

# Sardinia in the Roman World until Constantine

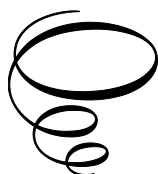


# Sardinia in the Roman World until Constantine

By

Attilio Mastino

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*To my son Paolo,  
because Cambridge was where it all began*

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## INTRODUCTION

The work aims to renew the interpretation of the history of Sardinia, which is no longer to be seen as isolated, but rather well-inserted in the Roman ecumene. It is inspired most of all by a great master, Arnold Toynbee, and his masterpiece, *Hannibal's Legacy*, which was published more than 50 years ago.<sup>1</sup> When Hannibal was born in Carthage (247 BC) the great Mediterranean island of Sardinia had been visited by the Carthaginians for centuries. His father Hamilcar had watch in horror from the sanctuary of Astarte in the city of Erice (Trapani) on the westernmost point of Sicily, as the Roman navy ambushed the Carthaginian fleet. On ships equipped with metallic rostrums they attacked the similarly equipped Carthaginians, after emerging from hiding behind the Aegadian islands (Levanzo).<sup>2</sup> This led to a disastrous naval defeat resulting in the loss of Sicily, and three years later, following a revolt of the mercenaries, Sardinia as well.

If we are to give credence to Polybius, the Romans usurped Sardinia with dishonest means and unacceptable justifications. They occupied a vast, densely populated and fertile island, with no provocation whatsoever, many months after the treaty that ended the first Punic war. This is deemed to be the main cause for Hannibal's war, which was waged as a direct result of the treacherous occupation of the towns, the land and the mines by mercenaries hired by the Romans. Exasperated, and suffering considerable personal financial loss, Amilcare convinced his son to take a vow of eternal hatred for Rome, perhaps in the sanctuary on the hill of Baal Hammon-Saturnus (on Djebel Bou Kornine) or in the tophet of Carthage.

Deprived of the "Island with the veins of silver" and having lost his *latifundia* and his mines, Amilcare decided to found a New Carthage at the entrance to a mine in the Iberian peninsula. It was from here that Hannibal is said to have departed on his mission to vindicate his father and the Carthaginians. Having occupied Sagunto, he invaded the territory of Marseilles, marched over the Alps and reached central and southern Italy, which was destined to be devastated by a long period of war. His real

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<sup>1</sup> A.J. Toynbee, *Hannibal's legacy*, Oxford University Press, London 1965.

<sup>2</sup> M.I.P. Gulletta, *Le fonti storiche come strumento per la cartografia. Aree di grandi battaglie nella Sicilia antica*, "Bollettino A.I.C.", 144-146, 2012, pp. 75-93.

legacy was the devastation and widespread poverty of the following centuries, which provoked the Gracchi affair and later the civil wars.

Hannibal's misfortunate ally in the *Bellum Sardum* was *Hampsicora*. From this moment onwards the myriad cultural, linguistic, institutional, juridical and economic remnants of the Palaeosardinians and Carthaginians contributed to the provoke incredible hostility on the part of the Romans. This was expressed by way of wanton destruction, the cutting down of entire forests, killings, and the capture of many Sardinians, among who in many cases, the structures of the local, prehistoric, Nuragic,<sup>3</sup> Phoenician, Villanovan and Etruscan society and culture had survived. This was a culture that consisted of far more than the sole Punic experience and was by no means illiterate.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it was one that was endowed with a complexity and dignity that has received no recognition whatsoever.

Scholars have gone so far as to speak of a general depopulation and a veritable "demographic crisis" in some parts of the island that were laid waste by the armies that had decided to sever the bond that continued to unite the Sardinians with each other and with Carthage. This prompted the administrative reorganisation (juridical and the borders between towns and peoples), the forced acculturation of the local *principes*, continuing with the consequent exploitation of resources and the profound environmental and cultural transformations. The gaze of the scholars has today become more penetrating and problematic, in relation to the many archaeological excavations, such as those carried out in Nora, Sulci, Olbia and Turrus Libisonis, in particular, but also in the rural areas, such as Marrubiu, Mesumundu or Rebeccu, with attention being paid to public buildings, and those for shows, wellbeing and leisure.

Transformed into *stipendiarii*, the Sardinians were profoundly humiliated and were obliged to pay a *stipendium* to finance the occupying Roman troops from their own pockets. Thousands of Sardinians were taken prisoner, sold as slaves, or even killed. With the exclusion of the ancient Roman colony of Feronia, on the mouth of Rio Posada, which is dated to the start of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, after the destruction of the African metropolis (146 BC) many territories in the island was colonised and occupied by soldiers and families that had arrived from Campania (the *Patulcenses*), Magna Grecia (the *Euthichiani*), Sicily (the *Siculenses*), from Corsica (the *Corsi*), Etruria (the *Falisci*), and then from Apulia (the

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<sup>3</sup> G. Lilliu, *Sopravvivenze nuragiche in età romana*, in *L'Africa romana* VII, 1990, pp. 415-446.

<sup>4</sup> See tough R. Zucca, *Storiografia del problema della 'scrittura nuragica'*, "Bollettino di Studi Sardi", 5, 2012, pp. 5-78.

*sodales Buduntini*), from Cirenaica (the *Beronicenses*) and from Africa (the *Mauri*). The *agri*, *praedia*, and even the *metalla* were then measured and allocated to colonialists from outside the island, with a very precise system of archive registration in the *tabularia*, the local and central land registry offices.

New towns were established, such as that of Valentia, by will of the consul Metellus in 115 BC, which after Augustus became the headquarters of a prefecture in the colony of Uselis. A large part of the territory became *ager publicus populi Romani*. We later now of many imperial latifundia, belonging to the *res privata* or to the *patrimonium*. Further income went to the *aerarium* of the Senate or the Imperial *fiscus*.

With the “second Roman occupation of Sardinia” (Marc Mayer), which took place after the military campaigns entrusted to the consuls and the proconsuls of the 2nd c. BC, Sardinia slowly started to enter the Roman sphere, also from a cultural point of view. Even in 54 BC, Cicero (in his *Pro Scauro*) ruled out that there were Roman towns or colonies on the island, or that there were towns that were friendly to the Roman people and were free and not under the yoke of military power. He spoke of a single *natio Sarda*, that pigeon-holed into a single group peoples that were easily distinguishable on the basis of appearance, dress, skin colour, language, political policies and traditions, such as the *Sardi Pelliti*, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians. Arpinate deliberately omitted the colony founded by the *populares* in Corsica (Mariana) and the opposing one, Aleria “Veneria” founded by will of Sulla.

Yet even it was precisely Cicero who confirmed that a nucleus had survived that was above all cultural. It was able to absorb external cultures but also to transform the Italic immigrants, assimilating them with the natives, giving Sardinian culture in the Roman era a distinct and unique character in the Mediterranean. After all, in the Roman world the island was never part of Italy, but was rather a province located on the other side of a wide tract of sea, administered by magistrates, pro-magistrates or other types of governors (praetors, consuls, pro-consuls and functionaries endowed with military command, at times only civil functionaries of the higher echelons).

In this way it maintained its “speciality”, which can be read like filigree jewellery through the centuries, as the Roman governance was not always superimposed over the preceding local autonomy, in many cases these survived in a patchy fashion, with vast tracts of the rural areas that were abandoned by provincial power.

It was the *populares*, in particular Caesar and then Augustus, who initiated the process of “Romanisation”, which never completely eclipsed

the local culture, but which became unstoppable, above all by way of the allotment of fertile lands, the reduction of colonies and the institutional promotion of the municipalities. A new image then emerged: that of the happy island (*eudàimon*), that was blessed with a mythical *eukarpia* inhabited by the Nymphs of the sea and of the land (such as in the *Numphàion limén* and in the warm springs or in the rivers), a place without snakes, wolves or dangerous animals, free of poisonous plants, thanks to the protection of Diana and Sylvan, the gods of the mountain woods on the *Montes Insani*. On the coast, the name of *Olbia* is testimony to the fact that the Greek sailors already saw the island as being a felicitous place.

According to Diodorus Siculus the peoples that lived there were still free in the era of Caesar, as freedom is the privilege of islanders.<sup>5</sup> We witness an extension of the *latifundia* of the large senatorial families (the *Domitii* in Olbia, the *Bennii* and the *Herennii* in Carales, many other *clarissimi* that we know from the *instrumentum* and from the sarcophagi)<sup>6</sup> as well as that of the Imperial estate.

However, a certain stability was arrived at in the era of the Antonine and the Severan dynasties, which led to an integration of the Sardinians into “Romanness”, to the diffusion of written culture, to access to the classical literary tradition, as is testified to by many elegant *carmina*<sup>7</sup> and artistic documents,<sup>8</sup> to a recognition of the role of women, *sibi suffice(n)s*,<sup>9</sup> with profound changes in artistic taste. All this led above all

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<sup>5</sup> For the judgment of Diod. IV, 29-30 e V, 15, see I. Didu, *I Greci e la Sardegna. Il mito e la storia*, Scuola Sarda Editrice, Cagliari 2002, pp. 94-107. How can we not think of Montesquieu and the island peoples freed from slavery? See D. Felice, *Oppressione e libertà. Filosofia e anatomia del dispotismo nel pensiero di Montesquieu*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2020. p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> R. Zucca, *Senatori nella Sardinia, Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo*. Atti della XIX<sup>e</sup> Rencontre sur l'épigraphie du Monde Romain, M.L. Caldelli, G.L. Gregori (Eds.) (Tituli, 10), Edizioni Quasar, Rome 2014, pp. 341-352.

<sup>7</sup> P. Cugusi (Ed.), *Carmina Latina epigraphica provinciae Sardiniae*, Pàtron, Bologna 2003; for ex. P. Floris, *Giovenale a Laconi*, in Ruri mea vixi colendo. *Studi in onore di Franco Porrà*, A.M. Corda, P. Floris (Eds.), Sandhi, Ortacesus 2012, pp. 205-216, about *ILSard. I 180*, from Juvenal, *Sat. 6*, 268-269: *Semper habet lites alternaque iurgia lectus, in quo nupta iacet; minimum dormitur in illo*.

<sup>8</sup> Just an example: G. Lopez Monteagudo, P. San Nicolas Pedraz, *La iconografia del rapto de Europa en el Mediterráneo occidental. A proposito de una lucerna del Museo de Sassari*, in *L'Africa Romana VIII*, 1991, pp. 1005-1018.

<sup>9</sup> P. Ruggeri, *Il prestigio di una vedova: l'elogio di Elia Cara Marcellina, un caso di indipendenza finanziaria nella Nora romana?*, in *Epigrafia romana in Sardegna*. Atti del I Convegno di studio (Sant'Antioco, 14-15 luglio 2007), F. Cenerini, P. Ruggeri (Eds.) (Incontri insulari, 1), Carocci, Rome 2008, pp. 137-146

to a perspective of multicultural co-existence and prompted considerable development, even though the Sardinian maintained their own specific identity and autonomous administration over vast districts.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, one should avoid idealising the Roman phase of the history of Sardinia, if for no other reason than that of the exaltation with which it was viewed in the past, and even today. It is true that it was certainly rich in innovation and new perspectives, providing an opening to Mediterranean horizons, but at the same time long shadows were cast by grave social injustice, such as the presence of slavery, which existed in varying forms for a millennium, the unequal distribution of wealth, the exaltation of imperialism, militarism and power.

This volume ends with Constantine, even though we know that the long Roman phase of the history of Sardinia did not end with the “peace of the church”, and it was almost eight centuries long, extending fully into that which we call the “Byzantine era”, the result of Constantine’s foundation of the New Rome. This was a very long period, rich in events, full of contradictions and cultural ferment emanating from the centre towards the periphery, but also from the periphery towards the centre. This was a process that greatly conditioned the successive phases of Sardinian history, from the era of the Giudici onwards, if these are to be truly considered “the last institutional descendants of the ancient Roman governors of the Imperial province”.<sup>11</sup>

With this volume we will attempt to put to good use the lessons of many masters, starting from the necessity to explore the borders between “Romanisation” and cultural continuity (between *Change* and *Continuity*) to adopt Robert Rowland’s model, notably rectified by Peter van Dommelen, who underlined that the other face of the “Romanisation” coin was the persistence of Punic features in some realities of Republican Sardinia.<sup>12</sup> Indeed we must take into account the recent debate about the theme of “Romanisation” that has often appeared to be excessive and

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<sup>10</sup> S. Lefevbre (dir.), *Quis sum ? Provincialis ? Manifestations identitaires dans le cadre supra-civique. Les identités provinciales et régionales*, Dijon 2022.

<sup>11</sup> L. Gallinari, *Sulla data di morte di Eleonora d'Arborea. Nuove riflessioni e nuovi dati ispirati da un vecchio testo*, in *Elanora de Arboree. Sa Juighissa*, G. Mele (Ed.), S'Alvure, Oristano, 2021, pp. 31-37.

<sup>12</sup> P. van Dommelen, *Punic persistence: colonialism and cultural identities in Roman Sardinia*, in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire (Proc. Reading 1995)*, E. Laurence, J. Berry (Eds.), London-New York, 1998, pp. 25-49; M. Rowlands, P. van Dommelen, *Material Culture and Postcolonial Theory*, London 2009; P. van Dommelen (Ed.), *Rural Archaeologies* (World Archaeology, 51.2), Routledge, London 2019.

misleading, even reaching the point of denying the evidence.<sup>13</sup> The moment has perhaps arrived in which we can consider the complexity of cultural exchange to be a given, taking for granted “the absence of ‘pure’ cultures, the continuity and originality of local cultures even after the Roman conquest, as well as the different specificities of the provincial world, the national, ethnic and peripheral realities”.<sup>14</sup> The time has come for us to resist the easy temptation of adopting abstract interpretative categories and to define impossible unitary solutions, with contrived ideological models that do not always take into account the complexity of the issues at hand.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who have been very generous with me, in particular David Brett for his translation of this work, Antonio M. Corda (director of Unicapress), Paolo Maninchedda (director of the series *Sardiniae memoria*), Salvatore Naitana (ISSLA), Giacomo Spissu (Fondazione di Sardegna), Paola Ruggeri (Interdisciplinary Study Center on the Roman Provinces, University of Sassari) and Cambridge Scholars Publishing limited. However, it is important to remember that behind this book there is the passionate work in the field of many colleagues who work courageously on large scale projects that are ever more of an international level. Projects that allow us to view history, religious, myth and the Imperial cult in a light that we believe is truly original.

In the background of this book we can certainly see the experience that we carry within us, that of the history of the Roman provinces, starting from the lesson provided by our friend and teacher Joyce Reynolds (London 1918-Cambridge 2022), who I would like to remember today.

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<sup>13</sup> G.A. Cecconi, *Romanizzazione, diversità culturale, politicamente corretto*, “MEFRA”, 118, 2006, pp. 81-94. Vaguely colonial are the concepts that some consider politically more correct and that they would like to adopt because they are more fashionable: “acculturation”, “integration into Romanity”, “assimilation”, even “creolization” or “crossbreeding”, with a truly disarming superficiality and an uncritical reference to categories of anthropological literature referring to the modern age, with the only result of denying the identity of Sardinia, because it is not found to be perfectly free from external elements: see A. Ibba, *Processi di “romanizzazione” nella Sardinia repubblicana e alto-imperiale (III a.C.-II d.C.)*, in *Colonization and Romanization in Moesia Inferior. Premises of a contrastive approach*, L. Mihailescu-Bîrliba (Ed.), Parthenon Verlag, Kaiserslautern und Mehlingen 2015, pp. 11-76.

<sup>14</sup> An excellent summary: F. Buscemi, *Processi di contatto e interazione culturale nel mondo romano. Per un riesame delle Posizioni teoriche*, in *Ricerche e attività del corso internazionalizzato di archeologia, Catania, Varsavia, Konya, 2009-2012*, P. Militello, M. Camera (Eds.) (Syndesmoi 3), Palermo 2012, pp. 141-151.

She started to attend our Africa Romana conferences in Sassari, from the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting (December 1986) and was ever present up to the 20<sup>th</sup> conference in Alghero 2013, representing the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge.

I also met her in Britain, in Oxford in September 2007 on the occasion of the AIEGL Congress.<sup>15</sup> Over the years we have had many occasions to read her works and meet her students. Joyce Reynolds had many merits, especially that of facilitating communication between different generations. She did not oppose the digital revolution, but instead welcomed it. She opened up English epigraphic research of the Italian post-colonial phase in Libia to a vaster community of scholars in an international setting, where Italian archaeologists often worked beside her in an environment of mutual respect and appreciation.

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<sup>15</sup> A. Mastino, *La Libia di Joyce Reynolds nei convegni de L'Africa Romana*, in A. Saleh Shariff, S. Walker, A. Mastino, *In memoria di Joyce M. Reynolds (1918-2022), protagonista dell'epigrafia di Libia*, "Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia", 25-26, 2024, pp. 211-219.

# CHAPTER 1

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STUDIES: FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETATION BASED ON PASSION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

### 1 The birth of the discipline: Giovanni Francesco Fara

The search for the mythical “lost civilisation” in Sardinia is to be attributed to some late humanistic antiquarians, amongst whom Rodrigo Nuño Baeza in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (about 1516), author of *Caralis Panegyricus*,<sup>1</sup> and Antonius Augustinus who later became the bishop of Tarragon (1517-86).<sup>2</sup> Later on, but still in the era of the Spanish domination of the island, an important role was played also by the archbishops of Cagliari and Torres, who were involved in a frantic search for the relics of the martyrs of the main seats of the dioceses, which are today viewed by the scholars with caution, if not outright suspicion.<sup>3</sup>

In reality, the person who initiated studies into the history of Sardinia in the 1500s was the humanist Giovanni Francesco Fara (1543-1591). Fara was the true founder of the discipline with his work *De rebus Sardois*, partly published in 1580, and later completed at Turin by Cibrario in 1835. It was republished in 1992 by Gallizzi Publishing, with a critical

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<sup>1</sup> F. Porrà, *Osservazioni sul materiale epigrafico citato da Roderigo Hunno Baeza nel “Caralis Panegyricus”*, “AFLC”, n.s., 1, 1976-77, pp. 181-188; A. Ibba, M.T. Laneri, *L'epigrafe in mostra: brevi note di un umanista spagnolo nella Càller del XVI secolo*, in *L'iscrizione esposta*. Atti del Convegno Borghesi 2015, A. Donati (Ed.) (Epigrafia e Antichità, 37), F.lli Lega Editori, Faenza 2016, pp. 307-333.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ibba, “*La carta 53v del Matricensis Q 87 e le antiquitates rinvenute a Caralib. in Sardinia*”, in *Antonio Agustín, arquebisbe i humanista*, J. Carbonell Manils (Ed.), Real Acadèmia Catalana de Bones Lletres, Barcelona 2019, pp. 121-143.

<sup>3</sup> D. Mureddu, D. Salvi, G. Stefani, Sancti innumerabiles, *Scavi nella Cagliari del Seicento. Testimonianze e verifiche*, S'Alvure, Oristano 1988.

introduction by Enzo Cadoni.<sup>4</sup> The work of the antiquarian, which was compromised considerably by the use of the work of Annio di Viterbo, “an imposter infamous for his publication of the supposed writings of Berosus”,<sup>5</sup> was the result of a series, that of the humanistic studies of the 1500s, of which the aforementioned *Caralis Panegyricus* was definitely a highpoint.

In order to obtain a more realistic view of the events relating to the history of Sardinia in the Roman period, we have to move forward in time and put to one side Montesquieu (*Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur de Romains et de leur décadence*, Paris 1748) and reach the 1800s. The contributions made by a number of scholars, including Giuseppe Manno, Carlo Alberto Della Marmora, Giovanni Spano, Luigi Amedeo, Piero Tamponi, Ettore Pais, and Camillo Bellieni, are now considered to be outdated, but should be evaluated in the context of their own time. With their many different voices, these authors testified to a multiplicity of approaches, which from time to time, emphasised the resistance of the Sardinians to Romanisation (Bellieni) or to the civilising function of Rome in the Mediterranean (Pais). The theme of the role of travellers, antiquarians and archaeologists in the reconstruction of the history of Roman Sardinia has been examined also in relation to individual towns and localities, such as the very recent publication concerning Nora.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Giuseppe Manno

We may start by taking into examination the work of the baron Giuseppe Manno (1786-1867), in particular the first two volumes of *Storia di Sardegna* [History of Sardinia], which were first published in Turin between 1825 and 1826,<sup>7</sup> in a period that not only preceded the falsification of the Arborea Papers,<sup>8</sup> but also the great archaeological and epigraphic discov-

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<sup>4</sup> G.F. Fara, *Ioannis Francisci Farae Opera*, E. Cadoni (Ed.), with the collaboration of R. Turtas et al, vol. 1: In Sardiniae Chorographiam; Biblioteca; vol. 2: De rebus Sardois, libri I-II; vol. 3: De rebus Sardois, libri III-IV, Gallizzi, Sassari 1992.

<sup>5</sup> I, p. 23, see E. Cadoni, *La Biblioteca di Giovanni Francesco Fara*, in G.F. Fara, *Ioannis Francisci Farae, Opera*, critical edition by E. Cadoni, Sassari 1992, p. 298 and p. 367 n. 820, in relation to the use by Fara of the cosmogonic work of the Babilonian historian Berosus, who lived between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.

<sup>6</sup> A. Mazzariol, A. Zara, *Nora, Viaggiatori, antichisti e archeologi. Storia delle ricerche e degli studi tra XVI e XX secolo* (Scavi di Nora, XI), Quasar, Rome 2023.

<sup>7</sup> G. Manno, *Storia di Sardegna*, I, Turin 1825.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Carte d'Arborea. Falsi e falsari nella Sardegna del XIX secolo*, L. Marrocu (Ed.), Cagliari 1997, see A. Mastino, P. Ruggeri, *I falsi epigrafici romani delle*

eries that offered new horizons for historical reconstruction. Manno's reflections constitute an exception in the panorama of the writings of the 1800s: while not yet sullied with fakes, it was however in a period before the activity of the priest Giovanni Spano, the pioneer of archaeology in Sardinia. This explains many of the limitations of the work, in particular those relating to the Imperial Roman period, as he was not able to avail of the topographic and archaeological research, neither were the numerous Latin inscriptions at his disposal. These texts were often of a public nature, regarding provincial and municipal administration.<sup>9</sup> They would only appear and start to be studied from the mid-1800s onwards and in 1883 they were inserted in Volume X of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* with an excessively strict separation between the *falsae vel alienae* inscriptions and those that were considered to be authentic.<sup>10</sup> Manno's work was in reality overly hasty and premature, and while it is true that the author had not acquired the skills needed to carry out philological analysis and the depth of historical research, at times it displays calm reflection, not lacking in insight and irony, which distances it clearly from the position of all the previous scholars. In particular, Manno did away with the annalistic approach adopted in the work of Fara and his followers. Instead he interacted in new ways with the literary sources, which were used with aplomb and considerable amplitude. Its many limits aside, the foundations of the work appear solid, starting from the myths of the earliest colonisations of the island "fabulous tales", that oftentimes conserve an "imperceptible germ of truth", whether these relate to the prehistoric or protohistoric period, that of the Greek colonisation or the Roman phase. The success of Manno's work later led not only to the romantic exaltation of the hero Hampsicora, a protagonist in the *Bellum Sardum* in the era of Hannibal,

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*Carte d'Arborea*, pp. 219-274, repeated in P. Ruggeri, *Alla ricerca dei corpi santi in Sardegna: l'epigrafia latina tra scoperte archeologiche e falsificazioni*, EDES, Sassari 2012, pp. 81-131; A.M. Corda, A. Ibba, *La (cattiva) coscienza del falsario. Ricerca e produzione di iscrizioni latine in Sardegna fra XVI e XIX*, in *La falsificazione epigrafica. Questioni di metodo e casi di studio*, L. Calvelli (Ed.) (Antichistica 25; Storia ed epigrafia 8), Venice 2019, pp. 103-125.

<sup>9</sup> R. Zucca, *Il patrimonio epigrafico della Sardegna romana, caratteri generali*, in *La Sardegna romana e altomedievale. Storia e materiali*, in S. Angiolillo, R. Martorelli, M. Giuman, A.M. Corda, D. Artizzu (Eds.), Carlo Delfino editore, Sassari 2017, pp. 161-170.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Mastino, *Il viaggio di Theodor Mommsen e dei suoi collaboratori in Sardegna per il Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, in *Theodor Mommsen e l'Italia*, (Atti dei Convegni Lincei, 207), Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome 2004, pp. 227-344, with the collaboration of R. Mara and E. Pittau.

but it also determined the interest and piqued the imagination of the forgers of the Arborea papers, who were immediately denounced and thwarted



**Fig. 1-1** Royal Museums of Turin, Orphaeus from Cagliari (ph. Attilio Mastino) Authorization to use images June 3, 2025.

by the German scholars.<sup>11</sup> In these pages the interest of the Savoia family emerges transversally. It became ever more acute, leading to the recuperation of the great Mosaic of Orpheus in Cagliari, to the transfer to the Museum of Antiquities of Turin of the trilingual of San Nicolò Gerrei (*CIL* X 7856, *IG* XIV 608, *CIS* I 143),<sup>12</sup> and to the hoax of the finds

<sup>11</sup> A. Mastino, *La Sardegna dalle origini all'età vandolica nell'opera di Giuseppe Manno*, "SS", XXXIV, 2009, pp. 271-300.

<sup>12</sup> E. Culasso Gastaldi, *L'iscrizione trilingue del Museo di Antichità di Torino (dedicante greco, ambito punico, età romana)*, "Epigraphica", LXII, 2000, pp. 11-28.

artificially rendered at Tharros for the use and consumption of Carlo Alberto.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 Alberto Ferrero della Marmora and the forgers of the Arborea papers

At the same time, in 1826, the first volume of Conte A. Ferrero della Marmora's<sup>14</sup> *Voyage en Sardaigne ou description statistique, phisyque et politique de cette île avec des recherches sur ses productions naturelles et ses antiquités*, Paris, Delaforest Libraires,<sup>15</sup> was published. This was followed by Atlas (by this stage completely contaminated by the Arborea papers) and in 1860 by *Itinéraire de l'île de Sardaigne*,<sup>16</sup> with a great deal of concession to falsification, used to assuage the egos of the Savoia<sup>17</sup> and to accompany the Island into the Kingdom of Sardinia (later the Kingdom of Italy), accepting a colonial vision as a given, using as a point of departure a sense of inferiority that was the result, in that time and still today, of limited knowledge of the history of the Island.

It is precisely as a result of this attempt to build an imaginary history from scratch, that the activity of the forgers of the Arborea papers developed in the 1800s with a devastating effect, as they distorted the historical reconstruction with the invention of documents found in distinctly suspect archives, above all linked to the Judgedom (“Giudicato”) of Arborea. Pietro Martini, Ignazio Pillitto, Salvatorangelo De Castro and Gavino Nino were responsible for the production of an enormous quantity of parchments, with texts in prose and poetry, written in a large variety of languages. The relationships with the archaeologists are still unclear, and the position of Giovanni Spano (1803-1878), viewed with fondness, indulgence, and mildly suspected of being implicated by Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903),<sup>18</sup> who saw him as having a

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<sup>13</sup> R. Zucca, *L'archeologia in Sardegna e Carlo Alberto*, in *Carlo Alberto. Archeologo in Sardegna*, G. Pantò (Ed.), Turin 2018, pp. 23-31.

<sup>14</sup> Alberto della Marmora (1789-1863).

<sup>15</sup> Italian translation: A. (De) La Marmora, *Viaggio in Sardegna*, translation by V. Martelli, Cagliari 1926-28.

<sup>16</sup> See *Itinerario dell'isola di Sardegna tradotto e compendiato con note* by canon. Giovanni Spano, Cagliari 1868.

<sup>17</sup> G. Pantò, R. Zucca, *Carlo Alberto archeologo in Sardegna, Gli idoli bugiardi*, All'insegna del giglio, Florence 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding Giovanni Spano (1803-1878), see R. Bonu, *Scrittori sardi nati nel secolo XIX, con notizie storiche e letterarie dell'epoca*, II, Sassari 1961, pp. 306ff; A. Mastino, *Il “Bullettino Archeologico Sardo” e le “Scoperte”: Giovanni Spano ed*





**Fig. 1-3** Cagliari, Palazzo Regio. The Romans attack the Ilienses on the Montes Insani (Domenico Bruschi, 1894). The epigraphy of Filippo Vivante: *Ilienses asperorum montium incolae, anno DLXXI ab urbe condita pauperes sed liberas sedes desperate Romanorum iugo contendunt.*

## 4 The fragile Giovanni Spano facing Theodor Mommsen

We now arrive at the years following the “perfect fusion” of Sardinia with the States on the mainland (from 1847 onwards) and with United Italy (from 1860 to 1871). It was precisely Father Giovanni Spano who was the brainchild behind the “*Il Bullettino Archeologico Sardo*” [the Sardinian Archaeological Bulletin], the first edition of which was published in 1855. With his programme manifesto, which was distributed in Cagliari on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1854, he desired to “light in the hearts of my patriots that sacred flame, which still has not been extinguished, of classical knowledge, and to reawaken amongst the youth the love for arts and classical studies” [my translation]. This had the aim of contrasting the flourishing trade in antiquities that was emerging, to favour, on the other hand, the birth of small museums in the main cities of the island, “to enrich the glory of our homeland”. The aim was that of documenting the “ancient splendour” of Sardinia, a land that features “countless ancient monuments”, and obvious and marked emphasis on regionalism based on the “value” and “virtues” of the Sardinians, which inevitably came into conflict with the adhesion to the project for national Italian unity, which Spano fought for even in moment of conflict between the church and the state, for “*Roma capitale*”.<sup>19</sup>

The *Bullettino* was published on a regular basis for 10 years, starting from 1855, in parallel with the ongoing affaire of the discovery of the Arborea Papers, which found in the journal not only constant support, but also very precise consonance in terms of highlights, ideology and aims. The *Bullettino* was in fact officially suspended in 1864, due to a low number of subscribers (about 60) and the excessive expenses faced by Spano at the Tipografia Timon in Cagliari. Two years later, when publishing a monography on a series of Nuragic bronze figurines found in the village of Teti, Spano placed a section in the appendix entitled *Scoperte archeologiche fattesi nell'isola in tutto l'anno 1865* [Archaeological discoveries made in the island during the year 1865], as if to make up for lost time and to provide news about the main discoveries that were made.

“Since 1864 saw the suspension of the publication of *Bullettino Archeologico Sardo*, which we constantly supported for 10 years, we have therefore decided to provide here a review of the ancient monuments and the artefacts that have been discovered all over the island over the last year, with the aim of keeping the lovers of Sardinian antiquities happy, until the moment comes when we can resume the periodical publication of

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<sup>19</sup> See A. Accardo, *La nascita del mito d'una nazione sarda*, Cagliari 1996, p. 16.

*Bullettino*” [my translation]. Therefore Spano was thinking only of a temporary interruption of the journal. However, for reasons that were explicitly declared (and also perhaps for other reasons harder to confess to, perhaps linked to the *affaire* of the Arborea Papers), in the series of the “discoveries”, which was issued up to 1875, attention was focussed on finds, on facts, on authentic epigraphic documents, well beyond any suspicion of falsification. Yet Spano had been criticised by the academic world of Cagliari, which was traditionally-minded and clerical, for having neglected university lecturing for the “trifles of vernacular language” and the “trinkets of archaeology”. Two years later Theodor Mommsen visited Cagliari: this scholar had declared the Arborea Papers to be false some time before and announced that he wanted to condemn the inscriptions as being “of monkish origin”.<sup>20</sup> A string of embarrassing disputes cast a shadow over the visit (October 1877), above all in Cagliari and Oristano, where the German scholar appeared to have denied the historical existence of the Judge Eleonora, precisely while preparations were underway to erect a marble statue of her sculpted by the Florentine artist Ulisse Cambi. The inauguration was postponed as a result, and the celebrative monument by the architect Mariano Falcini was concluded only three years later.<sup>21</sup> The trip was marred by the later fire at the library of Charlottenburg (12<sup>th</sup> July 1880), which wreaked particular damage on the documentation regarding Sardinia, especially the facsimiles and epigraphic casts. It was necessary for a second trip to take place, that of the thirty-year-old Johannes Schmidt (1850-1894), a visit illustrated in the many letters sent to Mommsen that are conserved at the State Library in Berlin.

Mommsen also left many other disciples in Sardinia: Luigi Amedeo (1848-1923),<sup>22</sup> Piero Tamponi (1850-1898),<sup>23</sup> Filippo Nissardi (1852-1922) and Ettore Pais (1856-1939).

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<sup>20</sup> P. Ruggeri, D. Sanna, *L'epigrafia paleocristiana della Sardegna: Theodor Mommsen e la condanna delle "falsae"*, in *La Sardegna paleocristiana tra Eusebio e Gregorio Magno*. Atti del Convegno Nazionale di studi (Cagliari 1996), Cagliari 1999, pp. 405-435.

<sup>21</sup> M.L. Piredda, *Il monumento ad Eleonora d'Arborea. Scena, retroscena, indagini e prospettive*, Rome 2021.

<sup>22</sup> P. Ruggeri, *Un'opera poco nota di un allievo di Ettore De Ruggiero. La Sardegna romana e l'antiquaria dell'Ottocento in Luigi Amedeo*, in *Dal mondo antico all'età contemporanea. Studi in onore di Manlio Brigaglia*, Carocci, Rome 2001, pp. 119-150.

<sup>23</sup> P. Ruggeri, G. Kapatsoris, *Pietro Tamponi (1850-1898)*, “SS”, 33, 2000, pp. 99-141.



University of Sassari.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the presence of foreign travellers in the island, which had characterised the 1800s, continued, with a visit by Thomas Ashby, who had marked archaeological interests.<sup>25</sup>

Ettore Pais had worked on the classical sources with reference to Sardinia in an excellent learned volume published from 1881 onwards, *Sardegna prima del dominio romano. Studio storico e archeologico* [Sardinia before the Roman Domination. A historical and archaeological study], a cornerstone in the field, one displaying an incredible knowledge of the ancient writers.<sup>26</sup> He had almost certainly read Edmund S. Bouchier's small book, *Sardinia in ancient Times*, Blackwell, Oxford 1917, which is of great interest, despite being still influenced by the Arborea Papers.<sup>27</sup> When the publisher Attilio Nardecchia issued his *Storia della Sardegna e della Corsica durante il dominio romano* [The history of Sardinia and Corsica during the Roman domination] in Rome in 1923, Ettore Pais (Academic at the Lincei and Senator for life of the Kingdom of Italy) had been reading for some time at the University of Rome and had by now reached the age of 67. This was hence a work produced in full maturity, especially if we bear in mind that Pais had started to work on Sardinian topics almost half a century before, from the graduation thesis defended at the Superior Institute for Historical Studies of Florence dedicated to the sardonic smile, a theme that led him to examine in greater detail the meaning of the Homeric expression relating to the threatening and ironic behaviour of Ulysses towards the suitors in the Odyssey. This was a felicitous subject, one which had already been worked on in a slightly superficial manner by Giovanni Spano, and which has recently been re-examined a number of times.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A. Mastino, *Il Museo Archeologico dell'Università di Sassari nell'Ottocento: la visita di Theodor Mommsen e la direzione di Ettore Pais*, "Annali di storia delle Università italiane", 11, 2007, pp. 381-413.

<sup>25</sup> *La Sardegna di Thomas Ashby. Paesaggi Archeologia Comunità. Fotografie 1906-1912*, G. Manca di Mores (Ed.), Carlo Delfino editore, Sassari 2014. Ashby was preceded by the Dominican priest Peter Paul Mackey, see R. Zucca, *L'archeologia in Sardegna allo scorcio del XIX secolo*, in *Immagini dal passato. La Sardegna archeologica di fine Ottocento nelle fotografie inedite del padre domenicano inglese Peter Paul Mackey*, Sassari-Rome 2000, pp. 57-59.

<sup>26</sup> "Atti della Regia Accademia dei Lincei. Memorie", s. III, VII, pp. 355-366.

<sup>27</sup> A. Mastino, *Ettore Pais e la Sardegna romana*, in *Aspetti della storiografia di Ettore Pais*, L. Polverini (Ed.), ESI, Naples 2002, pp. 249-300.

<sup>28</sup> For all of these, see G. Paulis, *Le «ghiande marine» e l'erba del riso sardonico negli autori greco-romani e nella tradizione dialettale sarda*, "Quaderni di semantica", I, 1993, pp. 9-23.

On the whole, we can state that for decades Pais had delayed the publication of *Storia della Sardegna e della Corsica durante il dominio romano*, an overview in preparation for which he had started to collect a vast amount of archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, literary and juridical material, visiting the museums and main localities, while deciding against travelling to Corsica for reasons of misguided patriotism. The idea of writing this work had matured “over more than forty years”, ever since he had felt a yearning to “investigate the events of Sardinia”, after having been called upon to “found, rather than to direct, the small archaeological museum of the University of Sassari”, immediately after his degree.<sup>29</sup> “As destiny would have it”, adds Pais in the *Preface*, “once the small institute was formed and once I had finished my specialisation studies in Berlin under the sagacious guidance of Theodor Mommsen, I was not destined to work in a larger research centre, but was rather sent to re-organise and expand the National Museum in Cagliari” [my translation].

It was at this point that he had the chance to “turn [his] attention to the monuments and the history of the Island, towards which, while not his place of birth” he held he was “closely bound for origins of ancestry, for domestic affection, and for many long and durable faithful friendships”.

He had hence mulled over the work for a long time and state that “it is not the fruit of improvisation, neither does it present fleeting impressions”. The collection of the documents, and literary and epigraphic sources went on for more than forty years, with an incredibly high number of new findings, original interpretations, new hypotheses, amplifications and amendments, in relation to the provincial glories, ancient geography, the town institutions, the rural populations, Romanisation, the *latifundia*, the road networks and the army.

In the *Introduction*, Pais addresses first and foremost the theme of Rome’s presumed “insatiable imperialism”: aside from an ethical judgement, Pais saw the Romans’ Mediterranean conquests to be absolutely necessary, “for political and historical reasons”, to counter the Carthaginian threat. In the same way, in his time, only a more active policy in Italy would be able to counter the commercial and military interests of the British in the Mediterranean. After all, one of the characteristics of the volume, is that of aiming to make history relevant to the present, to use the sources to find answers to contemporary problems, to re-affirm the Italian-ness of Corsica on “unassailable bases”, and to provide a solid historical and juridical basis for Italy’s imperial claims at the end of the Great War.

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<sup>29</sup> E. Pais, *Storia della Sardegna e della Corsica durante il dominio romano*, Nardecchia, Rome 1923 (republished as A. Mastino (Ed.), *Ilisso*, Nuoro 1999).