Sardinia as a Crossroads in the Mediterranean: An Introduction

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This book surveys the current state of research on medieval to modern Sardinian history from 500 to 1500 AD. It is one of the few books on Sardinia for English readers. While Sardinia's abundant natural resources and central Mediterranean location have perennially attracted sailors, merchants, refugees, kings, monks and emperors from neighboring nations alike, until recently, the island has failed to attract international scholars (Fig. 0.1). Unfortunately, Sardinian history before the end of the first millennium, and after, has been ignored by non-Italian scholarship. Despite a vast local bibliography, Sardinia has been largely omitted from histories of the western Mediterranean. Fortunately, this oversight is now changing.

The reasons offered are many. Most documents were lost, destroyed by human negligence, which has led scholars to consult Carolingian, Pisan, Genoese, Roman, Catalan, and Aragonese archives abroad. Not an easy task, yet in this volume there are many examples of where and how, new research is expanding our knowledge of Sardinia.

One element remains constant in the way documents have been transmitted, and is at the core of traditional Sardinian historiography: the church. The prevailing narrative comes from a relatively small and intermittent number of ecclesiastical documents that, nevertheless, allow scholars to begin to write a history. Sardinian dioceses begin much later than in other parts of Italy, although their clerics and bishops seem to have participated in early church councils since the fourth century—not much more can be asserted with certainty.

This limited archive may explain why the presence of non-Christian communities such as the Berbers, Muslims, Jews, and Sards have hitherto received little attention. Approaches are broadening and scholarly interest is now directed towards multiple narratives that will offer a more complete history.

The need for an independent narrative of Sardinian history is perhaps natural for an island that has been subject to such frequent incursions. The Sardinians' insistence on separatism, which has often resulted in isolationism, is beneficial (at least to scholars), and has rarefied its culture, which has been preserved in its music, nature, politics, and rituals. These elements are a source of civic pride, drawn from Sardinia's insularity. From revolts against
Figure 0.1 Map of Sardinia in the Mediterranean and the sites mentioned in the text.