The Making of Medieval Sardinia

A Historiographical Introduction

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Probably the two most enduring leitmotifs of early medieval Sardinian history are the perception of its isolation, and the tension between centre and periphery – between local power on the ground and remote control exerted from somewhere else, often overseas. For Bob Rowland, Sardinia was precisely ‘the periphery in the centre’.¹ This paradox is all the more intriguing in the context of a Mediterranean that we increasingly understand in terms of its connectivity, so that it would seem impossible for its second-largest island to be unaffected by events around it – the formation of medieval states, frontiers, faiths, commerce, identities and so on. As this volume of essays shows, the paradigm of medieval Sardinia’s isolation is no longer tenable. With its demise, the island’s uniqueness also passes, but Sardinia’s differences to the regions around it remain striking, and therein lies their historical importance.

It is unfortunate that Sardinia has not managed to convey a sense of its historical standing beyond the island to those for whom the Mediterranean already seems stacked with important and better-studied regions. Sardinia tends to be discounted in debates about Byzantine North Africa, of which it was a part; early Islamic North Africa, from where it was raided; frontier-formation of a reconfigured western Mediterranean in which it was central, or state-formation and governance in a part of what is now Europe, but which had not been conquered and colonised after the fall of Rome until the 1100s. If that were not enough, some of its earliest extant charters were written in vernacular Sardinian using Greek characters, yet it is rare to find discussion of these outside Sardinia itself. The same might be said for the exceptional Byzantine friezes of the cave church at Sant’Andrea Priu or the exquisite gold and silver pyxis with an Arabic inscription found in the church of Santa Maria Navarrese. There is no lack of important history in medieval Sardinia – its obscurity is thus a consequence of history-writing, rather than History per se.

The political transition of Sardinia from an administrative unit within the Byzantine Exarchate of Africa to four small realms within the Latin West forms

a central theme of this volume. As a recent historiographical sketch of Sardinia notes, the centuries from which the key evidence comes are that of the seventh/eighth and the eleventh/twelfth. In the former, the Arab Conquests divided Byzantine Africa from Sardinia; in the latter, the first charter materials from Sardinia survive and its first king was recognised as such outside the island. Between these times, there is little evidence on which to base firm conclusions. To fill the evidential void, two types of response have come to the fore: hypothetical modelling, and teleological ex silentio arguments formed mainly from assumptions of continuity. The quest for a missing past this has not always been supported by evidence is the subject of the opening essay by Fernández-Aceves, Metcalfe and Muresu. Taking the pioneering forms of seventeenth-century ‘archaeology’ that sought to recover religious history through relics and Cuerpos santos on the one hand, and the famous Falsi of Arborea— influence and distracting documentary forgeries of the nineteenth century— on the other, it concludes with observations about the puzzling and uncertain evidence offered by ‘Byzantine’ lead seals appended to the so-called Carte volgari. These later medieval vernacular charters from Cagliari, to which the ‘Byzantine’ seals were attached raise a number of methodological caveats and reminders that the aims of history-writing in Sardinia, as indeed elsewhere, are means that have served many ends.

1 Sardinia in the Roman Empire

Such are the legacies of the ancient past for later Sardinian history, it is hard to imagine a volume of essays on the medieval period which did not include a longue durée view of the pre-classical and Roman periods. In his chapter, Attilio Mastino begins by reminding us of the island’s distinctive landscape and built environment from the nuragic Bronze Age with its fortified stone towers, villages, cult sites and complexes, some of which came to be re-used or repurposed in the medieval period. By the time the island had emerged from a long period of ‘timeless therapeutic sleep’, it was less the prehistoric backdrop than overseas relationships with North Africa which are evident in the sources. Phoenician and Carthaginian influence in Sardinia is clear in both written and archaeological sources for the development of trade and commerce; conquest and control of the coastline; a limited level of colonisation, 

and the introduction of pagan Punic cults. However, the truism that Sardinia was at a Mediterranean ‘crossroads’ cannot be claimed until Roman administration, fleets, urbanism, citizenship, economic organisation, and Latin language connected the island to encompassing regions in ways that would not be repeated at any other point in Sardinia’s history. Indeed, for much of the classical period, Sardinia shared similar phases of conquest, colonisation and acculturation that can be seen in its neighbouring lands, particularly in North Africa (Tunisia) and Sicily.

Roman Sardinia, or perhaps better ‘Sardinia under Roman rule’ is conventionally viewed through the lens of Latin sources as hosting a varied population of autochthonous peoples with an admixture of colonists, merchants, soldiers and settlers. It was remembered as a site of refuge, exile, and colonisation with a plurality of pagan religions absorbed from the Greco-Roman pantheon as well as from Carthaginian cults and the Bronze Age gods of the nuragic people who now appeared as a vestige of the metal ages thrust into an imperial setting. In this ‘classic’ view of Classical Sardinia, Braudelian binaries have thrived: tensions between the dynamics of the plains with their socio-economic co-ordination of agricultural labour connecting centres of production and consumption, pitted against the so-called Barbaricini, independently minded peoples of the hills and mountains who were cast into the role of the ‘Other’ – pagan, primitive pastoralists at the fringes of the settled population and the perhaps beyond the reach of regular taxation. Rethinking the long, deep and multifaceted effects of Romanisation has tempered these long-held contrasts over time and the island is perhaps ready for an approach that emphasises autochthonous aspects alongside imperial impositions. Routeways, both physical and figurative, may have provided socio-economic, cultural and religious connectivity while linguistic acculturation overhauled all save Latinate tongues, but the imagined isolation of ‘aboriginal’ shepherds endured to assume a myth-like quality of autonomy and resistance.

By the time that Sardinia had been fully incorporated into the Roman empire, the island’s geopolitical horizons were bounded by the Italian Peninsula to the east, and the province of Africa to the south. Iberia or southern France was of relatively little consequence to the island. The supposed origins of the islanders were African, at least in the minds of Roman authors such as Cicero, whose pejorative remarks reminded his audience of Sardinia’s provincial links to the erstwhile rival of Carthage. His musings also produced an early view of Sardinian ethnogenesis which has been used to demonstrate the existence of ‘a Sardinian people’. Cicero’s argument was that Sardinians thought, spoke and looked the same, thus they constituted a people (natio or gens), which was formed from, and divided into, distinct ‘tribal’ groupings around the island.
Schematic and problematic as this is for a blueprint of societal formation, the Ciceronian view was at least phrased in cultural terms, rather than by bloodlines or race. The notion that these ancient peoples are somehow the same ones today is a historiographical assumption that feeds popular understandings, and can still be detected in some modern academic works too.

2 The Advent of Christianity

It was, however, the rise of Christianity in Sardinia that served to smooth over the sociocultural cracks between the island's diverse communities. Such was its irreversible impact that many have looked backwards to explain its success. For Rossana Martorelli, the island 'attained its religious maturity' during the Byzantine period which it had achieved by the spread of the faith from the margins of larger settlements into the countryside; the conversion of the hapless Barbaricini, who had been praying to stones and wood in the mountains; the advent of early Byzantine monasticism; the missions of papal legates; the organisation of the dioceses, and the promotion of cult sites linked to both Sardinian and African saints and martyrs. The modalities of cult-site diffusion are also of note, such as their links with transit routes, the re-use of secular space offered by basilicas, bathhouses, and nuraghi for religious purposes, and the preference for particular saints of North African colonists and soldiers, which lent Sardinia religious vitality and a new-found identity as part of a Christian community. Several recurrent themes are evident in the historiography, not least the importance of stimuli from outside the island combined with the vision and vigour of forces within it. The organisation of the early church, and the energy of its early bishops were broadly comparable with lands elsewhere across the Mediterranean, albeit against a regional background coloured by the politicised theologies of Donatism and Arianism. The theme of exiles in Sardinia is reprised with the exceptional example of the saint–bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe, banished from Carthage along with sixty anti-Arian bishops at the turn of the sixth century, and who offer a rare and fleeting view of Sardinia as a centre of cultural production during a period of expansion for the island's fledgling monastic communities.

The Wars of Justinian in the sixth century incorporated Sardinia into the Eastern Roman empire, which, with the benefit of hindsight, appear as an act of imperial overstretch in the western Mediterranean, a vast distance from the Byzantine metropolis of Constantinople. At a historiographical level, the convenient passage from Roman to Eastern Roman has tended to suppress discussion of Sardinia as an important model of long Late Antiquity (until
c. 800) in which the island exhibited features more usually associated with the Latin West while remaining within the Byzantine empire. Instead, Late Antique Sardinia is often conceived narrowly as an interlude between the fall of Rome and the end of the Vandals, who are themselves often portrayed as tribal invaders whom Edward Gibbon would have recognised. It is perhaps surprising that the short-lived sojourn of Constans II in Syracuse of the 660s has received little attention in Sardinian historiography since many of the formative debates of the day – religious sectarianism; the naval defence of the western Mediterranean; the incipient ‘militarisation’ of key regions against the threat of Muslim raids, politico-religious relations with Rome and the Lombards – all came to affect Sardinia too.

By the time of Constans II, Sardinia had already begun its descent into an evidential murk that did not lift before the eleventh century. In the interim, the absence of any conquest by outside forces has consequences for traditional termini of historical periodisation and division. As a result, to ask how, when and why Sardinia ceased to be ‘Byzantine’ can tend to elicit a wide range of argued and imagined ideas. Indeed, much of this volume is directly or indirectly informed by this puzzle over which diverse solutions have emerged.

3 Byzantinisation in Sardinia

One way of gauging the extent of Byzantinisation in Sardinia is to search for vestiges of provincial administration that were carried forward into later times when they are detectable in the documentary record. The many caveats associated with the methodology make this a delicate task given the potential for variation between imperial theory of how things were meant to be managed, and on-the-ground, provincial practice in outlying regions. The temptation to argue from analogy may be best resisted as the early medieval eastern Mediterranean was substantially different from the Byzantine west, and all the more so in the period of flux and reorganisation into themes from the late seventh century. Instead, the main methodology has been to extract legal–administrative precepts from the sources, and to fit them into a framework of structures and systems that does not serve to test hypotheses so much as to reaffirm them.

The acknowledgement of slippage between theory and practice in Byzantine administration is a first step towards a nuanced understanding of the drift between imperial intentions, structures and systems, and the actuality of provincial management in Sardinia. This tricky task is complicated further when one considers the lack of documentary sources from the island, and the gap...
in time between references in ‘legal’ texts and the first attested presence of the rulers, known as the *iudikes*. Elements of Roman law and administration providing tempting bait for analysis since these have often survived in the documentary record. For Sardinia, the debates rest on a handful of administrative terms attested in Greek, Latin and Sardinian sources. Of these, one of the most important were the *curatorías*, which referred to territorial divisions within the island. The derivation from medieval Greek κουρατωρία (*kouratoria*), and appearance of the term in written sources from the twelfth century is inferred to entail continuity of Byzantine practice.\(^3\) By later medieval times, the *curatoria* (or *curadoría* in Sardinian vernacular) was an administrative unit that circumscribed a number of settlements, and was overseen by a *curator* (or *curadore* in Sardinian) who exercised both fiscal and judicial duties. However, the prevalent impression in the historiography is that these polities had been divided into *curatorías* since their emergence, and were thus integral to the *iudikes*’ rulership, and thus they had not resulted from gradual processes of administrative adjustment throughout the twelfth and thirteenth century.\(^4\)

It is suggested by Michele Orrù that the *curatorias* had arisen as a result of wider ninth-century reforms in which a cadre of new officials was charged with restoring administrative order following the devastation said to have been wrought by the Muslims. This fascinating hypothesis rests partly on the adoption in Sardinia of reforms enacted elsewhere in the Byzantine world as well as on the perceived level of Muslim *devastatio*, for which the evidence is no less elusive than for the *curatorias* themselves before the first charter records. To mitigate this, Sardinian historiography has long argued for an equivalence of administrative terminology, such that the *curatorias* might be considered a synonym for the Greek *trigonias* (attested twice), and the frequently found, general Latin term, *partes*. However, the argument does not stop there as we find that *partes* has also been regarded as a synonym of the Greek *mereias*, and as an alternative to the Latin *locus* and Sardinian *logu*. Given the vague nature

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of any of these terms, hypotheses relating to territorial divisions within the island struggle to bear the weight of the constructions placed upon them. It is probably also worth noting the absence of common terms of Byzantine territorial organisation relating to villages and their boundaries as well as larger district divisions. Finally, it may also be noted that modern maps which purport to show the boundaries of the Byzantine *curatorias* have been created by assuming that later medieval and early modern dioceses’ divisions correspond neatly, and conveniently, with an underlying Byzantine matrix.

4 The Monetary Economy of Byzantine Sardinia and the Question of the Mint

Medieval Sardinia’s economy, both internal and external, underpins many questions of ‘connectivity’ and the island’s resilience in the face of a radically changed geopolitical environment. Central to these considerations is the monetary economy and the extent to which the Arab conquest of North Africa had disrupted the supply and circulation of capital or had even severed Sardinia from its previous economic sphere. Here, the argument has come to focus on whether or not there was a mint in Byzantine Sardinia. The notion of a Byzantine Sardinian mint is one that has gained traction among historians, perhaps at a faster rate than among numismatists wary of anomalies in the sequence of material evidence. New material has come to light, but the articulation of the argument is by no means straightforward, as Marco Muresu explains in his chapter. First, it is worth noting that the manufacture of gold *solidi* in North Africa was continued by the Muslims who issued Arab-Byzantine imitations in the early 700s. The design and fabrication of these shows that at least some of the staff of the erstwhile Byzantine mint had continued to find employment under the Muslims. Prior to the capture of Carthage during the first reign of Justinian II (685–95), some *solidi* began to be minted with the Latin letter ‘S’ in the reverse right field below the cross potent. Immediately

after the fall of Carthage, gold coinage of the same weight, language, fabric, and module continued to be issued and to circulate in the Byzantine western Mediterranean with the mysterious letter ‘S’—but where was it minted? From coin finds of *solidi*, *tremisses*, and bronze half-*folles* in Sardinia that bear the letter ‘S’, a mint can be inferred to have been operational on the island from at least the period following the fall of Carthage. Some of these coins were crudely made; others were not, but the ‘S’-for-Sardinia gold issues continued to be struck under successive emperors until Leo III in the 730s, after which official minting activity on the island ceased.

This argument leaves open an important question of gold coinage that may have been minted outside Carthage, but before its fall. This has suggested to many numismatists the existence of such a workshop outside Africa, most likely in Sardinia that may explain the appearance of a retrograde ‘S’ (Ƨ) in the reverse legend of *solidi* that date back to the early 660s. Of particular note is that the same retrograde ‘S’ is also found on at least two dozen *solidi* of Constantine IV (668–85). In this case, the Ƨ cannot be a workshop or *officina* mark (because that was already present after the legend on the reverse), nor can it be the Greek letter signifying the Indiction year (because that was present in the left reverse field), nor is the letter likely to be a mint mark (because that was hardly ever abbreviated to a single letter and in any case was never a retrograde letter). Crucially, the vast majority of *solidi* of Constantine IV were from a large hoard found in Carthage, not in Sardinia. As such, there is no reason to assume that there was a workshop in Sardinia that was in operation alongside Carthage in the generation of the Arab Conquests before the fall of the capital. It is, however, plausible that the Carthage issues bearing a retrograde ‘S’ (Ƨ) may have been made for Sardinia, rather than made in Sardinia.

Finally, it is worth noting the existence of a globular *solidus* of Anastasius II (713–15) from Sardinia. The production of this ‘globular’ form resulted from the striking of spheroids of gold, rather than flat blank discs. This distinctive practice, which was not found in any other Byzantine mint except Carthage and perhaps Sardinia too, has been plausibly linked to the West African empire of Ghana where gold dust was fused and moulded into balls of a specific weight for export. In any event, the trans-Saharan gold supply for Byzantine Carthage

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7 *Solidus* of Contans II, Constantine IV, Tiberius and Heraclius struck between 661–63. Savoca Numismatik GmbH & Co. KG Special Auction 79 (June, 2020), lot 582.
had been severed by the Arab Conquests, so the discovery of a globular *solidus* from Sardinia suggests that the Byzantines had transferred their gold reserves to the island before the capture of Carthage. The unexpected closure of the Sardinian mint in the 730s may thus have resulted from the exhaustion of that supply.

The island’s natural resources of silver were celebrated by classical Roman authors. However, after the closure of the mines in the fifth century, no mention is made of this resource until the twelfth. Indeed, only after 1250 is Sardinian silver known to have been mined again. In the interim, there is no evidence for silver (or lead) mining on the island. Thus, the idea that its archontes and *iudikes* had access to their own silver supplies is unwarranted.10 By the same token, the idea that this natural resource was a reason for Muslim raids in the eighth and ninth centuries also seems unlikely. Post-740s, the island increasingly relied on an exchange system based on grace, favour, services, and payments in kind. There may well have been attempts in Sardinia to use other currencies in lieu of Byzantine capital, but the current material evidence is slim. The vast economic gulf between an increasingly impecunious island and the highly monetised, cash-rich, commerce-based economies of Spain, North Africa, Sicily, and southern Italy is remarkable. Its effect on Sardinia’s ability to participate in trade, raise funds, pay for troops, officials, imported goods, the fleet or for defences can only have been profoundly negative. Arguably, geopolitical and economic explanations are key tools with which to explain Sardinia’s peculiar and precarious transition between long Late Antiquity and the arrival of the Pisans and Genoese in the 1100s. By that time, most of the defining episodes had taken place in Sardinia’s turn from Byzantine and Muslim Africa, and its re-orientated outlook towards the Italian Peninsula, particularly to the north-west, and with this transition, the eventual accommodation of the island’s four states as minor realms within the ambit of the Latin West and the Latin Church.

5 Post-conquest Africa and Sardinia

In his classic monograph on Byzantine Sardinian philology, Giulio Paulis expounded a long-held view that population displacement from North Africa strengthened Greek as a prestige language in Sardinia, but he argues against

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the idea that it was not used outside elite circles. Instead, lexical traces in the otherwise Latinate language of medieval Sardinian include Greek loan words attested in rural vocabulary, not merely in administrative terminology. In recent years, these precious examples have been supplemented by a handful more. Paulis’ assumption that Sardinia was becoming more militarised in the 600s and 700s is still widely held to be valid, even if few would argue that it had become a Byzantine theme in which civil and military powers were concentrated in the hands of a single governor (strategos). However, the supposition of an exodus from Carthage is far from clear, and it is upon this assumption of provenance that several of the arguments from linguistics rest.

Carthage of the late 600s had long been a site of urban decay that was barely defended at the point of its capture. As for officials, soldiers, and clerics, for some decades it has continued to be claimed that they had also left Carthage for Cagliari. A northward shift of monks and clergy from Africa in the early 700s is thought to have accompanied the translation of Saint Augustine. The movement of this single saintly body has been well known since the time of Bede, but unfortunately it says nothing about any post-conquest emigration of secular administrators or the Byzantine ‘nobility’. The idea of an exodus from Carthage is thus far from clear, yet it remains a key assumption in much of the traditional historiography.

Some insights may be gained about lordship and landholding from language-use in Sardinia. Again, Paulis is the point of reference. Perhaps his most salient example is that of the kaballarioi, sometimes loosely translated as ‘knights’ or ‘cavalry’. Derived from a Late Latin term for a ’horse’, the kaballarioi ‘horse-men’ are often understood in a Sardinian context as referring to a class of farmer–soldiers, if not landholding military officers. The word is not without its ambiguities as it might also refer to someone who merely looked after horses, rather than a cavalry officer. Nor is it widely attested in Sardinia where its primary appearance occurs in toponym compounds. The argument of Paulis points to the kaballarioi as transmitters of Greek language and Byzantine culture beyond its metropolitan centre and into the countryside. At this point, the linguistic argument may be supplemented by intriguing evidence for the burial of high-status individuals in the countryside along with their Byzantine military accoutrements. Future archaeological and linguistic

11 Giulio Paulis, Lingua e cultura nella Sardegna bizantina. Testimonianze linguistiche dell’influsso greco (Sassari, 1983).
12 For discussion of Su Mulinu at Villanovafranca, and Sa Domu Beccia at Uras amongst others, see M. Muresu, La moneta ‘indicatore’ dell’assetto insediativo della Sardegna bizantina (secoli VI-XI) (Perugia, 2018), 80–86.
work may loosen this Gordian Knot with the potential to unravel the entangled questions of Byzantine immigration, rural lordship, patterns of landholding, and the otherwise unexpected use of Greek terms in Sardinian. Indeed, the *kaballarioi* may also shed light on the peculiar distribution of markers and proxies for ‘Byzantine’ culture, such as churches and popular traditions found in a relatively small area of the north west of the island. In the interim, Paulis’ chapter on onomastics offers new etymologies for the alternating dynastic names shared by the archons and *iudikes*-kings from Calari – Torkitorius and Salusius. From their onomastic persistence, the author works back in time to conclude that mid to high-ranking Sardinian troops, recruited from the centre of the island, must have defended it against Arab attacks in the eighth and ninth century.

6 Sardinia and the Muslims

Almost anything written in recent times concerning early relations with the Muslims has strong historiographical components, and the contributions in this volume are no exception. The primary purpose of many ninth-century Muslim ‘histories’, such as that of Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, which have supplied defining evidence for raids on Sardinia, was to relate a series of morally meaningful tales for an audience of Muslim jurists critical of their co-religionists’ un-Islamic behaviour. Thus, in the case of his famously absurd description of the sacking of a town in Sardinia (or Spain – he is not sure which), the moral of the story relates to the Muslims’ avaricious frenzy of booty taking; their indifference for acceptable standards of behaviour, and their disregard for God except when circumstances changed against them.

The notion that the Muslims are to be held responsible for Sardinia’s woes is explored as a recurring theme of insular historiography going back as far as G.-F. Fara in the sixteenth century. A fundamental and overdue revision of the material impact of the Muslims in Sardinia has far-reaching implications – not only for the internal political and economic development of the island, but also for debates on medieval Mediterranean frontier formation. A second essay examines the evidence for increasingly scarce contacts with the Islamic world in the tenth and eleventh centuries, not all of which were hostile, but which

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apparently did little to undermine long-term perceptions of antipathy towards the constructed ‘Other’.

7 **From Archontes to Iudikes**

The dimly illuminated transition of political rulership from *iudikes* to archontes, and from archontes to *four iudikes* by 1073 is beset with traps for the unwary. It is in this gloom that some of the most fiercely contested battles of Sardinian historiography are taking place, fuelled by questions of political independence as perhaps once embodied by the island’s rulers in their own domains (*rennos*). The pitfalls of this debate have been elucidated by Luciano Gallinari, who examines the extent to which the *iudikes* were political descendants of archontes from a more overtly ‘Byzantine’ era. Sardinia’s local rulers perhaps find equivalents at Amalfi and Gaeta, or in many areas in which ‘archon’ simply referred to the person responsible with or without an official brief. But what their political roles might have been in Sardinia; their relationships with Byzantium; their length in office or how many of them there were at any one time remains largely beyond the evidence as it stands. The historical blank is not, however, total as Gallinari’s careful comparison of the language of election processes for the *iudikes* shows. The evidence suggests that the key terms of reference in legal–institutional precedents hark back to the Sardinian archontes of the ninth century, if not before. If so, then the *iudikes* can be regarded as the constitutional heirs to the archontes.

Many long-held ideas about the political drivers of cultural change in Sardinia after the Arab Conquests have tended to assume that a ‘suite’ of events accompanied the double fall of Carthage in 695 and (definitively) in 698. The latter serves historians, past and present, as a convenient marker of periodisation, but what is less clear is whether the fall of Carthage should be portrayed as an apocalyptic disaster that triggered an exodus of displaced or dispossessed Byzantine nobles, clerics, soldiers, and officials to Sardinia. Finding evidence for the putative exodus to Byzantine Sardinia has turned out to be difficult. It is not alone in this respect: exodus-strategy hypotheses have often been applied to Byzantine Sicily too. In the meantime, a generation of papyrus evidence from early Muslim Egypt has overturned much received

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14 In the case of Sicily, there is at least some documentary evidence for the displacement of the Byzantine military: ‘Sicily was obscure and sparsely populated before Islam, but when the Muslims conquered the lands of Ifriqiya, the people of Ifriqiya fled there. They settled it, strengthening and fortifying its defences. The area about it was not settled [by Muslims] until it was conquered in the days of the Banū l-Aghlab’. See Yāqūt.
post-Arab conquest wisdom by showing how families of Byzantine officials remained in their old posts for the next two centuries. Had some of this political pragmatism applied in early Muslim Ifriqiya too? The eventual sacking of Carthage was an exception, not the rule, for post-conquest African towns and cities.\textsuperscript{15} As for Muslim lordship in the countryside, most of the evidence comes from the ninth and tenth centuries, rather than the eighth. However, after the conquest, according to the chronicler Ibn 'Idhārī, the Muslims and Byzantines ‘came to an agreement over the land tax, and levied it on the Latin population of Ifriqiya’, a claim that does not suggest an immediate exodus, let alone to a specific destination.\textsuperscript{16} As the last outpost of the erstwhile Exarchate, the island is presumed, somewhat uncritically, to have adopted a more militarised organisation in the way of a Byzantine theme, but without actually becoming one in name.

8 The Latin Church, Charters and the Condaghes

The extent to which Sardinia’s iudikes in their realms (rennos) were indebted to Byzantine institutions and structures is tempered and countered by the considerable influence of the Latin Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This was exerted directly via papal letters, legates or more obliquely through new foundations linked to Latin-rite houses such as Montecassino or Saint-Victor in Marseille which were instrumental in drawing Sardinia into a framework of ecclesiastical, moral, institutional, and financial influence as guided by Reformist popes at Rome. As Corrado Zedda explains in his chapter, these strategies may even be seen in the importance attached to the tiny islands of Montecristo and Giglio that lie between Sardinia and Lazio and which, like Corsica and Gallura, were brought into the papal fold to form a coherent space around the Tyrrhenian archipelago at the time that the Normans were gaining substantial lands in south Italy.


The influence of Latin-rite church extended beyond religious and political fields since the record-keeping practices they introduced are the major reason for the survival of the island’s earliest administrative documents. The record of extant charter materials from the island begins from the 1060s, and increases post-1100 as Giovanni Strinna’s chapter shows. Such a pattern of document survival is not untypical for the contemporary central and western Mediterranean. In the case of Sardinia, the earliest documents materialised around the same time, but they were composed in different places on the island, giving rise to stark disagreement over diplomatic precedents. For Jean-Marie Martin, ‘all the scripts came from abroad and had to be imported when Sardinia resumed contacts with the outside during the tenth and eleventh centuries, which leads one to think that the island probably had neither a palaeographic nor a diplomatic tradition’. This might be contrasted with ideas, prevalent within Sardinian scholarship, of a massive documentary loss from once thriving writing offices. However, the predominance of book-hands evident in the charter calligraphy, whether in Latin or Greek characters, are consistent with the input of monks, rather than trained chancery scribes. Indeed, the putative existence of writing traditions on the island, particularly in monastic environments, shifts the debate to a plausible middle ground and in so doing it strengthens the argument of Maurizio Virdis that Sardinia pre-1050 was not a ‘scriptorial wasteland’.

Besides their invaluable insights into the dealings of the iudikes, the documentary materials in Sardinia are also of wider importance. From the iudikes of Calari, there are two extant examples of allographic texts in which Sardinian language was rendered in Greek characters, the first of which dates to the 1080s. This use of Sardinian marks one of the earliest examples of the vernacular in official documents from a chancery in ‘Europe’, even if the ‘chancery’ were no more than an irregular, mobile, on-demand writing office staffed by an available monk. In terms of a comparative study, for example with other ex-Byzantine regions such as Naples and southern Italy, the Sardinian material is distinctive even when set within a much wider body of written examples, mainly from charters, that otherwise bear similar hallmarks and familial resemblances.

The language of Sardinia’s earliest documentary outputs, including the multipurpose condaghes or church record books, was also distinguished by insular

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17 For the idea that ‘the effect of wars, termites and natural and random disasters should not be underestimated’, see O. Schena, ‘Archives and Documents Pertaining to the History of Medieval Sardinia,’ in A Companion to Sardinian History, 500–1500, ed. M. Hobart (Leiden, 2017), 52.
practice. Many legal and juridical terms were expressed in what seems to be everyday Sardinian language while other terms and phrases show an inclination towards the use of adapted Byzantine diplomatic formulae and calques from Greek. The Latin of Sardinia, on the other hand, predates Carolingian language reforms, and thus also preserves elements of vernacular usage through a different medium. Moreover, the use of Sardinian informs our ideas about aims, functions and audience. The question of condaghe ‘authorship’ in scribal terms remains elusive given the presumption of low literacy levels in Sardinia, and the lack of any obvious cadre of Sardinian notaries. These alternatives do not, however, need to be mutually exclusive; indeed, the various forms of language imply a level of collaboration and interaction between authors of different, but overlapping, backgrounds. The condaghes are also of importance for wider comparisons with other contemporary record-keeping practices, especially for studies of charters and cartularies in both western Byzantine and Latinate regions.

9 Architecture and the Arts

In terms of the built environment of early medieval Sardinia, the survival of structures above ground level is limited. Spaces were reused and reoccupied, but relatively few structures were constructed ex novo. The exception is that of churches, many of which are in a complex state of preservation with multiple repairs, additions, and reconstructions. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Sardinian churches were characterised by single nave basilicas; in the sixth and seventh centuries, by large domed churches, and from the sixth to tenth centuries, by small cruciform structures. Ecclesiastical architecture may have developed in terms of shape and design, but this architecture did not witness the advent of radically new styles until the 1100s. The sudden appearance of documentary materials in the second half of the eleventh century coincided with equally sudden (and relatively late) changes in art and architecture on the island and the introduction of Romanesque designs and structures, the earliest and most notable of which are the churches of San Gavino in Porto Torres and Santa Maria di Regno at Ardara, both of which were in the renno of Torres. It is tempting to regard the pairing of incoming artistic and architectural influence and the ‘rise’ of the iudikes as no coincidence, but rather that the two hail wider and deeper influences affecting the island’s rulers from overseas, visible in the absorption of influences from Tuscany, Liguria and Provence. The extent to which these styles blended with incipient insular designs of a local school remains elusive, not least as the original design of the buildings is still
unclear in many cases. Indeed, revealing the complex phases of construction and modification is the subject of Andrea Pala's chapter beginning with the historiography of the early twentieth century.

Related to this argument are themes from the island’s precious traces of Byzantine art, such as the exceptionally important painted frescoes at Sant’Andrea Priu, which argue for a growing consensus of scholarly opinion that Sardinia could never have been entirely isolated from artistic influences around it. Such contacts were mediated through the coastal towns of Campania between the mid-tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh, along with new cultural links with Rome and the Carolingian empire, usually considered peripheral forces with regard to the island’s affairs. Here, Alberto Virdis argues against the traditional paradigm of Sardinia’s ‘resistance’ to outside influence as ‘colonialist’ since observable artistic traits at a local level were not simply imposed without local elaboration, but combined with autochthonous artistic phenomena of the island. Scrutiny of the evidence comes with its own caveats, not least where there is lost or restored material. In this respect, the painted frescoes of Sant’Andrea Priu have been recovered from behind a thick, soot-clad, graffiti-ridden patina, compounding the difficulty of analysis. Nonetheless, their importance remains beyond doubt, both to Sardinia and to Byzantine art.18

Of many themes presented in this volume, it is perhaps the relevance of the primary sources that lies at their root. Indeed, in an environment of limited resources, hard evidence is all the more precious, and accurate description and contextualisation must happen before it can be evaluated. In this respect, Sardinia is rich in the diversity of its sources, both documentary and archaeological, and, in our view at least, there is a need to bring specialist inter- and multi-disciplinary research to bear on the continuing task of de- and reconstructing the island’s past. We hope and intend that this present volume will play its part towards that end.