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CARTHAGINIAN POLICY IN THE WEST-CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN BETWEEN THE LATE 7TH AND 6TH CENTURIES BCE

MASSIMO BOTTO*

Abstract: This contribution seeks to analyze Carthage's political strategies in the central-western Mediterranean during the late 7th century and 6th century BCE. This period marked a crucial phase in the city's political and economic evolution, as it sought to assert control over key trade routes, forge alliances, and counter competing powers such as the Greeks and the Etruscans. Carthaginian policy was characterized by a blend of diplomatic engagement, military intervention, and economic integration, underpinned by the city's thriving trade networks and its ability to project power across the region. Through a combination of archaeological findings and historical analysis, this discussion examines the mechanisms and impacts of Carthage's policies during this transformative era, focusing on its interactions with indigenous communities, its expansionist ambitions, and the resulting geopolitical dynamics that reshaped the Mediterranean landscape.

Keywords: Carthage; Sardinia; Sicily; Phoenicians; Malchus.

1. INTRODUCTION

Carthage's "maritime vocation" has been evident since its foundation, owing to its strategic location at the heart of the Mediterranean and along the vital trade route connecting the powerful metropolis of Tyre with the rich metal-producing regions near Huelva, ancient *Onoba* (Fig. 1).¹ Roald F. Docter's study of amphorae discovered during excavations at the intersection of the *Decumanus Maximus* and *Cardo X* revealed that, between 760 and 675 BCE (Early Punic I), only 18,8% of the goods consumed in Carthage were locally produced (Fig. 2).² The remaining 81,2% were primarily imports, originating from the Nuragic villages of Sardinia, as indicated by "Sant'Imbenia-type" amphorae,³ and from the Phoenician settlements within the so-called *Círculo del Estrecho*.

This trend remains consistent when considering analyses from investigations carried out between 2000 and 2005 in the Bir Massouda sector of the city, reaffirming that Carthage was not self-sufficient during the initial phases of its history.⁴ To meet the growing food demands of its expanding population, the North African metropolis strengthened its network of Mediterranean contacts. This maritime orientation extended not only toward other Phoenician colonies but also toward the Greek world, Nuragic Sardinia, Etruria, and the Levant. Simultaneously, Carthage managed to export products from its *chora*. Due to their

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1 Cfr. e.g. Nuñez Calvo 2018a; 2018b.

2 Docter 2007, p. 618, graph at the top of fig. 336.

3 From the name of the Nuragic village located in the Bay of Porto Conte, north of Alghero in north-western Sardinia, first identified by Ida Oggiano (2000). On these amphorae see e.g. Botto 2015 (with references) and Oggiano – Pedrazzi 2019.

4 Bechtold – Docter 2010, pp. 88-91, tab. 2.



Fig. 1. The main routes from Phoenicia to the West and back (from Medas 2020).

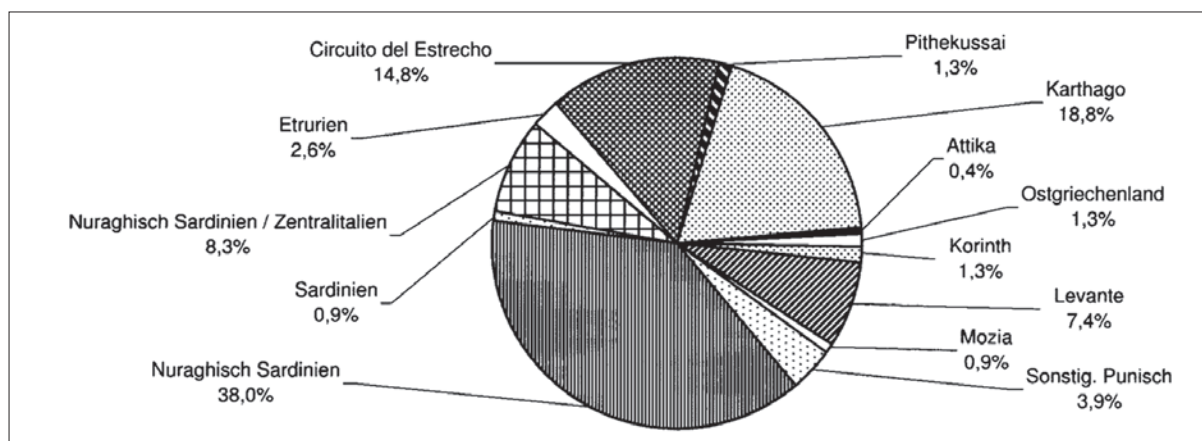


Fig. 2. Carthage: Graph illustrating local and imported transport amphorae discovered during excavations at the intersection of *Decumanus Maximus* and *Cardo X* in the Early Punic I period: 760-675 BC (from Docter 2007).

limited availability, these exports had to be of exceptional quality to bridge the gap between demand and supply effectively. The extensive network of Carthaginian contacts is exemplified by the distribution of amphorae of the Ramon T-3.1.1./2. types, primarily in the central Mediterranean but also reaching Mediterranean Andalusia, as evidenced by the excavations at Toscanos.⁵

Recently, a significant number of amphorae produced in Carthage and its hinterland have been discovered at Sant'Imbenia.⁶ This has prompted scholars to investigate what goods Carthage exported to Sardinia, especially since, by the late 9th century BCE, some of the most prosperous Nuragic villages on the island were already supplying foodstuffs and metals to the major markets of the central Mediterranean and

5 Bechtold – Docter 2010, pp. 91-93.

6 De Rosa – Garau – Rendeli 2018.

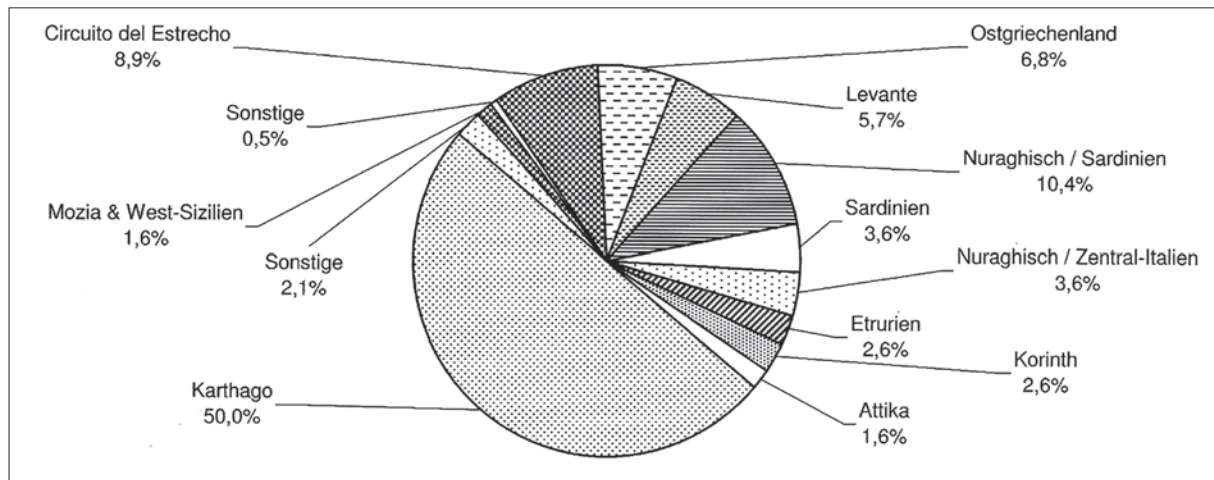


Fig. 3. Carthage: Graph illustrating local and imported transport amphorae discovered during excavations at the intersection of *Decumanus Maximus* and *Cardo X* in the Early Punic II period: 675-550 BC (from Docter 2007).

Atlantic Andalusia. The prevailing hypothesis suggests that Carthage exported high-quality oil and wine, though the absence of biochemical analyses necessitates caution in drawing definitive conclusions.⁷ Further insights from Roald F. Docter's studies reveal a shift beginning in the second quarter of the 7th century BCE. During this period, the production of amphorae in Carthage's hinterland increased dramatically, eventually surpassing the number of imported amphorae by the century's end (Fig. 3).⁸ This phenomenon reflects the growing influence of the North African metropolis in international markets, a trend with significant political ramifications, as will be explored further in the discussion.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

2.1. Sicily

Beginning in the final decades of the 7th century BCE, Carthaginian policy in the Mediterranean underwent a profound transformation. This shift coincided with a marked political and military strengthening of the Carthaginian *chora*, resulting in a significant increase in food production.⁹ This growth is evidenced by the widespread distribution of Ramon T-3.1.1.2. and T-2.1.1.1. amphorae, both within Carthage itself and across international maritime trade networks.¹⁰ This period of intense commercial activity was accompanied by large-scale diplomatic initiatives, extending from Pantelleria to the Balearic Islands. These efforts led to tighter control over the Sicilian Channel, which was secured by a stable Carthaginian presence in *Cossyra* from the second half of the 7th century to the early 6th century BCE.¹¹ This control followed a prolonged period of commercial interactions in the region.

⁷ Bechtold – Docter 2010, pp. 101-103.

⁸ In addition to Docter 2007, pp. 618-620, bottom graph in fig. 336 and figs. 337-338, see Bechtold – Docter 2010, pp. 88-89, tab. 2, with percentages of local amphorae related to the Bir Massouda contexts far higher than those imported.

⁹ Bondi 2021, pp. 15-17 (with references).

¹⁰ Bechtold – Docter 2010, pp. 91-93, tab. 2-3. It should be noted, however, that there is no unanimity of opinion among scholars regarding the impact of Carthaginian agricultural products on international markets for the period indicated: see Sourrisseau 2013, pp. 140-144; Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 16-17, 43-44, 101-102; Spatafora 2018, pp. 369-370.

¹¹ Cfr. e.g. Bechtold 2013b, pp. 414-422 (with references); 2015a, pp. 125-126.

Simultaneously, Carthage's direct involvement in Sicily became evident (Fig. 4). According to Francesca Spatafora's recent proposal, this is reflected in the establishment of Solunto and Palermo. These settlements appear to have served a deliberate strategy: Solunto was likely intended to strengthen indigenous markets in the hinterland, while Palermo aimed to control trade and oversee the Lower Tyrrhenian routes, particularly in response to the foundation of Himera and Greek expansion along Sicily's northern coast.¹²

The involvement of the North African metropolis in these initiatives was to be achieved «con l'immissione di gruppi provenienti da varie zone del mondo punico occidentale, in particolare dall'Africa del nord e dalla Sardegna».¹³ According to Spatafora's entirely plausible interpretation, Carthage would have contributed both directly – by facilitating the movement of individuals from the North African territories under its control – and indirectly, through targeted diplomatic efforts aimed at engaging the principal Phoenician colonies in Sardinia.

In the intricate events that shaped northern Sicily at the end of the 7th century BCE, the role of Motya should not be overlooked. From its earliest stages in the 8th century BCE, Motya maintained strong economic and cultural ties with Carthage.¹⁴ This synergy between Motya and Carthage was very likely a key factor in the success of the operations that led to the founding of Solunto and Palermo.

These observations are drawn from a detailed analysis of evidence from the burial areas of the two settlements. For instance, in the early phases of the Palermo necropolis, dating from the late 7th century to the first half of the 6th century BCE, the coexistence of inhumation and cremation rituals, combined with the presence of three distinct tomb types, highlights the diverse and multifaceted nature of the Panormite community. The tomb types include simple pits for primary cremations, vase burials for secondary cremations, and hypogean chambers designed for individual inhumations. This diversity in burial practices has led scholars to propose a multifaceted cultural composition for the community. Specifically, while the practice of secondary cremation appears closely aligned with the funerary traditions of Motya,¹⁵ the use of inhumation and primary cremation finds its closest parallels in the burial customs of Carthage¹⁶ and Sardinia,¹⁷ respectively, during the same period.

For Solunto, it is also possible to hypothesize the existence of a multi-ethnic society based on funerary evidence. Alongside primary burials in simple pits, there are inhumations in a crouched position and in the “alla cappuccina” tombs, indicating a shared funerary space among Punic, indigenous, and Greek populations.¹⁸ Particularly noteworthy is the group of 35 burials uncovered by Gabriella Calascibetta during

12 Spatafora 2018, pp. 371-376; 2021, pp. 10-13.

13 Spatafora 2018, p. 375: «... by incorporating groups from various regions of the western Punic world, particularly from North Africa and Sardinia».

14 Spatafora 2018, pp. 368-369 (with references).

15 Cfr. e.g. Vecchio 2013; Sconzo 2016 and Ferrer 2021, pp. 221-223. In this regard, it is worth noting that cases of primary incineration have recently been identified in Motya, although they remain far fewer than secondary incineration: Sconzo forthcoming.

16 Not all scholars are inclined to trace the practice of inhumation back to the influence exerted by Carthage outside its North African possessions, tracing it rather to more general phenomena affecting the entire Mediterranean basin during the fifth century BCE: cfr. Quinn 2013, p. 24. As Francesca Spatafora highlights for Sicily in the aforementioned contributions, and as will be discussed further below concerning Sardinia, the adoption of inhumation within the Phoenician colonial framework – where the ritual of cremation predominated, with the notable exception of Carthage – can be observed as early as the late 7th century BCE (Garbati 2021, p. 155). It is therefore evident that this is a “long-lasting” phenomenon, which is linked to a gradual cultural penetration of the Carthaginian milieu, in turn motivated by the progressive political-military rise of the North African metropolis in the central-western Mediterranean.

17 Primary incineration is dominant at Bitia and Monte Sirai, while it is present at Pani Loriga, *Othoca* and Tharros in a subordinate manner to secondary incineration. For a review of funerary rituals in the Phoenician necropolises of Sardinia see Guirguis 2010, pp. 41-61; 2017.

18 Spatafora 2018, p. 376.

the 2009 excavations at Santa Flavia, in the Campofranco area.¹⁹ These burials document the coexistence of cremation and inhumation rituals over a period extending from the early 6th century to the first half of the 5th century BCE. In the case of cremation, the remains of the deceased were deposited directly into pits, a practice already observed in Palermo. Notably, close parallels have been drawn between these burial methods and those found in some of the most significant Phoenician necropolises in Sardinia.²⁰ The nine cremations, which are all dated to the first half of the 6th century BCE thanks to the presence of Corinthian pottery in the grave goods,

«formano un raggruppamento omogeneo per orientamento, modalità di deposizione, scelta e cronologia del corredo, che potrebbe forse suggerire un'organizzazione dello spazio funerario per gruppi familiari».²¹ Following Spatafora's reasoning, one could speculate that the Campofranco incinerates represent a cohesive group of individuals from Sardinia.

With regard to the inhumation ritual, which prevailed across all documented phases, significant variability was observed in both tomb types and deposition methods. In the first case, the presence of four “a cassone” tombs from the second half of the 6th century BCE deserves to be emphasized. They were realized by lining the grave with four calcarenite slabs set on the rock in such a way as to form a kind of lithic chest, as documented in Carthage from the second half of the 7th century BCE and in Sardinia, at *Othoca*, for chronological horizons of the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE.²²

With regard to the way in which the corpses were deposited, the presence of six individuals in a crouched position without grave goods is striking, but they can probably be dated to the first half of the 6th century BCE on the basis of the stratigraphic relationship with the adjoining burials. The lack of grave goods is certainly an indication of a subordinate social condition, confirmed by the pathologies found, typical of individuals who carried out particularly heavy labor activities. In the absence of other indicators, however, it is extremely complicated to hypothesize a definition in the ethnic sense, so that «se non può certo scartarsi la possibilità che si tratti di nativi immessi all'interno dell'emporio in condizioni di marginalità, non può escludersi d'altra parte una provenienza da altri ambiti culturali».²³ In the latter case, Calascibetta suggests that they may have been individuals from the Tunisian Sahel, where this funerary practice is widely observed within the Libyan substratum. These individuals likely belonged to lower-ranking segments of the population and would have accompanied the migration movement orchestrated and managed by Carthage.²⁴ How-



Fig. 4. Phoenician and Punic Sicily (italicized sites were not involved in Phoenician colonization) (from Bondi *et al.* 2009).

19 Calascibetta 2020.

20 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1066, note 4.

21 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1066, «form a homogeneous grouping in terms of orientation, deposition method, choice and chronology of the grave goods, which could perhaps suggest an organization of the funerary space by family groups».

22 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1068, note 7 (with references). For *Othoca*, see most recently Del Vais 2018, pp. 94-98.

23 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1072, note 31, «if the possibility of natives brought into the *emporion* under conditions of marginality cannot be ruled out, a provenance from other cultural backgrounds cannot be excluded».

24 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1071, note 27 (with references).

ever, as emphasized by the Sicilian scholar in the concluding pages of the work examined here, it is far more likely that the huddled inhumations in the Solunto pit represent indigenous individuals who were present in the emporium from an early stage, living in conditions of marginality.²⁵

The North African metropolis and its directly controlled territories serve as a reference point for inhumations in tombs of the “*cassa monumentale*” type, primarily dating to the first half or mid-6th century BCE, as investigated by Caterina Greco between 1992 and 1993. These graves consist of large pits carved into the rocky substrate, covered with substantial rectangular slabs laid on a wide ledge cut into all sides of the pit. Beyond Palermo, this type of tomb is also well-documented in Sardinia, as will be discussed below. However, it is important to highlight the distinctive features of the “*cassa monumentale*” tombs of Solunto compared to other examples. Notably, a “cushion” carved from the rock is often found near the head of the deceased. Additionally, two tombs are sometimes positioned side by side within a single burial enclosure. In certain cases, the grave includes a side niche on the southern wall, where both the remains of the deceased and the grave goods are placed.²⁶

These particular features could provide valuable clues about the origins of Solunto’s earliest inhabitants. The “cushion” spared in the excavation of the tomb hollow, for instance, has been previously compared by the author to examples from the necropolis of Menzel Témime at Cape Bon.²⁷ However, the tombs in this funerary area, which have unfortunately been subject to repeated looting, have not provided evidence predating the 4th–3rd centuries BCE.²⁸ The presence of this specific adaptation of the grave floor at Tharros further underscores the close connections between the Carthaginian sphere and the Phoenician settlements in the northern Gulf of Oristano, as well as those in northern Sicily.²⁹

The situation described can be supplemented with economic considerations on the flow of goods between Punic settlements in the central Mediterranean identifiable through the study of amphora containers. From this point of view, a privileged observatory is represented by the rich documentation from the necropolis of Himera, which reflects the network of relations in place in the *emporion* of the Doric-Calcidian colony in the time span between its foundation, dated by sources to 648 BCE, and its abandonment after the bloody events of 409 BCE.

Among the 276 Phoenician-Punic amphorae recently examined by Babette Bechtold and Stefano Vassallo, 41 specimens have been attributed to production in the Carthage area, representing 15% of the total.³⁰ This positions them as the second-largest group, following the amphorae produced at Solunto. A diachronic analysis reveals that Carthaginian amphorae were the most numerous during the period spanning the second half of the 7th century to the early 6th century BCE. These were accompanied by amphorae from Solunto and Motya, highlighting the trade connections between Himera and the Punic-Sicilian world beginning in the late 7th century BCE.³¹

For this same period, the identification of two amphorae likely originating from the Nora area has been appropriately contextualized by Babette Bechtold within the close relationship between the colony in southwestern Sardinia and Carthage, a topic explored further in later discussions.³² The scholar has also proposed that Carthage mediated the arrival of a unique Ramon amphora type T-10.1.2.1. in Himera, originat-

25 Calascibetta 2020, p. 1075.

26 Greco 1997a, pp. 892-894; 1997b, p. 30; 2000, p. 1322.

27 Botto 2008, p. 1629.

28 Fantar 2002, p. 99.

29 Acquaro – Del Vais – Fariselli 2006, p. 315 (tomb 17).

30 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017.

31 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 16-19, 23, 32, 43.

32 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 43 and 48, notes 167-168, 218-219.

ing from Phoenician settlements in Mediterranean Andalusia. This is supported by the type's documented presence in Carthage and its strategic outpost of Pantelleria. Similarly, the circulation of amphorae of type T-10.2.1.1., produced near the Strait of Gibraltar and present in Himera during the mid-6th century BCE, likely involved Carthaginian mediation.³³

Another point of significant interest concerns the settlements in the Gulf of Oristano, which served as key intermediaries for the North African metropolis in Sardinia, facilitating the flow of goods to the markets of the Lower Tyrrhenian Sea. Amphorae produced in the Tharros area, with 38 specimens, constitute the third most represented group in Himera, following those from Solunto and Carthage.³⁴ This figure becomes even more significant when combined with the 20 amphorae produced in the hinterland of *Neapolis*.³⁵ Over time, this trade route became increasingly consolidated. A diachronic analysis reveals that while initial imports during the first half to mid-6th century BCE were limited, the majority of attestations occurred in the 5th century BCE, aligning with documentation from Carthage, where Sardinian imports increased significantly from the Middle Punic I period (480-430 BCE) onward.³⁶ It is worth noting that, compared to the documentation from Tharros, the records of *Neapolis* and its hinterland show significant diachronic differences. These differences are particularly evident in the intensive exploitation of land for agricultural purposes and the resulting ability to export food surpluses, which began at the end of the 5th century BCE and became especially prominent in the 4th century BCE.³⁷

Simultaneously, it is noteworthy how limited the circulation of amphorae produced in the Phoenician settlements of southwestern Sardinia was in northern Sicily. In addition to the already-mentioned case of Nora, the near-total absence of amphorae from *Sulky* is striking.³⁸ This is surprising given *Sulky*'s established role since the 8th century BCE as a colony specializing in the production and export of foodstuffs, particularly wine.³⁹ The current evidence makes it exceedingly difficult to establish direct connections between Motya and *Sulky*, two of the most prominent settlements in their respective regions, both deeply integrated into international trade networks.⁴⁰

Focusing on the flow of goods transported by Carthage to the Lower Tyrrhenian Sea, the amphorae from its hinterland distributed widely across Sicily likely contained a range of foodstuffs, including preserved meat and fish, wine, and, above all, oil.⁴¹ With regard to the amphorae found at Himera,⁴² it is noteworthy that no evidence of inner surface treatment with pitch or resins – commonly used for amphorae intended to transport wine and, likely, oil – was detected.⁴³ This significantly limits the range of products exported to the Greek colony, indicating that they were predominantly solid foodstuffs, such as olives, as well as fish and meat preserved in salt.

33 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 40 and 47-48.

34 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 35-38.

35 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 33-35.

36 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 38, 44.

37 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, pp. 48-49 (*Neapolis*).

38 In this regard, see the observations developed by Bartoloni 2020, pp. 79-80.

39 Botto 2021a, pp. 266-271 (with references); Botto forthcoming b.

40 For *Sulky* see the previous note; for Motya see Bechtold 2015b, pp. 64, 91-92; Nigro – Spagnoli 2017, pp. 86-88; Spatafora 2018, pp. 368-369, where the preferential relations with Carthage are highlighted.

41 Spanò Giammellaro 2000, pp. 309-311 (with references); see also Sourisseau 2013, pp. 121-122; Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, p. 17, notes 48-57.

42 Bechtold – Vassallo 2017, p. 50.

43 See the considerations of Massimo Botto in Bordignon *et al.* 2005.



Fig. 5. Map of Sardinia showing the main settlements from the Phoenician and Punic periods (from Bondi *et al.* 2009).

the necropolis were dated to the late 6th century or early 5th century BCE. However, recent revisions of these chronologies have been proposed. For instance, Piero Bartoloni now dates the oldest hypogeum in the necropolis, the Belvedere Tomb 1, to the first quarter of the same century.⁴⁸ This tendency to raise the chronologies of the *Sulky* funerary installation does not appear to be isolated in the panorama of studies, since in the recent publication of Tomb 9 PGM, a dating of the funerary installation to the third quarter of the 6th century BCE was advanced by Michele Guirguis.⁴⁹

Moving inland from the coast, the Carthaginian influence in Sulcis quickly spread throughout the interior of the region, reaching the most economically significant settlements within the territory controlled by Sulky, namely Monte Sirai to the north and Pani Loriga to the east.⁵⁰ The most interesting data for our analysis once again come from the necropolises, where the predominant cremation ritual has been accompanied, since the late 7th century BCE, by inhumation. This shift is marked by the appearance in grave goods

Similar observations can be made regarding goods produced in Phoenician settlements in southern Spain and the Gulf of Oristano, which reached Sicily and the Lower Tyrrhenian Sea via Carthage. Notably, the transition from the 6th century to the 5th century BCE marked an increasing specialization in the export of fish products in the far western Mediterranean. Meanwhile, in Sardinia, a distinctive feature is the expansion of wine production in the *Neapolis* area, which gained particular significance in the 4th century BCE.⁴⁴ In the northern Gulf of Oristano, *Othoca* documented extensive production of preserved meat,⁴⁵ while Tharros emerged as a hub for the export of metals, particularly iron – a topic deserving further in-depth study given the current lack of research. Finally, it is essential to highlight that between the second half of the 6th century and the first half of the 5th century BCE, the export of wine, accompanied by bronze sets for its consumption, was a defining aspect of Etruscan trade in Sicily.⁴⁶

2.2. Sardinia

Focusing on Sardinia, it is possible to trace the progressive expansion of Carthaginian influence in the southwestern part of the island, beginning with the Punic necropolis of *Sulky* (Fig. 5). This necropolis consists of hundreds of hypogea, some of which are particularly significant for the topics discussed here, as highlighted in Paolo Bernardini's studies.⁴⁷ In the past, the earliest chamber tombs in the

44 Roppa 2014, pp. 214-219 (with references).

45 Del Vais – Sanna 2012.

46 Bellelli 2017, p. 49.

47 Bernardini 2007; 2008; 2018; 2021.

48 Bartoloni 2022, p. 72; 2023a, p. 33.

49 Guirguis 2021a, p. 225.

50 Botto – Dessena – Finocchi 2014.



Fig. 6. Pani Loriga: (a) Overhead view of Tomb A at the end of the excavation (photo S. Lancia, CNR-ISPC); (b) Overhead view of Tomb B at the end of the excavation (photo S. Ledda, Ati-Iffras).

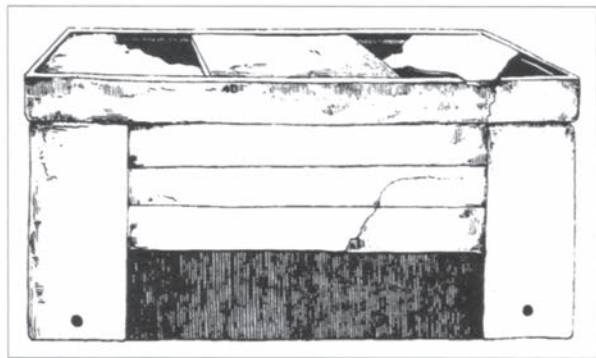


Fig. 7. Ghar Barka, Malta: Terracotta sarcophagus discovered in 1797 (from Guirguis 2010).

of ceramics with clear North African influences, as well as the use of a distinctive type of tomb associated with the Carthaginian sphere. These tombs consist of large pits covered by slabs set into wide grooves cut into the long sides. Occasionally, they feature two symmetrical sub-rectangular depressions at the short ends of the pit's bottom (Fig. 6, a-b). Although their function remains unclear, these depressions were likely designed to hold the feet of large wooden sarcophagi (Fig. 7).⁵¹

The documentation from Sulcis reveals numerous connections with that of Palermo and Solunto. In both Sulky and Palermo, inhumations in rock-carved hypogeal chamber tombs appear several decades earlier than the historical accounts of general Malchus's expeditions to Sicily and Sardinia, followed by the campaigns of the Magonids in Sardinia. The same holds true for inhumations in tombs of the "monumental box/pit" type found in Palermo and Solunto, as well as at Monte Sirai and Pani Loriga.⁵² Regarding the

⁵¹ The hypothesis that this type of burial was introduced in Sulcis following the displacement of groups of people from the North African territories controlled by Carthage was first put forward by Piero Bartoloni: cfr. Bartoloni 1998; 1999; 2000 (Tombs 88 and 95 of Monte Sirai). For later finds in the same necropolis see Botto – Salvadei 2005, p. 128; Botto 2008; Guirguis 2010, pp. 179-184; 2011, pp. 10-11, 18-19; 2021a, pp. 378-379; Botto *et al.* 2021, pp. 39-43. For the findings made by the CNR at the Phoenician necropolis of Pani Loriga see Botto *et al.* 2021 and Botto forthcoming a.

⁵² Cfr. *supra* text and note 16. On Palermo, see also Spatafora 2018, p. 374; 2019, p. 13.

documentation from these two settlements, the author questioned how this evidence should be interpreted: does it reflect autonomous movements of individuals driven purely by economic needs, or does it suggest the presence of a coordinated strategy behind these movements?⁵³

As previously explored in another context,⁵⁴ the collected evidence suggests, in our view, a strategy implemented by Carthage that involved the gradual integration of individuals of North African origin into the Phoenician colonial network of the central Mediterranean.

The conclusions drawn for Sulcis are strongly supported by Spatafora's recent observations regarding the foundations of Palermo and Solunto. For this reason, it is considered plausible that the inhumations found in Sicily, as well as in Sulcis, may belong to prominent members of a Carthaginian community. This group was likely much larger but is challenging to fully identify, as many individuals lacked the right to formal burial. We can therefore infer the presence of Carthaginian skilled merchants – emissaries of influential mercantile enterprises based in North Africa – accompanied by retinues of specialized workers whose expertise facilitated interactions with local communities.⁵⁵

Similar phenomena are documented in the Oristano region, with burials in Tharros and *Othoca* attributed to individuals of probable Carthaginian origin.⁵⁶ These contexts, dated between the late 7th century and the first half of the 6th century BCE, illustrate a broader process of political and cultural integration with Carthage. In Tharros, the evidence from burial grounds, the Tophet,⁵⁷ and habitation areas indicates a process of urbanization driven by North African colonists, commencing between the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE.⁵⁸

Carthage's presence in the Sinis peninsula seems to have been driven primarily by economic interests. The region functioned as a crucial hub for the collection and redistribution of metals from the Montiferru and Nurra mines to North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and potentially Sicily.⁵⁹ Additionally, the sheltered lagoon port of Mistras offered a strategic anchorage for ships, enabling trade routes between the Atlantic and the central Mediterranean to bypass Phoenician settlements in southwestern Sardinia (such as Nora, Bitia, and *Sulky*) and flow directly to the Gulf of Tunis.⁶⁰ Additionally, Carthage's consolidation of its presence in the Gulf of Oristano reflects its growing commercial interests in the Iberian Levant and the Bouches du Rhône region.⁶¹

During the same period, there is evidence of increased Greek activity in the Iberian Peninsula, which became more established between the second and third quarters of the 6th century BCE. This development is marked by the foundation of *Emporion* around 575 BCE by settlers from *Massalia*⁶² and the sustained presence of Greek-East ceramicists in Huelva until approximately 545-540 BCE.⁶³ In the Iberian Levant, however, the

53 The question was stimulated by the recent position statements of Secci 2018; 2019.

54 Cfr. Botto *et al.* 2021 and Botto forthcoming a.

55 As has been recently emphasized, a useful tool for identifying these migratory flows is provided by the study of pottery: Secci 2019, pp. 181-182; Botto forthcoming a.

56 For Tharros see in particular Del Vais – Fariselli 2010, pp. 18-20; Fariselli 2018, pp. 122-125; Del Vais – Fariselli 2019, pp. 1251-1256; Fariselli 2021, pp. 303-304. Cfr. also the interesting observations of Secci 2014-2015, pp. 193-199, on a considerable group of rectangular pit tombs, including tomb B13, which has been analyzed in depth, and on tombs B8 and B19, which in terms of the size of the pits, the presence of ribs and the type of covering are close to the cases of Monte Sirai and Pani Loriga reported here. For *Othoca* see Del Vais 2012; 2018, pp. 94-98.

57 Floris 2022, pp. 273-275 (with references).

58 Secci 2018, p. 356. On these issues, see also Fariselli 2018 (with references).

59 This issue is discussed extensively in Botto 2021b, pp. 478-479.

60 Botto forthcoming a.

61 Ramon 2010; Costa Ribas 2018, pp. 20-21, note 42.

62 Plana-Mallart 2018, pp. 106-107; Almagro-Gorbea – Lorrio Alvarado – Torres Ortiz 2021.

63 For an extensive and up-to-date examination, see Domínguez Monedero 2020 and González de Canales – Llompart Gómez 2023.

Phocæan presence strengthened mainly between the second half of the 6th century and the beginning of the 5th century BCE. The third quarter of the 6th century BCE dates the abandonment of the important Phoenician colony of La Fonteta, which coincides with the abandonment of the large indigenous settlement of Peña Negra. This undoubtedly favoured the resumption of Phocæan trade in the region organized by *Emporion* and with *Massalia* as the main Phocæan reference in the West.⁶⁴ It is entirely probable that this situation created tension between *Massalia* and Carthage, as also reported in the sources,⁶⁵ directing the North African metropolis to consolidate its positions in the western Mediterranean, as is well testified by the progressive interest in Ibiza.⁶⁶

Turning to the central-southern quadrant of Sardinia, the settlement of Nora offers significant insights. Excavations indicate a period of strong settlement development in the late 7th century BCE, marked by a sharp increase in commercial and cultural exchanges with Carthage.⁶⁷ This is well-documented through the study of tableware pottery⁶⁸ and the fabrics of transport amphorae assemblages uncovered in the area of the Roman Forum.⁶⁹ The latter has revealed high percentages of amphorae types, such as Ramon T-2.1.1.2. and T-1.4.2.1., linked to workshops in the North African metropolis. Further supporting this connection is the recovery of amphorae of the same type in the nearby sea, which contained zebu bones (*Bos taurus indicus*), a bovine species native to North Africa.⁷⁰ These findings strongly suggest a privileged trade relationship between Nora and the Gulf of Tunis.⁷¹ This hypothesis could be further corroborated if petrographic analyses confirm that amphorae found in Carthage, Pantelleria, and northern Sicily – regions influenced by Carthaginian trade – can be attributed to workshops in the Nora area, as has been observed for Himera.⁷²

In the neighboring settlement of Bitia, evidence from the necropolis⁷³ and the tophet⁷⁴ suggests that the transition from a trading post to a more structured settlement occurred during the last decades of the 7th century BCE.⁷⁵ The necropolis reveals close cultural ties with the communities of the Gulf of Tunis, particularly Utica and Carthage. These connections are evidenced by the adoption of the inhumation ritual in the first half of the 6th century BCE⁷⁶ and by distinctive grave goods, such as “à chardon” vases,⁷⁷ decorated ostrich eggs,⁷⁸ and ivory pyxes.⁷⁹

64 PLANA-MALLART 2018, pp. 109-110; Almagro-Gorbea – Lorrio Alvarado – Torres Ortiz 2021, p. 84

65 Morel 2000, pp. 24-25; Bernardini 2010, pp. 199-200; Botto 2023, pp. 47-51. Reference is made to the well-known passages of Pausanias (X, 8, 6-7; 18, 7) and Justin (XLIII, 5, 2), for which see Agus 2000.

66 Cfr. *infra* text.

67 Bonetto 2021; Botto 2021a, pp. 271-277.

68 Botto 2009, pp. 99-100 (plates with a short everted rim); 125-126 (domed cups with a marked curvature of the walls); 128 (glasses); 129-130 (open cups with decorated rims); 172-180 (adaptations of Greek shapes: *skyphoi* and *kotylai*); 195-200 (jugs/ amphorae with a circular mouth and horizontal dividing element on the neck); 224-228 (amphorae with a flared neck and ovoid body); 231-232 (amphorae with a careened shoulder).

69 For the materials from the excavations at the Roman Forum cfr. Finocchi 2009, pp. 383-386, 463-464, table XII (fabrics 5 and 6); see also Bechtold – Docter 2010, p. 92, notes 25 and 26. For the transport amphorae from the investigations at the Roman Temple see Madrigali 2021, p. 29, notes 23-24 (T-2.1.1.2.) and 32, note 35 (T-1.4.2.1.).

70 Madrigali – Zara 2018 (with references).

71 Botto – Madrigali 2016, pp. 262-264.

72 Bechtold 2013a, pp. 92-93; for Himera cfr. *supra* note 32.

73 Bartoloni 1996 (excavations 1976-1979); 1997, where a selection of grave goods from later investigations is presented.

74 Floris – Gilbert forthcoming.

75 For 8th and 7th centuries BCE pottery from the Torre di Chia and surrounding areas see Minoja – Bassoli – Nieddu 2016.

76 Bartoloni 1983, pp. 59-60; Botto forthcoming a.

77 Tore – Gras 1976, pp. 56-57, 61, 65, 78; Bartoloni 1996, pp. 89-91; 2003; Secci 2019, pp. 188-189.

78 Botto 1996.

79 Acquaro – Bartoloni 1986.

The remarkable development of Bitia at the end of the 7th century BCE, in our view, fits into a strategic plan implemented by Carthage to strengthen economic, commercial, and cultural ties with Etruria by enhancing connections with the Phoenician settlements of southern and eastern Sardinia.⁸⁰ This interpretation is supported both by the abundant evidence of Etruscan pottery found in the funerary assemblages of the Bitia necropolis⁸¹ and by recent investigations conducted at Nora, which reveal striking parallels with Carthage in the patterns of Etruscan imports.⁸²

The eastern coasts of Sardinia, though the least explored areas of the island, hold particular significance for our analysis as they lie along key routes connecting Sardinia to Etruria.⁸³ Rubens D'Oriano's studies have demonstrated that Olbia, located in the northeastern sector of the island, served as a crucial outpost for Phoenician trade directed toward the central Tyrrhenian coasts of the Italian peninsula from as early as the second quarter of the 8th century BCE.⁸⁴ Consequently, its transition to Phocaean influence around 630 BCE, as thoroughly documented by Greek materials analyzed by the scholar, must have dealt a severe blow to Sardinian-Phoenician and Carthaginian interests in the Tyrrhenian Sea.⁸⁵ At the same time, this shift likely played a decisive role in the dissemination of Ionian trade goods across other parts of Sardinia. In this context, the observations of Paolo Bernardini remain highly relevant: «L'approccio più promettente, oggi, sembra quello di esplorare le possibilità di una connessione tra la circolazione di prodotti greco-orientali in Sardegna tra il 580 e il 530 a.C. e l'esistenza di interessi greci per la Sardegna come sfondo e motivazione dell'intervento cartaginese nell'isola».⁸⁶

From this perspective, the strengthening of commercial activities at *Sarcapos*⁸⁷ at the mouth of the Flumendosa River at the end of the 7th century BCE – despite the still limited evidence available – should be interpreted as part of a coordinated defense of Sardinian-Phoenician and Carthaginian interests in the Tyrrhenian.⁸⁸ The foundation of Cuccureddus in Villasimius, whose occupation phases are dated by recent research to the late 7th century and the first half of the 6th century BCE, should be understood in the same light.⁸⁹

The Phocaean control of Olbia and the reinforcement of their positions at Alalia around the mid-6th century BCE – accompanied by a rise in pirate activities in the Tyrrhenian by East Greek forces – were among the primary factors prompting the Etruscan-Carthaginian alliance against the Phocaeans, culminating in the battle of the Sardonian Sea.⁹⁰ This battle, therefore, should be viewed as one episode within a much broader historical framework, in which Carthage acted against Greek interests both in the Tyrrhenian and along the coastal regions stretching from southern Spain to the French Midi.

80 Santocchini Gerg 2014, pp. 203, 227-228, 259.

81 Bernardini 2000; 2005; Botto 2007, pp. 90-107 and Santocchini Gerg 2014, pp. 72-78.

82 In this regard, the contribution of Santocchini Gerg (2021) is essential, to which should be added the significant documentation of the western Phoenician necropolis, recently examined systematically by Mazzariol (2023, pp. 427-431).

83 For the routes connecting Sardinia to the Peninsula in the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, see Botto 2007, pp. 77-78; 2008b, pp. 131-132; Milletti 2012, pp. 242-249; D'Oriano 2021, pp. 325-329.

84 Cfr. e.g. D'Oriano 2021 (with references).

85 For further observations on this matter, see Rubens D'Oriano in D'Oriano – Oggiano 2005, pp. 188-189.

86 Bernardini 2010, p. 206, «The most promising approach today seems to be exploring the possibility of a connection between the circulation of East Greek products in Sardinia between 580 and 530 BCE and the existence of Greek interests in Sardinia as a backdrop and motivation for Carthaginian intervention on the island».

87 Zucca 1984; Mastino – Spanu – Zucca 2005, pp. 205-206. For the Etruscan materials found at the site, see Santocchini Gerg 2014, pp. 171-172. Extremely promising for understanding the settlement's trade network are the investigations at the necropolis, a preliminary report of which is given by Manunza 2013.

88 Secci *et al.* 2023, p. 212 (with references).

89 Guirguis 2021b; Bartoloni 2023b, p. 299.

90 Zucca 2000, p. 256, with explicit reference to the works of Michel Gras; Bartoloni 2023b, pp. 298-300.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted, following recent lines of research, allows for a reinterpretation of many of the events that took place in the central-western Mediterranean between the late 7th and 6th centuries BCE.⁹⁴ First and foremost, it is believed that the concept of a “second colonization” which originated in the Levant and supposedly strengthened ancient foundations while promoting the creation of new settlements, should be definitively rejected.⁹⁵ Instead, a historical reconstruction centered exclusively on Western dynamics is advocated. The final decades of the 7th century BCE marked a period of significant expansion for the Phoenician colonial world, particularly for Carthage. During this time, Carthage strengthened its foothold in North Africa while also fostering more dynamic economic activity across the Mediterranean, bolstered by ambitious diplomatic initiatives. If the recent proposal put forward by Francesca Spatafora regarding the foundations of Palermo and Solunto were correct, it would open up extremely interesting interpretative scenarios from this perspective. In the first case, a synergy between the Phoenician elements of Sicily and Sardinia with Carthage in an anti-Greek function would emerge to protect commercial interests in the Lower Tyrrhenian Sea. In the second case, Carthage’s strategy would be primarily aimed at strengthening relations with the local components of the island.

The Scholar’s hypothesis aligns perfectly with research aimed at uncovering phenomena of human mobility within the Phoenician colonial world of the West.⁹⁶ In this instance, however, the movement of individuals or groups would not be limited to personal initiatives or those linked to private enterprise but could also involve institutional leadership. This is because the founding of a settlement, while encompassing economic and commercial aspects, carries significant political implications. Notably, Carthage’s swift engagement in an extraterritorial initiative requiring the participation of various components of the Punic Mediterranean is particularly striking.

This strategy closely resembles the patterns observed in Sardinia during the same chronological periods. Notably, the proposal by Anna Chiara Fariselli and Raimondo Secci regarding Carthage’s direct involvement in the urban development of Capo San Marco is particularly compelling.⁹⁷ This site, frequented continuously by Levantine sailors and later by Phoenicians since the 9th century BCE, is of strategic importance, controlling the routes to and from North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula and serving as a bulwark for various forms of supply from the interior.

With regard to the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Carthage in Sardinia, the case of Tharros stands out as particularly significant. However, it is clear that, starting from the late 7th century BCE, the North African metropolis actively pursued its economic and commercial interests across various sectors of the island. In Sulcis, for instance, Carthage’s strategy involved the gradual integration of individuals with strong entrepreneurial abilities into the social fabric of Sulky, the region’s oldest and most prominent Phoenician settlement. These efforts aimed to consolidate the economic and cultural dominance of the Tyrian colony in the southwestern part of the island. Equally remarkable is the Carthaginian capacity for territorial penetration in the region, demonstrated by their integration into the social fabric of inland settlements such as Monte Sirai and Pani Loriga from the late 7th century BCE. The situation in settlements like Nora and Bitia, however, presents a contrasting picture. Unlike *Sulky*, which exercised extensive territorial control, these settlements developed a strong maritime focus from their inception. In their case, the increasingly close connections with Carthage, as evidenced by material culture, were driven by a shared interest in expanding

94 Secci 2018; 2019.

95 Cfr. e.g. Moscati – Bartoloni – Bondi 1997, pp. 36-37; Bartoloni 2009a, p. 29; 2009b, p. 29; Bondi *et al.* 2009, pp. 100-101.

96 Bondi 2006; Botto 2013; 2022; forthcoming a.

97 Cfr. *supra* text and note 56.

trade with the prosperous communities of southern Etruria and *Latium Vetus*. As a result, when this thriving economic activity was disrupted – first by Olbia coming under Phocaeen control and later by the founding of Alalia – Carthage skillfully devised effective countermeasures. In the first instance, it strengthened ties with Phoenician communities most invested in protecting their interests in the central Tyrrhenian Sea. In the second, it established an anti-Phocaeen alliance with the leading coastal cities of southern Etruria, most notably Cerveteri.⁹⁸

This interpretation of the archaeological evidence challenges the thesis that Carthage, during its expansion in the Mediterranean, developed conflicts with the Phoenician communities settled in Sardinia.⁹⁹ On the contrary, as demonstrated in this study, Carthage worked in synergy with the Phoenician groups active in Sicily and Sardinia, enabling a swift and effective response to Greek expansionist ambitions in the Tyrrhenian region.¹⁰⁰

This does not imply that tensions between Carthage and the major Phoenician foundations in the West did not occur, largely due to competition in the commercial sphere, but rather that, within the framework of a policy strongly oriented toward dominance in the Mediterranean, the Carthaginian elite preferred a strategy focused more on integration and cooperation than on military conquest.

In our view, the situation does not appear to change significantly even in the second half of the 6th century BCE, when historical sources recount the expeditions led by general Malchus to Sicily and Sardinia, followed by the exploits of the Magonids in Sardinia.¹⁰¹ As has been recently noted, the final decades of the 6th century and the 5th century BCE mark a period of remarkable prosperity for the Phoenician settlements in Sicily.¹⁰² This is particularly evident in Motya, where archaeological investigations have uncovered significant transformation and reorganization of the settlement following a destructive event, likely dated to the mid-6th century BCE.¹⁰³ As is well known, scholarly opinions differ regarding the causes of this catastrophe, with some attributing it to Greek activities in Sicily and others suggesting Carthaginian involvement.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of its origins, the rapid reconstruction of Motya, undertaken according to a new ambitious political program, has rightly been interpreted as part of a broader political strategy by the North African metropolis, aimed at strengthening economic and commercial ties with the Greek world.¹⁰⁵

Turning to Sardinia, the most recent archaeological investigations conducted in Sulcis have highlighted elements of continuity rather than disruption between the Phoenician and Punic phases.¹⁰⁶ This phenomenon aligns with the growth, during the historical periods under consideration, of settlements such as Tharros and Cagliari, which have long been recognized as significant within the field of studies.¹⁰⁷

98 Botto forthcoming c.

99 Cfr. e.g. Moscati – Bartoloni – Bondi 1997, pp. 55, 68, 75, 78, 90, 114-115; Bernardini 2004; Bartoloni 2009a, pp. 46-47; 2009b, pp. 21-23, 102-104; Bondi *et al.* 2009, pp. 104-106, 164-166, 199.

100 For Sardinia, in addition to the studies mentioned above, see the interesting observations of Gras 2000, pp. 38-39 and Bartoloni 2023b, pp. 298-300.

101 For different assessments of these events, see, for example, Vico Montanero 2018; Garbati 2018a; 2018b; Bondi 2022; Bartoloni 2023b, pp. 298-299.

102 Spatafora 2019, p. 100.

103 Nigro 2015; 2020.

104 Cfr. Bondi 2022, pp. 11-12.

105 Nigro 2015, p. 229, note 14.

106 Bernardini 2021; Bondi 2021; Botto – Candelato 2021; Guirguis 2021a.

107 Moscati – Bartoloni – Bondi 1997, pp. 75, 81-85, 93-95 (with references).

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