centre, not just because it was the largest site, but also because it has yielded a range of imported

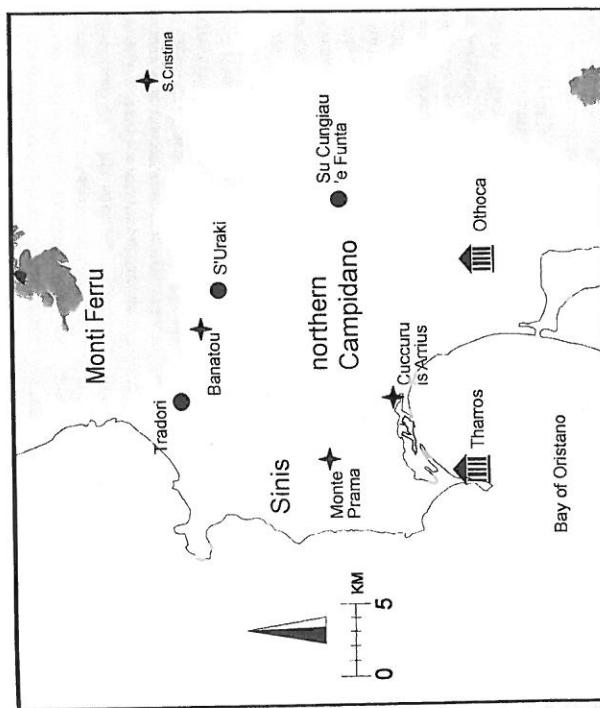


Figure 11. Map of the Sinis and northern Campidano areas, showing the locations of areas and places discussed. These sites are the only ones that can reliably be ascribed to the later ('orientalizing') Iron Age (late 8th and 7th centuries BC). Dots indicate Nuragic settlement sites, stars Nuragic ritual sites, and temples Phoenician settlements.

objects, including a rare bronze torch-holder that in all likelihood had been imported from Cyprus (Tore 1986; Martelli 1996).

The importance of S'Uraki is underscored when the often-overlooked Phoenician presence is considered. The 'colonial' settlement of Tharros is only a short distance away at the southern end of the Sinis, where it was established in the late 8th century BC. Reports (but unfortunately few details) of Phoenician-style cremation burials with abundant Phoenician and Etruscan pottery near S'Uraki furthermore suggest that this place may have been home to a group of Phoenician settlers from the mid-to-late 7th century BC (Tore 1991: 1264; Stiglitz 2003: 115). Clear burial and settlement evidence of a Phoenician establishment called Othoca has been located several dozen kms farther south on the eastern shore of the Bay of Oristano. Some time shortly after the mid-7th century BC, this settlement was created on a low knoll overlooking the Santa Giusta lagoon at a short distance from a Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age village (Nieddu and Zucca 1991: 107-24; van Dommelen 1998: 96-97). Several of the earliest burials have yielded items of Nuragic material culture such as pins and some small weapons like daggers. These objects are not necessarily precious or prestigious and have been used to argue that some of the people buried in Othoca had close links with the Nuragic Iron Age communities of their time or may have come from one. The recurrent presence of Nuragic pottery among the otherwise Phoenician settlement debris suggests a similar picture of frequent contacts between the Phoenician and Nuragic communities (Nieddu and Zucca 1991: 58; 110-16; Bernardini 2000: 48).

The chronological and spatial details of these sites and their finds suggest that the Nuragic centralization process more or less coincided with the intensification of interaction between the various communities of the Sinis and northern Campidano from roughly

the mid-7th century BC onwards (Figure 11). The small numbers of imported objects recovered and their close association with indigenous elites suggest that the latter continued to dominate these contacts within their own communities and that for most people the impact of the Phoenician settlements must have been limited.

It is therefore surely no coincidence that the site of Monte Prama with its obvious elite connotations is situated almost exactly halfway between the Iron Age sites in the north and Tharros in the south.

Hybrid Practices at Monte Prama

This brings us back full circle to Monte Prama, where we can begin to see what role the site played in the Sinis and northern Campidano areas during the Iron Age. In light of the previous discussion, we can now explore the site and its remarkable features as a single coherent context. The key to this exploration is provided by a number of features of this site that attest to its elite character. First and foremost among these are the burials themselves. Single burials were an Iron Age innovation that was reserved for members of the elite. Only a handful of examples have been documented: those best known are at Sa Costa (Sardara) and Antas (Fluminimaggiore), both in west central Sardinia (van Dommelen 1998: 96-100).

Standing stones are similarly related to funerary contexts since they are normally found standing along megalithic long barrows. Because the standing stones are usually part of Middle Bronze Age burial contexts, it is likely that the Monte Prama ones refer to older pre-Iron Age funerary traditions and monuments. Because they are made in another kind of limestone than the local one, the standing stones were probably carved elsewhere. It is indeed a distinct and intriguing possibility that they were taken from Bronze Age long barrows elsewhere in order to be re-erected at Monte

Prama. Since one or more rows of standing stones feature regularly near Bronze Ages barrows, such re-use would clearly signal a strong sense of continuity with the Nuragic past. It is indeed not inconceivable that the linear layout of the burials mirrored the elongated design of the Bronze Age communal burial monuments (Tronchetti in press).

The statues and *nuraghe* models further underscore the elite nature of Monte Prama. Given the close connections discussed earlier, the Monte Prama statues must be understood in reference to *bronze*ti in general and presumably carried similar connotations of power and warrior status. The absence of children and women among the statues excludes the possibility that they directly represented the buried individuals. It is worth noting that most of the Iron Age single burials on record, including the ones at Sa Costa and Antas mentioned above, have yielded a small statuette. The key feature of *bronze*ti is that, despite their island-wide occurrence, their distribution is actually very circumscribed, as they are exclusively found in high-ranking ritual and political contexts such as meeting huts and well-sanctuaries (Tronchetti 1997). In other words, they are closely associated with the Nuragic elites, too. This observation is significant, because it means that it is not only iconography and stylistic details that connect the Monte Prama statues to the *bronze*ti, but also the shared association with elite and burial contexts.

The *nuraghe* models fit seamlessly in this setting, as they are mostly found in contexts similar to those in which *bronze*ti occur. Because they are often prominently displayed on pedestals, the models can be regarded as powerful symbols that refer back to the Nuragic past of the Bronze Age *nuraghe* in general, and in the case of the four-towered models, perhaps even to specific myths which featured such a complex *nuraghe* (Blake 1997: 161). Being associated with key elite spaces both in the past and present, the *nuraghe* models are most likely

to have been adopted by the Iron Age elites as 'icons of power' and may even have been regarded as a source of traditional power (*paxe* Blake 1997: 161). The latter aspect nicely parallels the reference to the Bronze Age past evoked by the standing stones. While many models have been recovered from ritual contexts, none have been associated with burial, which confirms the suggestion that the Monte Prama site should not simply be regarded as an elaborate funerary complex.

Where do these observations and interpretations take us? The key point to make is surely that, for all their uniqueness, both the Monte Prama site and the statues are anything but an isolated phenomenon in Sardinian prehistory. Almost every single element can be traced elsewhere in the island, mostly to Nuragic contexts, but in the case of the statues perhaps also outside the island. Moreover, as made clear above, it is not only the Monte Prama statues that are unusual but the site as a whole; the conclusion therefore has to be that the statues are but one feature of the activities carried out at this site, albeit obviously a very prominent one.

It is for this reason that we certainly do not deny that the specific configuration of the Monte Prama site, including its statues, represents a remarkable and unusual feature in the Sardinian Iron Age. The sheer size of the statues in particular is unusual and they are quite likely inspired by external contacts while some of the stylistic details may indeed be understood in similar terms. What we do contend, however, is that the statues and indeed the site represented such an anomaly in Iron Age Sardinia that they can only be explained in terms of external initiative and examples. We argue on the contrary that the site and the statues were conceived in the specific local context of the Sinis and Iron Age west-central Sardinia more generally and drew on the available materials and traditions of that colonial context.

It is of course difficult to know exactly what the people at Monte Prama were doing—apart from every now and then burying an individual from a small selected group of people. The size of the statues and of the other types of material culture suggest that people would have come back to the site on a regular basis, perhaps for performing commemorative rituals. Just as important is the fact that Monte Prama is situated along the only communication route between S'Uraki and Tharros, and that anyone travelling overland to or from Tharros would have noted at least the statues as part of the Sinis landscape.

More specifically, we can suggest that those who were buried at Monte Prama must have been members of the local Iron Age elites and that they may well have resided at S'Uraki. Given the gender and age characteristics of the people buried at Monte Prama, it seems likely that they were members of one and the same elite kinship group (whether defined through real or perceived kinship ties). Since the site was in existence for many decades, it follows that this kinship group will have taken the lead in maintaining the site and presumably also in elaborating it over time. It was also in the course of this period of the second half of the 7th century BC that members of this group gradually intensified their contacts and dealings with the Phoenician communities, thus visiting Tharros on a regular basis. It must have been at some point during this period that this elite group received the scaraboid seal eventually deposited in burial 25 as well as the Cypriot bronze torch-holder found at S'Uraki. During this period, the changing settlement organization of the Nuragic communities had gradually shifted towards the interior regions of Sardinia, entailing among other things the abandonment of the well-sanctuary of Sant'Anastasia in Sardinia. The increasingly prominent Phoenician presence around the Bay of Oristano may thus have induced the leading elite group in the Sinis to create their

own site for ritual and civic display closer to home. While remaining entirely in line with the warrior ethos and references to the Bronze Age past of their time, they combined these elements in new and hybrid ways producing a new type of site that suited the new colonial context. The fact that the dominant feature of this new site was the burial of deceased elite members rather than a small well-sanctuary is, for instance, entirely in line with the increasing centralization of Nuragic society and the growing emphasis on kinship groups, which is evident in the new courtyard houses (cf. Webster 1996: 164–65). The reported existence of a handful of fragments of large statues similar to the Monte Prama ones in the well-sanctuary at Banatou in the northern Campidano suggests that these hybrid practices may have been part of a wider development (Stiglitz 2004: 809). In any case, these fragments contradict the alleged uniqueness of the Monte Prama statues and support our interpretation of local people engaging in hybrid practices in response to new circumstances.

Hybrid Practices and Entangled Objects

To conclude, we would like to draw attention to a number of issues of critical importance for understanding the meanings of the Monte Prama site and its many features.

First, we would like to reiterate that neither the Monte Prama statues nor the site as a whole are truly unique; and nor are they a 'mystery'. Instead, we have argued that all aspects of the site, including the statues, were borrowed and adapted from elsewhere, and that these features were reconstituted and given new meaning through hybrid practices of the local elite. It is these local elites who must therefore be credited with creating the original and novel character of the site. Attempts to classify Monte Prama as either a cemetery or a shrine are consequently beside the point, as it was both kinds of place at one and the same time.

Such a process of hybridization is not new or exceptional in itself. Its development makes perfect sense in the course of the later 7th century when contacts between the Phoenician and Nuragic Iron Age communities intensified and their physical presence in the region was reorganized and refocused.

A second point worth noting is that Monte Prama was constructed through the activities of the local Iron Age elite. The objects, activities and meanings that were adopted and adapted at Monte Prama were derived mostly from indigenous contexts but the hybridization process itself was very much influenced by the nearby presence of Phoenician settlers. The case of Monte Prama thus shows that colonial changes do not follow predictable pathways where colonial and indigenous cultures are 'blended' or replaced. It reminds us instead that the dialectic of the colonial encounter 'altered everyone and everything involved, if not all in the same manner and measure' through 'an intricate mix of visible and invisible agency' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 5 and 28). It is for this reason that the creation of innovative life-size statuary in (very) roughly contemporary contexts such as Iberia and Etruria cannot be called upon to explain or demonstrate the Monte Prama statues. Instead, it is our contention that this undoubtedly intriguing phenomenon requires locally focused contextual analysis as we have offered for the Monte Prama site.

Our third point that refers to material culture is captured by Nicholas Thomas's felicitous phrase 'entangled objects' (1991: 205–206). It highlights the material dimension of colonial situations by drawing attention to those items that have become subsumed in the colonial 'entanglement'. The Monte Prama statues represent a striking example of 'entangled objects' because the hybrid practices that constructed them were themselves features of the colonial context of the Sinis in the later Iron Age (see also Gosden 2004: 20).

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We have only touched upon the Nuragic and colonial landscapes of the Sinis in passing. The location of Monte Prama must have made it an integral part of the lives of people working and living in the Sinis. Located at the foot of a hill with a *nuraghe* and at least another dozen *nuraghi* on the surrounding Sinis hills, the pointers to the Bronze Age past provided by the standing stones and the *nuraghe* models on the site not only strongly reinforced the surrounding landscape, but may also have reminded people moving through the area of the rich and proud Bronze Age past.⁹ Located halfway between Tharros and the Iron Age settlements of the northern Sinis, Monte Prama is also likely to have marked a border or transition area between the spaces inhabited by the Phoenician settlers and the Nuragic Iron Age Sardinians.

As a final note, we suggest that our case study of Monte Prama helps to demonstrate how detailed and fine-grained analyses of specific local colonial contexts—rather than 'globalizing' overviews of Phoenician or British colonialism *tout court* (contra Gosden 2004: 24–25)—can provide keys to unravelling the hybrid and 'messy' intricacies of colonial situations.

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Notes

1. Work took place between 1977 and 1979 under the direction of Carlo Tronchetti on behalf of the *Soprintendenza archeologica per le province di Cagliari e Oristano*. The adjacent area had previously been excavated by Alessandro Bedini in 1974–75.
2. This cemetery was investigated shortly before the excavations discussed here and is usually referred to as 'scavi Bedini' (cf. note 1). Both these and the other sites in the area remain unpublished.
3. The scaraboid ($1 \times 1.6 \times 0.7$ cm) is made of

bone and is probably a Levantine product, belonging to the so-called 'pseudo-Hyksos' class. It cannot be dated very precisely but is nevertheless likely to have been manufactured in the 8th or 7th century BC, as Levantine and Egyptian scarabs and scaraboids of comparable types and materials have been found throughout the Greek and Phoenician world, including Sardinia (see for instance Mendelson 1987 for Tharros). It had originally been mounted on a ring, which suggests that it may have come from Cyprus, where comparable rings and amulets were known. This particular one was found in the fill of tomb 25 somewhat above the skull. While the high position of the object in the pit suggests that it was not necessarily a personal ornament of the deceased, the fact that it was found below the capstone as part of the fill of the pit, confirms at least the stratigraphic association with the burial. We thank Joanna S. Smith (New York, Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University) and Claudia Wagner (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum) for their advice and preliminary indications. See also Tronchetti 1986: 47. Photos of the scaraboid have been published by Barreca (1990: 297, fig. 11i) and Zucca (2005: 53, fig. 50).

4. The amphora is of the Bartoloni type D4, which is equivalent to Ramón's type 1.4.5.1 (Bartoloni 1988; Ramón Torres 1995). There are also various fineware fragments present that are roughly datable to the same period.
5. As has recently been suggested, these houses may already have begun to appear in the Late Bronze Age (Santoni 2001: 53).
6. See Zucca 2005 and Garau 2005 for the recently identified Phoenician phase of Neapolis.
7. A number of nuraghe models have reportedly been found in the central Sinis area (Stigliani 2003: 1115) but given the lack of context they can only be dated generally to the Iron Age.
8. An additional and potentially substantial complication is that identification of iron

Age occupation is largely dependent on a small range of indigenous fine wares (the so-called geometric and orientaling pottery) or colonial imports. Since both were probably only present in small quantities at lower-level nuraghi, this may well explain the apparent absence of Iron Age occupation at these sites. It is perhaps telling that these pottery classes have mostly been recognized at the largest settlements and ritual sites.

9. The area immediately around Monte Prama is the only part of the Sinis that has yielded early ('geometric') Iron Age remains (Funta Meiga), including a large fragment of an unusual nuraghe model depicting an individual climbing a nuraghe ('Cann' e Vadosu). The latter is unfortunately a poorly documented surface find (Tronchetti 1986: 46–47; Sebis 1998: 116; Stiglitz 2003: 115; see also above, note 7).

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Photography and Fiction: The Publication of the Excavations : Palace of Minos at Knossos

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Abstract

This paper discusses the photographs published by Sir Arthur Evans of the Bronze Age site of Knossos on Crete and gives special attention to those that exhibit evidence of alteration. The altered images are divided into three categories: Retouched for Clarity, Reconstruction, and Falsification. It is argued that although Evans most frequently altered excavation photographs for benign purposes, he also occasionally changed images of the site and archaeological materials in order to reflect his desired historical interpretations.

Introduction

The nature of proof is more complex than it seems to be at first sight. (Pettie 1904: 136)

Among the texts basic to the study of Aegean Prehistory is the 3,100+ page, four-volume publication of the excavation of the site of Knossos entitled *The Palace of Minos at Knossos: A Comparative Account of the Successive Stages of the Early Cretan Civilization as Illustrated by the Discoveries at Knossos* (hereafter *PoM*). Written by the excavator, Sir Arthur

Evans, it originally published thousands of objects and architectural passages which are essential to an understanding of the material part of the Minoans and Mycenaeans. Indeed, over 2,000 illustrations provide the reader with an indispensable visual account of these materials, many hundreds of which are original black-and-white photographs. When one looks carefully at these photographs, however, it becomes clear that some are a bit odd: the contrast in some is unnaturally high, focus

shifts from sharp to fuzzy in the same spatial plane, and occasionally a segment appears to be not photographic, but more painterly. In short, some of the photographs look as if they have been manually altered. Several of these altered photographs are of archaeological strata essential to Evans's arguments about the chronology and history of Knossos.

When Evans began excavation at the Bronze Age site of Knossos in northern central Crete in 1900, he was certainly aware of contemporary standards of archaeological excavation and publication, given (among other things) his affiliation with the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and memberships in the British Society of Antiquarians and the Royal Society of London. To work as a foreman at Knossos, Evans selected a young but already highly experienced excavator, Duncan Mackenzie, whose excavation and recording methods represented the contemporary state-of-the-art. At Knossos Mackenzie took many of the photographs which were used in the yearly report of the excavation's