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SARDINIA AND THE BYZANTINE WEST PARADIGM SHIFTS AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS*

Abstract. The paper focuses on Sardinia from the fall of Carthage (698) to the rise of its autonomous rulers, the *iudikes*, in the mid-9th c. During these centuries, the island managed to convey a sense of historical standing between different ‘worlds’: the Latin West, the Byzantine empire, and the Muslims in North Africa and Spain. Albeit traditionally considered as a proof of ‘periphery’ and ‘isolation’, Sardinia’s insularity condition and its development as an unconquered liminal polity among the major powers in the Western Mediterranean received renewed interest through the re-assessment of the archaeological, sigillographic and numismatic record. As such, the paper is an account of the key features of this transition and offers new perspectives on the island’s resilience within the formative phases of a Medieval Mediterranean that we increasingly understand in terms of its connectivity.

Keywords: Byzantine Sardinia, sigillography, numismatics, Western Mediterranean, trade

After the fall of Carthage (698 CE) and the subsequent capture of *Septem* (711 CE) Sardinia became the last outpost of the erstwhile Exarchate¹, and a frontier zone between the Latin West, the Eastern empire, and the Muslims in North Africa and Spain². While remaining within the Byzantine sphere

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¹ For a general overview on this topic see W.E. KAEGI, *The Islamic Conquest and the Defense of Byzantine Africa. Reconsiderations on Campaigns, Conquests, and Contexts*, [in:] *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, ed. S.T. STEVENS, J.P. CONANT, Washington, DC 2016 [= DOBSC], p. 67–70; A. LOUTH, *Byzantium Transforming (600–700)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492. Revised Edition*, ed. J. SHEPARD, Cambridge 2021, p. 222, 235–236, 239.

² The liminality of Sardinia from the late 600s CE onwards still fuels the historiographical debate (see R. MARTORELLI, *I cd. “secoli bui” della Sardegna: problematiche, metodi, filoni d’indagine da una*

of influence, from the 8th c. CE to the beginning of the autonomous rule under the so-called *iudikes* in the 10th c. CE, the island has shown different levels of resilience from the Motherland to its surroundings³. To this end, the aim of this paper is therefore to provide a critique of Sardinia's transition through the magnifier lens of numismatics, archaeology, and prosopography.

Regarding the coin circulation, the debate tends to focus on whether there was a Byzantine mint on the island. Striking coinage for Sardinia was first suggested after the discovery of a hoard of several *solidi* of Constantine IV in Carthage. The specimens bear a retrograde 'S' on the reverse, which was interpreted as the first letter of *Sardinia*⁴. From the first reign of Justinian II, prior to the capture of Carthage, *solidi* with a regular 'S' on the reverse are documented on the island. From coin finds of *solidi*, *tremisses*, *folles* and half-*folles* bearing the same letter 'S' in the reverse, a mint can be inferred to have been operational on the island from at least the period following the first fall of Carthage in 695 CE⁵ (fig. 1). The design and

storiografia consolidata e aspettative dal nuovo progetto, [in:] *Settecento-Millecento. Storia, Archeologia e Arte nei "secoli bui" del Mediterraneo. Dalle fonti scritte, archeologiche ed artistiche alla ricostruzione della vicenda storica. La Sardegna laboratorio di esperienze culturali*, vol. I, ed. EADEM, Cagliari 2013, p. 20–33). Due to the sparseness of the Byzantine sources (see the overview in M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore" dell'assetto insediativo della Sardegna bizantina (secoli VI–XI)*, Perugia 2018, p. 326–333), a number of *ex silentio* arguments have come to the fore, such as the traditional conception of the island as a model of conservatism (see R.J. ROWLAND, *The Periphery in the Center. Sardinia in the Ancient Medieval Worlds*, Oxford 2001 [= BAR.IS, 970]) 'despite' its central position in the Western Mediterranean (on this, see S. COSENTINO, *Byzantine Sardinia between West and East. Features of a Regional Culture*, Mil 1, 2004, p. 329–332; F. SULAS, *Landscapes, Archaeology, and Identity in Sardinia*, [in:] *Sardinia from the Middle Ages to Contemporaneity. A Case Study of a Mediterranean Island Identity Profile*, ed. L. GALLINARI, Bern–Berlin–Bruxelles–New York–Oxford–Warszawa–Wien 2018, p. 17–23) and the overestimation of some of the alleged 'turning points' in its development as a frontier, such as the early Muslim raids (which have been recently re-assessed as to their extent: see A. METCALFE, *Early Muslim Raids on Byzantine Sardinia*, [in:] *The Making of Medieval Sardinia*, ed. A. METCALFE, H. FERNÁNDEZ-ACEVES, M. MURESU, Leiden–Boston 2021 [= MME, 128], p. 126–131).

³ The extent of Byzantinisation in Sardinia relies on detecting cultural influence in the documentary, administrative and material record. This is the case with the medieval *curatorias* – territorial divisions of the island attested since the 1000s CE – and their interpretation as a derivation from the Medieval Greek *κουρτωρία* (see M. ORRÙ, *Nota sull'amministrazione dell'isola in età bizantina e altomedievale. Κουρτώρες in Sardegna?*, *ThHi* 25, 2016, p. 361–366). Similar assumptions of continuity involve a series of terms and toponyms of Vernacular Sardinian which may also be partly of Byzantine origin (on which see G. PAULIS, *Lingua e cultura nella Sardegna bizantina. Testimonianze linguistiche dell'influsso greco*, Cagliari 1983) as well as the transition of political rulership from *archontes* to *iudikes* (see A. SODDU, *Il potere regio nella Sardegna giudicale (XI–XII secolo)*, [in:] *Linguaggi e rappresentazioni del potere nella Sardegna medievale*, ed. IDEM, Roma 2020, p. 44–56, 73–84; L. GALLINARI, *The Iudex Sardiniae and the Archon Sardanius between the Sixth and Eleventh Century*, [in:] *The Making of Medieval Sardinia...*, p. 204–239).

⁴ C. MORRISSON, *Un trésor de solidi de Constantin IV de Carthage*, RN 22, 1980, p. 155–160; EADEM, *Supplément au "trésor de Constantin IV"*, BSN 36, 1981, p. 91–94.

⁵ M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 387–416. For more recent information, see IDEM, *The Coinage of Byzantine Sardinia*, [in:] *The Making of Medieval Sardinia...*, p. 170–203.

fabrication of the coins suggests that at least some of the staff of the erstwhile mint at Carthage would have been transferred in Sardinia, while the remaining moneyers would have continued to strike coins in North Africa under the Muslims⁶.

Gold coinage from 'Sardinia' is mostly made up of unique specimens. Aside from a few sporadic findings, the majority of the gold issues were found in a hoard from an undisclosed rural location between Porto Torres (ancient *Turris Libisonis*) and Stintino, on the Northern coast of the island⁷ (fig. 2). This raises important questions on the extent of their circulation, which appears to be limited only to the island, with no evidence of discoveries in other contexts of the Western Mediterranean⁸. Silver issues date back to the reigns of Justinian II (685–695 CE) and Leontius (695–698 CE) and were made up primarily of unique specimens of fractions of *siliquae*⁹ (fig. 1, c–d). Finally, the bronze issues were crudely made mainly by reusing older coins, with significant shifts in weight and module¹⁰. The last two gold series bearing the letter 'S' were struck during the reign of Leo III. The former between 720 CE – when Leo co-opted his son into power, changing

⁶ Gradual transition from Byzantine to Islamic types over a period of twenty years, from 698 to 717 CE, while maintaining the older features – weight standards, globular fabric, rough surface – as well as Latin inscriptions suggests continuity of the minting operation, with the Byzantine moneyers assisting Arabs. See T. JONSON, *The Earliest Dated Islamic Solidi of North Africa*, [in:] *Arab-Byzantine Coins and History, Papers Presented at the Seventh Century Syrian Numismatic Round Table held at Corpus Christi College, Oxford on 10th and 11th September 2011*, ed. T. GOODWIN, London 2012, p. 1–11; T. JONSON, M. BLET-LEMARQUAND, C. MORRISON, *The Byzantine Mint in Carthage and the Islamic Mint in North Africa. New Metallurgical Findings*, RN 171, 2014, p. 655–699.

⁷ M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 132, with further bibliography.

⁸ See below, p. 515.

⁹ For the coinage issued during the reign of Justinian II see C. MORRISON, *L'Argent d'une île: nouvelles siliques de Justinien II en Sardaigne*, [in:] *Suadente Nummo Vetere. Studi in onore di Giovanni Gorini*, ed. M. ASOLATI, B. CALLEGHER, A. SACCOCCI, Padova 2016, p. 337–343. Regarding Leontius' coinage, a unique (as problematic) fraction of *siliqua* was minted in Sardinia during his reign. At the current state, the latter appears to be the last Byzantine silver coin struck on the island (see M. MURESU, *The Coinage...*, p. 193).

¹⁰ Such is the case of a Sardinian *folles* of Justinian II (685–695 CE) overstruck on *folles* of Constantinople (*Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. II.1, *Heraclius Constantine to Theodosius III (641–717)*, ed. P. GRIERSON, Washington, DC 1968 (cetera: DOC, II.2), p. 591, no. 38, pl. XXXVIII). The practice of reusing older currency in minting bronze coinage on the island is attested to also from the reigns of Leontius (695–698 CE), Tiberius III (698–705 CE), and Anastasius II (713–715 CE). To the former refer two half-*folles*, overstruck on a Sicilian (DOC, II.2, p. 617, no. 11, pl. XL) and a Sardinian *folles* of Justinian II respectively (E. PIRAS, *Le monete della Sardegna dal IV secolo a.C. al 1842*, Sassari 1996, p. 89, no. 48; M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 403, no. 2.c.3.d). A half-*folles* of Tiberius III from Sardinia was overstruck on a *folles* of Constans II (641–668 CE) (L. LAFFRANCHI, *La numismatica di Leonzio II. Studio su un periodo della monetazione italo-bizantina*, Firenze 1940, p. 32, no. 5–6; DOC, II.2, p. 634, n. 20). Finally, two Sardinian half-*folles* of Anastasius II have been identified as overstruck: the former was obtained from an unknown earlier specimen (M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 403, no. 2.c.6.d, fig. 304) and the latter was issued on a pre-existing half-*folles* of Justinian II from Sardinia (R.M. ZANELLA, *L'individuazione di un inedito folles Sardo-Bizantino attribuibile a Anastasio II Artemio, 713–715*, [in:] *Atti I e II Giornata di Studi Numismatici*, Dolianova 2013, p. 41–55).

iconography of the coins¹¹ – and 726 CE, the latter from the interpretation of the Greek *theta* in the reverse of two specimens, as an indiction date or a regnal year (fig. 1, g). The second is a series of tremisses of poor quality, with garbled legends and schematic portraits¹². Their features led to them being considered an imitation of the previous series, providing a hypothetical chronology between 720s/730s and 741 CE (the end of Leo III's reign) and had them identified as the last Byzantine coin issue in Sardinia (fig. 1, h).

Framing the 'rise and fall' of the coinage production on the island is far from clear. The closure of the mint and/or the dramatic reduction of available currency may be read as a local effect of a wider monetary crisis, which took place in the Western Mediterranean during the first half of the 8th c. CE. Indeed, at that time, the mints of Ravenna, Rome, Naples, and Syracuse struck gold currency that was suffering from an increasing and sometimes critical debasement, among a general decrease in the number of coins in circulation¹³. The closure of the 'Byzan-

¹¹ *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. III.1, *Leo III to Michael III (717–867)*, ed. P. GRIERSON, Washington, DC 1973, p. 226.

¹² Despite their poor quality, the authenticity of the specimens is not in question. Three examples were included in the hoard found between Porto Torres (ancient *Turrus Libisonis*) and Stintino (see above at footnote no. 8). Two other issues have been found through archaeological excavation and in contextual association with artefacts dating to the same period: the former during exploration of a monumental underground tomb in the locality of Cirredis, near Villaputzu (Cagliari: D. SALVI, *Monili, ceramiche e monete (bizantine e longobarde) dal mausoleo di Cerredis (Villaputzu-Sardegna)*, QFA 11, 2001, p. 115–132), and the latter during archaeological research at the area of Santo Stefano-Parfè Sole in Posada (Nuoro) during the 1980s (M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 297–300, with previous bibliography).

¹³ The purity of Ravenna's gold series started to decline from 90% to between 83% and 65% under Justinian II; at the very beginning of Leo III's reign, the fineness was around 60%; twenty years later, at Constantine V's ascension to the throne, the maximum fineness was 8%, with most of the 'tremisses' devoid of any gold (a discussion is in V. PRIGENT, *A Striking Evolution: the Mint of Ravenna during the Early Middle Ages*, [in:] *Ravenna. Its Role in Earlier Medieval Change and Exchange*, ed. J. HERRIN, J.L. NELSON, London 2016, p. 170). See also C. MORRISSON, B. CALLEGHER, *Ravenne: le déclin d'un avant-poste de Constantinople à la lueur de son monnayage (v. 540–751)*, CRMH 28, 2014, p. 255–278. At Rome, between 695 and 720 CE, the average fineness of gold coins had undergone a dramatic decrease from 90% to slightly above 20% (W.A. ODDY, *The Debasement of the Provincial Byzantine Gold Coinage from the Seventh to Ninth Centuries*, [in:] *Studies in Early Byzantine Gold Coinage*, ed. W. HAHN, W. METCALF, New York 1988, p. 141; V. PRIGENT, *Les empereurs Isauriens et la confiscation des patrimoines pontificaux de l'Italie du Sud*, MEFR.MÂ 116.2, 2004, p. 582–584; for a general update, see F. MARANI, *The Circulation of Coinage in Two Byzantine Cities. Rome and Naples in Comparison*, [in:] *Perspectives on Byzantine Archaeology: from Justinian to the Abbasid Age (6th–9th Centuries)*, ed. A. CASTRORAO BARBA, G. CASTIGLIA, Turnhout 2022, p. 194–195). The debasement of the coinage minted in Naples was even more marked, as it shifted from 60–65% (late 600s CE) to 20–25% (720s–730s CE) and to near 0% (740s CE) (W.A. ODDY, *The Debasement...*, p. 141, fig. 3; see also A. ROVELLI, *Naples. Ville et atelier monétaire de l'empire byzantin: l'apport des fouilles récentes*, [in:] *Mélanges Cécile Morisson*, Paris 2010, p. 699–700). Regarding the situation in Sicily, from 695 to 717 CE its gold currency suffered a decline in fineness from 97% to 60%, before rising to approximately 83–84% following the monetary reform of 730s–740s CE (see V. PRIGENT,

tine mint of Sardinia' and the progressive distancing from the monetary influence of Byzantium could also have been a collateral effect of the conflicts between the Emperor and the Apostolic See, primarily after the fiscal reforms of 730/731 CE, which caused the tax revenues of Calabria and Sicily that were until then received by Rome to now flow to the treasury of the Patriarchate of Constantinople¹⁴, or the final seizure of the Sicilian patrimonies of the Roman Church in 741/743 CE¹⁵. While this last possibility still requires further evidence, one may consider such pivotal events in the wider Mediterranean did not pass without having an impact on the economic assets of the Byzantine Sardinia¹⁶.

In fact, after the minting activity ceased, until the end of the 8th c. CE the Byzantine coinage circulating on the island was reduced to a small number of *folles*¹⁷. Interestingly, the material evidence from the same period shows the coinage of Sardinia was supplemented with currencies coming from elsewhere, mostly by Lombard and – to a small extent – Muslim coins (fig. 3). Notably, Sardinia is the land with the largest number of Lombard coin finds in the whole Mediterranean¹⁸. These consist primarily of tremisses issued by Liutprand, found as reused artefacts (i.e., grave goods) or collected in hoards¹⁹ – both unsurprising outcomes, considering the low fineness of the metal used for this series²⁰. Regarding the Arabic coins, both gold and silver, their discovery was made in urban and rural contexts

Monnaie et circulation monétaire en Sicile du début du VIII^e siècle à l'avènement de la domination musulmane, [in:] *L'Héritage Byzantin en Italie (VIII^e–XII^e siècle)*, vol. II, *Les cadres juridiques et sociaux et les Institutions publiques*, ed. J.M. MARTIN, A. PETERS-CUSTOT, V. PRIGENT, Rome 2012, p. 458–461.

¹⁴ V. PRIGENT, *Les empereurs Isauriens...*, p. 563–565; IDEM, *Un confesseur de Mauvaise foi. Notes sur l'exactions financières de l'empereur Léon III en Italie du Sud*, CRMH 28, 2014, p. 281–282.

¹⁵ J.M. MARTIN, *Rural Economy: Organization, Exploitation and Resources*, [in:] *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, ed. S. COSENTINO, Leiden–Boston 2021 [= BCBW, 8], p. 288, see there for further references.

¹⁶ See also M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 420–430.

¹⁷ Evidence consists in *folles* of Constantine V (741–775 CE) and Leo IV (775–780 CE) coming from both Private Collection (3 *folles* of Constantine V of unknown provenance: see G. BIAMONTI, *Monete vandaliche e bizantine provenienti dalla Sardegna sud-occidentale. La collezione Lulliri*, QSA.CO 13, 1996, p. 233–254) and surveys (17 *folles* of Constantine V and an uncertain number of *folles* of Leo IV from Ruinas-Ozieri: see M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 368).

¹⁸ M. BALDASSARRI, *Le monete di Lucca dal periodo longobardo al Trecento*, Firenze 2022, p. 39.

¹⁹ M. MURESU, *Monete longobarde della Sardegna bizantina. Un'apertura dell'isola verso la Penisola?*, [in:] *Atti Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, vol. II, ed. P. ARTHUR, M. LEO IMPERIALE, Firenze 2015, p. 432–435. For an update, see IDEM, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 428; IDEM, *La Sardegna nel Mediterraneo di VII–VIII secolo attraverso il dato archeologico, numismatico e sfragistico*, MEFR.MÂ [En ligne] 132.2, 2020.

²⁰ The tremissis of Liutprand had an average fineness of 58% (0,71g of pure gold) (E.A. ARSLAN, G. PERTOT, *Moneta e tecniche costruttive nel Memoratorio de mercedes commacinatorum*, [in:] *I Magistri Commacini. Mito e realtà del medioevo lombardo*, Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale di Studio sull'alto Medioevo (Varese–Como, 23–25 ottobre 2008), Spoleto 2009, p. 86). On this see also V. PRIGENT, *Mints, Coin Production and Circulation*, [in:] *A Companion to Byzantine Italy...*, p. 339; M. BALDASSARRI, *Le monete di Lucca...*, p. 39.

as individual finds²¹. Compared to the Lombard coins, they share more similarities with Byzantine gold currency in terms of weight and metrics, which increased their viability as a currency (despite the progressive debasement throughout the early 8th c. CE)²². It may have been an attempt to use other currencies *in lieu* of the Byzantine coinage, all the more likely if one were to consider the intrinsic weakness of the ‘S’ coins. As already outlined before²³, the latter have never been discovered outside of Sardinia itself – unlike the contemporary coinage from Syracuse, which can be found all over the Mediterranean and even in the Baltic area²⁴. Arguably, the situation in Sardinia could be interpreted as resulting not only from the scarce internal circulation, but also as an effect of the new orientation towards the West, especially the Italian Peninsula.

Evidence related to trade is pointing in a similar direction, as it suggests the development of a market less interested in North-African and Eastern amphorae after the fall of the Byzantine Africa, in favour of vessels and other goods from Campania, Apulia, Rome, and Sicily²⁵. In this regard, it is worth noting the existence of globular amphorae in Sardinia, from both terrestrial and underwater archaeological contexts; the case of Cagliari stands out in particular²⁶. Many frag-

²¹ For a summary of the findings see M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 430. For a wider analysis of the coins, with respect to the evidence documenting relations between Sardinia and the Muslims from 700s to 1000s CE, see A. METCALFE, *Early Muslim Raids...*, p. 152–153.

²² In terms of metrology, the comparison between a set of no. 69 Byzantine *solidi* struck at Carthage between 641 and 695 CE and a series of no. 37 Islamic post-conquest *solidi* (699–709 CE) shows an average weight of 4.32gr for the former and of 4.25–4.28gr for the latter. Regarding the fineness, the Byzantine mint at Carthage struck gold coinage with an average gold content of 96.6% right up until the Islamic conquest. The Muslims continued to strike gold issues, recycling the coinage of their Byzantine predecessors; they also debased their coinage (to, on average, between 86–88%) through the addition of unrefined, native gold. See T. JONSON, M. BLET-LEMARQUAND, C. MORRISON, *The Byzantine Mint in Carthage...*, p. 665–674.

²³ See above, page 3.

²⁴ As is well known, the fiscal reform of Leo III of establishing a new standard of 22 carats and 83–84% of fineness made the Sicilian *solidus* remain stable until the beginning of the reign of Michael I (811–813 CE). Over that period, Byzantine coins struck in Syracuse circulated throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, as findings from Continental Europe, England and Norway are also documented (C. MORRISON, *La Sicilie byzantine: une lueur dans les siècles obscurs*, QTNAC 27, 1998, p. 307–334; E. VACCARO, *Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries AD: A Case of Persisting Economic Complexity?*, *Al-Mas* 25, 2013, p. 47–51. For a list of other findings see M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 425–426).

²⁵ For an authoritative account, see M. MCCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900*, Cambridge 2001, p. 592–604; C. WICKHAM, *The Mediterranean around 800: on the Brink of the Second Trade Cycle*, *DOP* 58, 2004, p. 170–172. For recent views see A. MOLINARI, *Le anfore medievali come proxy per la storia degli scambi mediterranei tra VIII e XIII secolo*, *ArM* 45, 2018, p. 296–297; P. ARTHUR, M.L. IMPERIALE, G. BUCI, *Amphoras, Networks, and Byzantine Maritime Trade*, [in:] *Maritime Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. J. LEIDWANGER, C. KNAPPETT, Cambridge 2018, p. 219–237.

²⁶ See L. SORO, *L’approdo portuale di Cagliari in età tardoantica e bizantina: traffici commerciali e relazioni di scambio*, [in:] *Know the Sea to Live the Sea. Conoscere il mare per vivere il mare*, *Atti del*

ments with engraved symbols and letters have been found in urban archaeological excavations, such as in the areas of Vico III Lanusei, Bonaria and Santa Caterina²⁷. Bonaria's artefacts, based on comparing shape, fabric, and graffiti with products from Comacchio, Venice (Cinema San Marco), Sicily (Palermo; Cefalù), Egadian Islands (Marettimo), and Naples (Santa Patrizia) were dated to the early 8th c. CE²⁸. This evidence is especially significant because of a globular amphora bearing the same type of engraving. Bonaria's amphora could also postdate 8th c. CE, as well as the artefacts from St. Caterina. Both have been contextually associated, among other vessels from the medieval period, with sparse glaze pottery *Forum Ware*, produced and traded in Southern Italy²⁹.

It is also possible to identify the presence of Byzantine officers in Sardinia, from both inscriptions and lead seals, to the same few decades. Of these, among many titles of military and civil servants dated to the seventh century – δοῦκες, ἀπὸ ὑπάτοι, ὑπάτοι, ἀπὸ ἐπάρχοντες³⁰ – only a single specimen of unclear origin

Convegno di Studi (Cagliari, 7–9 marzo 2019), ed. R. MARTORELLI, Cagliari 2019, p. 278, 281; EADEM, *Traffici commerciali e approdi portuali nella Sardegna meridionale*, Oxford 2022, p. 83–93, 99–101.

²⁷ On Vico III Lanusei see S. CISCI, *Contentitori per la conservazione ed il trasporto (VI a.C. – VIII d.C.)*, [in:] *Archeologia urbana a Cagliari. Scavi in Vico III Lanusei*, ed. R. MARTORELLI, D. MUREDDU, Cagliari 2006, p. 112–136. On Bonaria, see R. MARTORELLI, D. MUREDDU, *Cagliari: persistenze e spostamenti del centro abitato fra VIII e XI secolo*, [in:] *Settecento-Millecento...*, vol. I, p. 215. On Santa Caterina, see S. CISCI, M. TATTI, *Cagliari. Indagini archeologiche presso il Bastione di Santa Caterina. Campagna 2012–2013. Notizia preliminare*, QSA.CO 24, 2013, p. 1–24. On the archaeology of Byzantine Cagliari see (among others) R. MARTORELLI, *Cagliari bizantina: alcune riflessioni dai nuovi dati dell'archeologia*, PCA, EJPCA 5, 2015, p. 175–199; EADEM, *L'assetto del "quartiere portuale" nella Cagliari bizantina. Dai dati antichi e attuali alcune ipotesi ricostruttive*, [in:] *Know the Sea...*, p. 83–98; EADEM, *Cagliari: un centro a continuità di vita fra spostamenti e ritorni. Aspetti della valorizzazione delle "assenze"*, [in:] *Ancient Modern Towns. I centri urbani a continuità di vita: archeologia e valorizzazione. Studi in memoria di Anna Maria Giuntella*, ed. M.C. SOMMA, Roma 2021, p. 137–150.

²⁸ For an overview on the mentioned sites see E. SANNA, *Contentitori da trasporto anforici tra VIII e XI secolo: dati e problemi*, [in:] *Settecento-Millecento...*, vol. II, p. 675–704. For an update on Comacchio, see *Un emporio e la sua cattedrale. Gli scavi di piazza XX Settembre e Villaggio San Francesco a Comacchio*, ed. S. GELICHI, C. NEGRELLI, E. GRANDI, Firenze 2021. On Sicily see E. VACCARO, *Sicily in the Eighth...*, p. 57–59; L. ARCIFA, *Contentitori da trasporto nella Sicilia bizantina (VIII–X secolo): produzioni e circolazione*, ArM 45, 2018, p. 125–127. For more recent information on Naples see P. ARTHUR, *Byzantine 'Globular Amphorae' and the Early Middle Ages: Attempting to Shed Light on a Dark-Age Enigma*, ArM 45, 2018, p. 281–287; finally, on Sardinia see L. SORO, *Traffici commerciali...*, p. 162.

²⁹ L. SORO, *Traffici commerciali...*, p. 162. On the sparse glazed pottery "Forum Ware", see M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 162, with further bibliography.

³⁰ The first of the offices is testified by the seal of Πετρόνας, πατρίκιος (καί) δούξ Σαρδινίας (C. MORRISON, V. PRIGENT, *Les bulles de plomb du Musée National de Carthage, source méconnue pour l'histoire de l'Afrique byzantine (533–695/698)*, CRAIBL 162.4, 2018, p. 1803–1834). The seals of ἀπὸ ὑπάτοι belong to Θεοπέμπος, Διομήδης, Κωνσταντῖνος, plus a fourth with unreadable name (P.G. SPANU, R. ZUCCA, *I sigilli bizantini della Sardinia*, Roma 2004, p. 62, 112–113, no. 14–17). The ὑπάτοι are named Ἰσάχιος, Κωνσταντῖνος and Πέτρος, in addition to a fourth officer of unidentifiable

dates to the 8th c. CE and mentions a ὑπατος καὶ δούξ called Θεόδοτος³¹. The seal of Θεόδοτος shares distinctive features, notably the personal name in the inner monogram on the reverse (fig. 4, a). The latter was usually reserved for offices, as can be concluded from comparisons with many examples of seals of the Dumbar-ton Oaks Seals collection (Washington, DC – USA)³². Based on this composition and on other details, such as the ‘Laurent V’ typology, the τῷ σῷ δούλῳ in the quarters, the circular inscription surrounding a monogram at reverse, and the module of some letters – for instance the round *theta* in the centre of the monogram at obverse – the object could date back to the first half of the 8th c. CE³³. Its existence recalls the presence of nobles and administrators, many of whom were probably not from Sardinia, and some of whom used Greek as the administrative language³⁴. If its dating is correct, the seal could therefore slightly predate the mention of the island’s second known ὑπατος καὶ δούξ, whose existence is attested by an inscription in Greek letters carved on a limestone block found near a reused Roman thermal complex known as ‘Palazzo di Re Barbaro’ in Porto Torres³⁵. The artefact is currently kept in the Romanesque cathedral of San Gavino and it was likely part of a public building. This is thought to be the case because of its message, which celebrates a victory by Konstantinos, ὑπατος καὶ δούξ, against the Lombards ‘and other Barbarians’, as well as praising the glory of the emperor – also named Konstantinos, most likely Constantine V, dating the text to the final decades of the 8th c. CE – as one enjoying good fortune, triumphant, and especially a bringer of peace, as the legitimate representative of God on Earth³⁶. The latter

name (*ibidem*, p. 110–111, nos. 8–13). Finally, the seals of the ἀπὸ ἐπάρχοντες belonged to the officials named Γεώργιος, Πατρικιος, Ἰωαννης and Κάτζης, the latter also δρουγγάριος (*ibidem*, p. 113–116, nos. 18–20, 22).

³¹ Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW CW ΔΟΥ ΛΩ (τῷ σῷ δούλῳ). Rev. in the centre, a cruciform monogram with stars in the quarters: ΘΕΟΔΟΤΩ. Within concentric borders of dots, a circular inscription beginning at the top: ΥΠΑΤΩ Σ ΔΟΥΚΙ ΚΑΡΔΙΝΙΑΚ (G.L. SCHLUMBERGER, *Sigillographie de l’Empire byzantin*, Paris 1884, p. 222, no. 1; V. LAURENT, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médailler Vatican*, Città del Vaticano 1962, p. 115, no. 112). A second example was reportedly kept in the *Medagliere Reale* of Turin (Italy). The object is known only from an illustrated reproduction and is now missing, presumed lost. See S. COSENTINO, *Byzantine Sardinia...*, p. 341–342, n. 48.

³² For instance, the seals of the *hypatoi* Athanasios (BZS.1955.1.1320; BZS.1958.106.2046) and Theodoros (BZS.1947.2.1611). All the objects date back to the 8th c. CE. See doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals.

³³ See N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals*, Washington, DC 1985, p. 153; R. FEIND, *Byzantinische Siegelkunde. Eine Einführung in die sigillographie von Byzanz*, Mainz 2010, p. 66, 68. For an update, see M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 338–339.

³⁴ See G. PAULIS, *Lingua e cultura...* For an update, see I.E. PUTZU, *Il repertorio linguistico sardo tra tardo-antico e alto medio evo. Un breve status quaestionis*, [in:] *Itinerando. Senza confini dalla preistoria ad oggi. Studi in ricordo di Roberto Coroneo*, vol. I, ed. R. MARTORELLI, Perugia 2015, p. 497–518.

³⁵ For a bibliographical summary of the discovery, see M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 336–338.

³⁶ The inscription has been read by several scholars, with different interpretations and chronological attributions. The most authoritative interpretation is in F. FIORI, *Costantino hypatos e doux di Sarde-*

was emphasised in contrast to the Lombard enemies, whose were defeated because their power was illegitimate (τυραννία)³⁷. The text composition implies not only that Sardinia was still within the Byzantine sphere of influence, but also that its ruling hierarchy was capable of acts of patronage³⁸.

By the end of the 8th c. CE, Sardinia had already begun its political transition from Byzantium to the Latin West. A wide range of hypotheses have been suggested to explain this³⁹. An intriguing way of gauging the extent of Byzantinisation of the island comes, again, from lead seals, particularly two specimens belonging to Torbennios and Zerkis, who were both *archontes* of Arborea (a geographical term which we will discuss later).

The seal of Torbennios (fig. 4, b) has been found in 2013 in the storerooms of the *Antiquarium Arborense* Museum at Oristano. Aside from this information, nothing is known about its provenance. It features a 'Laurent V' cruciform monogram on the obverse and an inscription in Greek letters on the reverse. The name TOPBENN(IOY) is followed by the mention of the office APKWNTOC APBOPE(AC)⁴⁰.

The seal of Zerkis (fig. 4, c) was found in uncertain conditions in the rural area of San Giorgio, in the proximity of Cabras (Oristano)⁴¹. Similarly to the object of Torbennios, it bears the monogram of the *Theotokos* and the invocation formula in the quarters. Its inscription on the obverse is on four lines, preceded by a cross. The text mentions the name of the officer (Ζερκις, with retrograde letter *Zeta*), followed by his office (APXWN) and a problematic series of letters interpreted as AP[B]O[P] (and integrated as APBOPEAC), continuing the last line and ending unreadable due to the major damage to the object's surface⁴².

gna, Bologna 2001. For an updated reading, see M. ORRÙ, *Le fonti greche di età bizantina per lo studio della Sardegna altomedievale (VI–XII secolo)*, PhD Thesis, Cagliari 2013, p. 171–173, with previous references.

³⁷ See M. GALLINA, *Incoronati da Dio. Per una storia del pensiero politico bizantino*, Roma 2016, p. 30–36.

³⁸ F. FIORI, *Costantino hypiatus e doux...*, p. 37–40. See also EADEM, *Epigrafi greche dell'Italia bizantina (VII–XII secolo)*, Bologna 2008, p. 11; M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 338.

³⁹ For a summary see M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 339–359. See also L. GALLINARI, *The Iudex Sardiniae...*, particularly p. 204–206.

⁴⁰ Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW CW Δ[OY] [ΛW] (τῷ σῷ δούλῳ). Rev. inscription of four lines (bottom line with a decoration): +TOP / BENN AP / XWNTOC / AP[B]OPE. Wreath border. Unknown diameter, module and weight (P.G. SPANU, P. FOIS, R.M. ZANELLA, R. ZUCCA, *L'Arcontato di Arborea tra Islam e eredità bizantina*, [in:] *Tharros Felix*, vol. V, ed. A. MASTINO, P.G. SPANU, R. ZUCCA, Roma 2013, p. 527–531. For an update see M. MURESU, *I sigilli "arcontali" della Sardegna bizantina: una nuova proposta di datazione*, [in:] *IX Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, ed. M. MILANESE, Firenze 2022, p. 207–211).

⁴¹ A series of surveys and chance discoveries in the area allowed to theorise the existence of a vast settlement between 500s and 700s CE. For a bibliographical summary see M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 220–232.

⁴² Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW CW ΔOY [ΛW] (τῷ σῷ δούλῳ). Rev. inscription of four lines (bottom line partially illegible): +ZEP / KIC APX /

They seem to be the first *archontes* attested in Sardinia. Their existence certainly postdates the fall of the Exarchate, before which no seal of *archon* is attested; they also predate the visit of the ἄρχων Σαρδάνιας in Constantine VII's *De Ceremoniis* (mid-10th c.), particularly as it was mentioned in the paragraph dedicated to foreign authorities (like Venice, Naples, Gaeta, Salerno, and Amalfi, among the others)⁴³. However, this dating is fundamentally at odds with the received wisdom that dates the seals to 200 years later: according to this interpretation, based essentially on homonymy, both Torbennios and Zerkis would have been *iudikes* of Arborea, one of the four small realms (*iudikati*) into which Sardinia was divided in the Latin West⁴⁴. Such problematic hypothesis has recently been re-assessed through a new diplomatic study and a comparative interpretation of the seals themselves. Based on this research, the seal of Torbennios shows features which can be compared to objects dating from the late 8th to the first half of the 9th c. CE; the seal of Zerkis, on the other hand, seems more a later product of the 9th c. CE⁴⁵.

The appearance of Zerkis and Torbennios as *archontes* represents a variation from the earlier series of distinctly Eastern names – Πετρόνας, Θεοπέμπος, Κωνσταντίνος, Ἰσάχιος, Γεώργιος, Ἰωάννης, *etc.*⁴⁶ – to anthroponyms that are more difficult to explain. The name Torbennios was likely of local origin and was first documented in the *Torveni* and *Torbenius* variations on inscriptions from central Sardinia dating to the 1st–2nd c. CE⁴⁷. As for Zerkis, it appears to be a *uni-*

WN [A]P[B] / O[P][---]. Wreath border. Diameter 27.5 mm; field 24 mm; weight 14.5 gr (P.G. SPANU, R. ZUCCA, *I sigilli bizantini...*, p. 145–146, no. 77; M. MURESU, *I sigilli "arcontali"...*, p. 207–211).

⁴³ CONSTANTINUS PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo*, II, 48, 16, [in:] *Constantine Porphyrogenetos' The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. et trans. A. MOFFATT, M. TALL, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= BAus], p. 609. For a historiographical interpretation see L. GALLINARI, *Reflections on Byzantine Sardinia between 7th and 11th Centuries in the Light of Recent Historiographical Proposals*, [in:] *Ricordando Alberto Boscolo. Bilanci e prospettive storiografiche*, ed. M.G. MELONI, A.M. OLIVA, O. SCHENA, Roma 2016, p. 83–107; IDEM, *The Iudex Sardiniae...*, p. 212–213.

⁴⁴ Torbennios was identified with the *iudike* mentioned in two charters of the earliest years of the 12th c. (P.G. SPANU, P. FOIS, R.M. ZANELLA, R. ZUCCA, *L'Arcontato di Arborea...*, p. 529–530). Zerkis has been dated to the mid-11th c., because of eight mentions of the name *Cerkis* in the Condaghe (fiscal register) of the Camaldolese Abbey Santa Maria di Bonarcado (Oristano). One of these specifically mentioned a *iudice Cerkis* which, according to the traditional view, would have been the same as the owner of the seal (R. ZUCCA, *Zerkis, iudex arborensis*, [in:] *Giudicato d' Arborea e Marchesato d'Oristano: proiezioni mediterranee e aspetti di storia locale, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Oristano, 5–8 dicembre 1997)*, vol. II, ed. G. MELE, Oristano 2000, p. 1103–1112; P.G. SPANU, R. ZUCCA, *I sigilli bizantini...*, p. 146–147).

⁴⁵ M. MURESU, *I sigilli "arcontali"...*, p. 207–211.

⁴⁶ See above, p. 517.

⁴⁷ S. BORTOLAMI, *Antroponimia e società nella Sardegna medioevale: caratteri ed evoluzione di un 'sistema' regionale*, [in:] *Giudicato d' Arborea...*, vol. I, p. 183. See also P.G. SPANU, P. FOIS, R.M. ZANELLA, R. ZUCCA, *L'Arcontato di Arborea...*, p. 529–530. For updated more recent reading, see G. PAULIS, *Sociolinguistic Dynamics and Dynastic Names in Byzantine and Medieval Sardinia*, [in:] *The Making of Medieval Sardinia...*, p. 306.

cum in Byzantine prosopography and its origin is still unclear⁴⁸. The use of the term *archon* also raises several questions because of its vagueness in the Byzantine administration between the 8th and the late 9th c. CE⁴⁹. It denotes a role of a ‘governor’ of a city or a region, and many seals from the same period mention *archontes* of coastal towns of strategic importance, like Abydos⁵⁰. Such officers were also found in Athens, Cherson, and Mesembria⁵¹. Other *archontes* were appointed to govern islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Cyprus, Chios, and Crete⁵², and its Western counterpart, as we shall see shortly. The temptation to argue from analogy is best resisted here, as the Byzantine East was substantially different from the West, and even more so during the period of the thematic reorganization, from which Sardinia seems to have been left out⁵³. Nevertheless, the evidence of *archontes* in Sardinia offers intriguing comparisons with the existence of homologous officers in the Balearics (*Gordio/Iordanes?* of Maiorca, from Minorca), Gozo (*Theophylactos*) and Sicily, specifically Palermo (...γηω for Γεώργιος or Σέργιος), all of whom are attested to by lead seals. The artefact from Minorca is dated to the mid-8th c. CE and was found under archaeologically uncertain conditions⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ On the name Zerkis, see S. BORTOLAMI, *Antroponimia e società...*, p. 184; *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Erste Abteilung (641–867)*, vol. V, ed. R. J. LILLIE, C. LUDWIG, T. PRATSCH, I. ROCHOW, B. ZIELKE, Berlin–New York 2001, p. 123, no. 8651. On the possible origin of the paleonym, see the hypotheses in G. D. SERRA, *Nomi personali d’origine greco-bizantina fra i membri di famiglie giudiciali o signorili del Medioevo sardo*, B 19, 1949, p. 235–236; G. PAULIS, *Lingua e cultura...*, p. 186.

⁴⁹ For a summary of the possible meanings of the term ἀρχων in Late Antiquity and Byzantium see *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. H. W. LAMPE, Oxford 1969, col. 241b; *LSJ*, col. 254a; *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, ed. A. KAZHDAN, New York–Oxford 1991, p. 160. See also J. SHEA, *Politics and Government in Byzantium. The Rise and Fall of the Bureaucrats*, London 2020, p. 60–62, 101.

⁵⁰ *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. III, *West, Northwest, and Central Asia Minor and the Orient*, ed. J. NESBITT, N. OIKONOMIDES, Washington, DC 1996, p. 73–74, 78.

⁵¹ *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. I, *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea*, ed. J. NESBITT, N. OIKONOMIDES, Washington, DC 1991, p. 173–174, 183–184 (Cherson, Mesembria); *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. II, *South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor*, ed. J. NESBITT, N. OIKONOMIDES, Washington, DC 1994, p. 49–50 (Athens). On the *archontes* of Byzantine Cherson see also the paper of Martina Čechová in these Proceedings.

⁵² *Le Taktikon du Cod. Hierosol. Gr. 39 dit Taktikon Uspenskij*, [in:] *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles*, ed. N. OIKONOMIDES, Paris 1972, p. 53, no. 5; 57, nos. 11–13, 15. For other examples of Byzantine archontal seals, see M. MURESU, *I sigilli “arcontali”...*, p. 209–210.

⁵³ For a general account, see A. LOUTH, *Byzantium Transforming (600–700)...*, p. 239–240. On the research into the role of Sardinia in the thematic organization, see M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 327.

⁵⁴ Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW-C[W] ΔΟΥ-Α [W]. Rev. inscription of five lines (partly missing) [---]ΟΡΔ / [O/N]I AP / [...]ONTI M / [A]IOVPI / KW. Wreath border. Diameter 33mm; field 28mm. Unknown weight. The seal was discovered with no stratigraphic reliability, in an area affected by both the previous settlement phases (dating back

The seal from Gozo was discovered during the mid-20th c. and dates to the late 8th–early 9th c. CE⁵⁵. Lastly, the one of the ἄρχων Πανόρμου dates to the 9th CE. Its primary historical importance rests on being the only seal of an *archon* known from Sicily, as well as certainly predating the Muslim conquest of Palermo in 831 CE⁵⁶. In addition to the aforementioned artefacts, historiography made known the existence of another seal, mentioning Nicetas, *droungarios* and *archon* of Malta. The object was first studied by Gustave Schlumberger who dated it to the 7th–8th c. CE⁵⁷. There is no known image of the seal, which is now missing, presumed lost. Thus, it cannot be considered in detail.

The many caveats associated with the available evidence make the task of understand the rise of the *archontes* in Sardinia an intricate one. Not only because of the potential differences between the imperial theory of how things were meant to be managed, and the on-the-ground, provincial practice in outlying regions; such task is complicated further when one considers the lack of the documentary record. Thus, what the *archontes*' 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 remain open questions. It may be suggested that between the end of the 8th and the 9th c. CE, instead of a remote control exerted from overseas, a local representative was preferred. This would guarantee a more effective management of Sardinia by Byzantium, by reinforcing its sphere of influence towards an increasingly 'distant' land, while simultaneously respecting its geopolitical and commercial prerogatives. Similar practices are known in the Western Mediterranean in the same period. For instance, local notables were chosen as rulers in Naples by the *patrikios* of Sicily during the mid-8th c. CE onwards, although the city maintained a high degree of independence and good relationships with the

to the Late Antiquity and the 6th c. CE) and coeval artefacts. The latter include a semmissis of Leo III and Constantine V (720–741 CE) of 'Uncertain Italian Mint', and a bronze belt-buckle variation of a 'Syracuse' typology (7th–8th c. CE). See J.C. DE NICOLÁS MASCARÒ, B. MOLL MERCADAL, *Sellos bizantinos de Menorca. Un arconte mallorquín para las Baleares en el siglo VIII*, [in:] *Tharros Felix*, vol. V..., p. 540, 545–547.

⁵⁵ Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW-CW ΔΟΥ- [ΛΩ]. Rev. + ΘΕΟ / ΦΥΛΑΚ(T) / W APXO / (N)[T]H. Worn wreath border. Diameter 27 mm; weight 25 gr (*Core and Periphery. 'Mdina and Hal Safi in the 9th & 10th centuries*, ed. N. CUTAJAR, La Valletta 2018, p. 7).

⁵⁶ V. PRIGENT, *Palermo in the Eastern Roman Empire*, [in:] *A Companion to Medieval Palermo. The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. A. NEF, Leiden–Boston 2013 [= BCEH, 5], p. 24. On the Muslim conquest of Palermo see A. METCALFE, *I Musulmani dell'Italia Medievale*, Palermo 2019, p. 14–15.

⁵⁷ Obv. cruciform invocative monogram (type V: Θεοτόκε βοήθει); in the quarters, TW-CW ΔΟΥ- ΛΩ. Rev. + ΝΙΚΗΤΑ ΔΡΟΥΤΓ[APIW] ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΟΝΤ[Ι] ΜΕΛΑΤ[HC]. Unknown border. Unknown diameter, module and weight (G.L. SCHLUMBERGER, *Sceaux byzantins inédits (quatrième série)*, REG 55, 1900, p. 492, no. 203). See also T.S. BROWN, *Byzantine Malta: A Discussion of the Sources*, [in:] *Medieval Malta. Studies on Malta before the Knights*, ed. A.T. LUTTRELL, London 1975, p. 77.

Apostolic See⁵⁸. Another ‘typical’ case is Venice, where the office of the *doge* was entrusted to a local family, passing from elective to (substantially) dynastic⁵⁹. Even in this case, and despite the inevitable and progressive consolidation of ducal power, the city was always an object of great interest to Byzantium, the reasons for which are easy to imagine, as already since the early 9th c. CE it was the terminus of an internal road that departed from the Middle Danube basin, as well as a port of prime importance⁶⁰.

Leaving aside the hypotheticals, what emerges from the documentary and material evidence is that even during the 9th c. CE Sardinia played an active part in the reconfigured Western Mediterranean. The *Annales Regni Francorum* mentioned an embassy from the island that came to Louis the Pious in 815 CE, bearing gifts⁶¹. The same source reported the Muslims repeatedly attacked Sardinia, but they were repelled during several naval skirmishes⁶². Diplomatic contacts involved trade as well. Again, the *Annales* mention eight merchant ships, plundered and sunk while returning to Italy from Sardinia in 820 CE⁶³. Pope Leo IV asked the *Iudex* for a consignment of byssus, to be acquired at any price, in 851 CE⁶⁴. Finally, John VIII in 882 CE ordered the *Principes Sardiniae* to stop the slave trade at once: it was a highly lucrative business in which Sardinia was eventually involved, not only as a victim⁶⁵. As a matter of fact, slave trade was present in the entirety of the Western

⁵⁸ See J.M. MARTIN, *Byzance et l'Italie Méridionale*, Paris 2014, p. 102–103, with further discussion.

⁵⁹ A. CARILE, *L'Istria tra Bisanzio e Venezia*, [in:] *Storia della marineria bizantina*, ed. IDEM, S. COSENTINO, Bologna 2004, p. 43–58. See also J.M. MARTIN, *Byzance...*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ M. McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy...*, p. 225–226, 299–301.

⁶¹ EINHARDUS, *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. KURZE, Hanover 1895 [= MGH.SRG, 6] (cetera: EINHARDUS, *Annales regni Francorum*), p. 143. On the event, see the critical reading of L. GALLINARI, *The Iudex Sardiniae...*, p. 206–210. See also M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 340–341, with further discussion.

⁶² The Frankish *Annales* recorded Muslim naval defeats in attacks against Sardinia (among the other lands of Western Mediterranean) in 806/807, 810, 812, 816/817, and 821/822 CE (EINHARDUS, *Annales regni Francorum*, p. 124, 130, 136–137, 139). See L. GALLINARI, *The Iudex Sardiniae...*, p. 207–208.

⁶³ *In Italico mari octo naves negotiatorum de Sardinia ad Italiam revertentium a piratis captae ac dimersae sunt* (EINHARDUS, *Annales regni Francorum*, p. 153). See M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 341.

⁶⁴ [...] *Si apud sublimitatem vestram vel in quibuscumque locis vestris lana marina, quod nos usu nostro pinnino dicimus, fuerit inventa, illam emere non dedignemini, quantuncumque fueri precii et ad nos dirigere, quia nobis pontificalibus vestimentis valde nobis necessaria esse videtur [...]* (Leonis IV Papae *Epistolae selectae*, Berlin 1899 [= MGH.EK, 3], p. 596, no. 17).

⁶⁵ [...] *Grande peccatum incurritis [...]. Igitur Grecorum studiis, sicut didicimus, multi a pagani captivi sublatis in vestris partibus venundantur et a vestratibus empti sub iugo servitutis tenentur, cum constet pium et sanctum esse, veluti Christianos decet, ut, cum eos vestrates ab ipsis Grecia emerint, pro amore Christi liberos esse dimittant [...]* (Fragmenta registri Iohannis VIII Papae, Berlin 1928 [= MGH.EK, 5], p. 288–289, no. 27).

Mediterranean, as is clear from the letter of Stephen V who was threatening Naples – one of the most active hubs for slave merchants – in an effort to end it in 886, otherwise the pontiff would have ordered the closure of the ports of all Christianity, including Sardinia⁶⁶. Even the analysis of the archaeological record – which can't be discussed in this paper in its entirety – suggests the island's ongoing ability to participate in trade and to import goods, despite the scarcity of coinage in circulation. These, for the 9th c. CE, were primarily composed of gold and (fewer) bronze coins struck in Constantinople and Syracuse⁶⁷. The most substantial discovery was made in Porto Torres, where 37 *solidi* of Theophilus and Basil I (868–879 CE) were found near the church of St. Gavino a Mare, at Balai, alongside 3 Aghlabid *dananir* of the emir Abu Ishaq Ibrahim II ibn Ahmad of Ifrīqiya and many fragmented gold objects⁶⁸. The hoard could potentially be interpreted as evidence of a dramatic event⁶⁹ – nevertheless, its composition and state also point to wider trade links. Hoards of Muslim and Byzantine gold coins were discovered in numerous finds of Mediterranean and European provenance, with repeated discoveries made along the river routes (from the Po valley to the Rhone and Mesa)⁷⁰. The presence

⁶⁶ [...] *Nam nos et Romam Sardiniam Corsicam et totam christianitatem contra te claudemus* [...] (*Stephani V Papae Fragmenta registri*, Berlin 1298 [= *MGH.EK*, 5], p. 337, no. 7). For an updated account on the slave trade in the Byzantine Mediterranean see Y. ROTMAN, *Byzantium and the International Slave Trade in the Central Middle Ages*, [in:] *Trade in Byzantium. Papers from the Third International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, ed. P. MAGDALINO, N. NECİPOĞLU, Istanbul 2016, p. 129–142. See also M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 429.

⁶⁷ For a summary see M. MURESU, *La moneta "indicatore"...*, p. 368–369.

⁶⁸ A. TARAMELLI, *Porto Torres. Scoperta di monete d'oro di età bizantina in regione Balai*, NSA 1922, p. 294–296. Although the Byzantine coins have never been photographed and they are currently missing (presumed lost), the transcription of their legends and features allows comparisons with issues minted at Constantinople (*Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. III.2, *Basil I to Nicephorus III (867–1081 CE)*, ed. P. GRIERSON, Washington, DC 1973, p. 426–427, n. 3d, pl. XXII; *ibidem*, p. 487–489. As concerns the *dananir*, their traditional dating to 261 H/874–875 CE to 269 H/881–882 CE by Taramelli was adjusted by McCormick to the years 236 H/850–851 CE, 267 H/880–881 CE, and 270/883–884 CE (M. McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy...*, p. 945–946, no. A32).

⁶⁹ As already described (see above, footnote nos. 62–63), medieval sources recorded forays to Sardinia in the early 800s from al-Andalus (by a northern route via Corsica) and, with the rise of the Aghlabids, from Ifrīqiya as well. None of these raids appear to have been an outright success for the Muslims (see A. METCALFE, *Early Muslim Raids...*, p. 130–131). In the case of Balai, the composition of the hoard with golden coins and fragments and a certain degree of consumption from the most recent specimens up to the oldest, suggest it is possible to consider it as pertaining to the category of 'emergency treasures', the main features of which were a small size and being formed from whatever was available at the time, from coinage to jewellery and fragments of precious metals (see J.P. CASEY, *Understanding Ancient Coins. An Introduction for Archaeologists & Historians*, London 1986, p. 51–67).

⁷⁰ M. McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy...*, p. 391; C. MORRISSON, *La monnaie sur les routes fluviales et maritimes des échanges dans le monde Méditerranéen (VI^e–IX^e siècle)*, [in:] *L'ac-*

of gold in a time when silver dominated the nascent European economy could seem striking – and, in a certain way, it is. It may be noted that Byzantium and the Islamic world – and later the Duchy of Benevento – supplied the gold coins, which would thereafter continue to circulate⁷¹. After all, Muslim *dinar* maintained a high level of fineness among the other currencies in use in transactions of Italy, including the account currencies such as the *solidos lucanos* (tremisses of Lucca)⁷². This opportunism as regards utilising coins from different sources is more intriguing in the context of a Mediterranean that we increasingly understand in terms of its connectivity; in this context it seems possible to view the Balai hoard as evidence of trade networks on an ‘international’ level.

In conclusion, it is unfortunate that to date Sardinia’s historical significance has not been conveyed with a sufficient emphasis. Even considering the limited extent of evidence relating to the island when compared with other important and better-studied regions, this state of affairs seems more a consequence of history-writing rather than history *per se*⁷³. As has been demonstrated above, the critical assessment of coinage, archaeological and prosopographic record offers new perspectives on Sardinia’s place in the vibrant Western Mediterranean during the 8th and 9th c. CE. Gauging the extent of Byzantinisation in Sardinia and its role as an unconquered liminal polity among the major powers of the Mediterranean must be reconsidered through the lens of connectivity and resilience, because therein lies the island’s historical importance.

qua nei secoli altomedievali, Atti della LV Settimana di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo (Spoleto, 12–17 aprile 2007), Spoleto 2009, p. 631–670. More discussion and examples in M. MURESU, *La moneta “indicatore”...*, p. 130–131.

⁷¹ See E.A. ARSLAN, *Emissione e circolazione della moneta nei ducati di Spoleto e Benevento*, [in:] *I Longobardi di Spoleto e Benevento, Atti del XVI Congresso internazionale di studi sull’alto medioevo (Spoleto, 20–23 settembre 2002; Benevento, 24–27 settembre 2002)*, Spoleto 2003, p. 1047–1050; IDEM, *La monetazione longobarda di Benevento e Salerno*, [in:] *Longobardi. Un popolo che cambia la storia*, ed. G.P. BROGIOLO, F. MARAZZI, C. GIOSTRA, Milano 2017, p. 413–415. See also V. PRIGENT, *Mints...*, p. 344.

⁷² M. McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy...*, p. 370–372. For updated more recent discussion see M. BALDASSARRI, *Le monete di Lucca...*, p. 3, 9, 13, 36.

⁷³ For instance, in his recent monograph on the Mediterranean economy between 950 and 1180 CE, Chris Wickham stated to have left out Sardinia (among other regions) because it was *terribly documented as it is for our period*, despite being *fascinatingly strange in its socio-economic structure* (C. WICKHAM, *The Donkey and the Boat. Reinterpreting the Mediterranean Economy, 950–1180*, Oxford 2023, p. 8).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

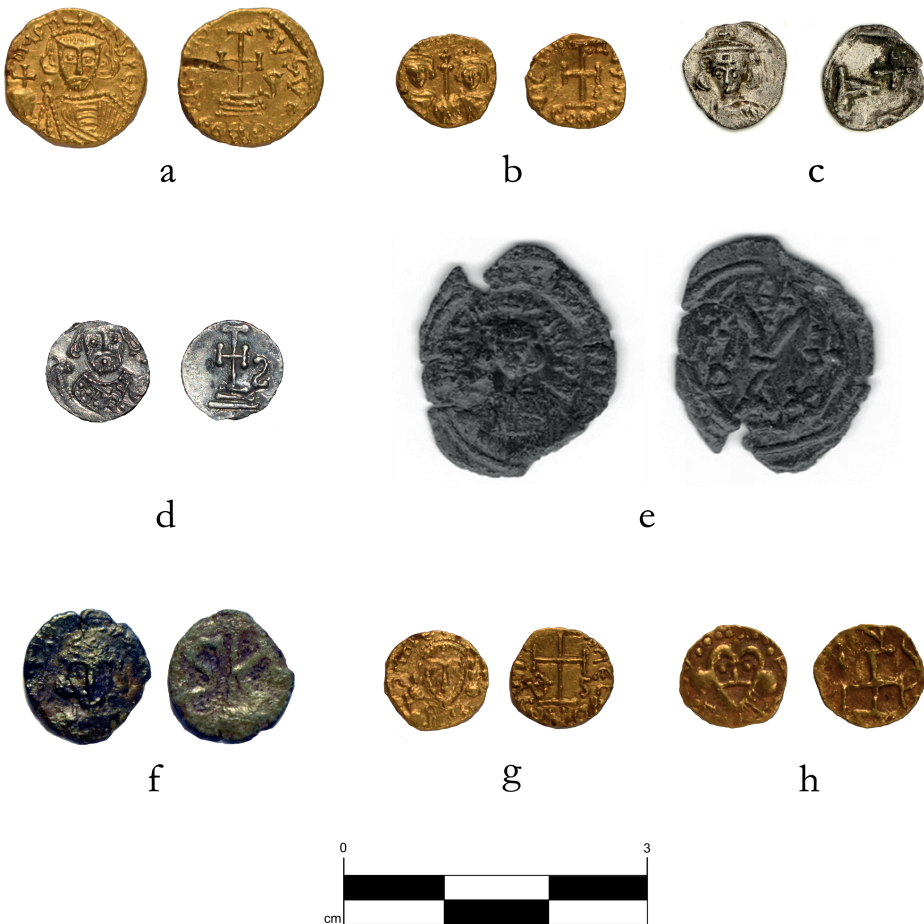


Fig. 1. Coinage from the 'Byzantine Mint' of Sardinia.

a. Justinian II (685–695 CE), solidus. Obv. $\delta\Gamma\text{ I}\psi\text{STI ANS P}\epsilon\text{X}$; frontal bust, bearded, wearing chlamys and crown with cross. Globus cruciger in right hand. Rev. VICTORI [...] $\text{AV}\zeta\text{V}\zeta$; cross potent on base and three steps. Exergue: CONO. Dotted border. AV, Diameter 16 mm, weight 3.68 gr. Private Collection.

b. Justinian II (705–711 CE), tremissis. Obv. [...] ψSTI [...]; standing figures (Justinian II and Tiberios), between globus cruciger with PAX and long cross. Rev. [...] $\text{IA AV}\zeta\psi$; cross potent on base. S in right field. Exergue: ONOB. Traces of linear border. AV, Diameter 11 mm, weight 1.08 gr. Private Collection.

c. Justinian II (685–695 CE), siliqua. Obv. Frontal bust, beardless, wearing paludamentum and a crown with cross. Faint trace of fibula (?) in left field. No inscription. Rev. [P] AX. AR, Diameter 10.5 mm, weight 0.45 gr. Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks.

d. Leontius (695–698 CE), fraction of siliqua. Obv. Frontal bust, bearded, wearing loros and crown. Raised akakia in right hand, globus cruciger in left hand. No inscription. Rev. Cross potent on base and two steps. Retrograde S in right field. AR, Diameter 11.6 mm, weight 0.39 gr. Cagliari, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

e. Justinian II (685–695 CE), *follis*. Obv. DN $\text{I}\psi\text{ST}$ [...] ANVS PP ; frontal bust, wearing chlamys and crown with cross. Rev. M and PAX below. Three crosses on the sides and above the M. AE, Diameter 24 mm, weight 11.2 gr. Private Collection.

f. Tiberius III (698–705 CE), half-*follis*. Obv. Frontal bust, bearded, wearing chlamys and crown with cross. Spear held over left shoulder. Traces of inscription. Rev. K. S in left field. AE, Diameter 25 mm, weight 5.1 gr. Private Collection.

g. Leo III (717–741 CE), tremissis. Obv. Frontal bust, bearded, wearing chlamys and crown with cross on circlet. Globus cruciger in right hand. Traces of inscription. Rev. VI[...] $\Lambda\epsilon$ [...]; cross potent on base. Θ in the left field. S in the right field. Exergue: CONOB. Diameter 10 mm; weight 0.84 gr. Private Collection.

h. Leo III (717–741 CE), ‘imitative’ tremissis. Obv. Schematic frontal bust, bearded. Traces of letters (?) alternated with dots. Rev. Greek cross potent. Traces of letters (?). Diameter 12 mm; weight 0.6 gr. Private Collection (photos by Marco Muresu – CC BY SA)

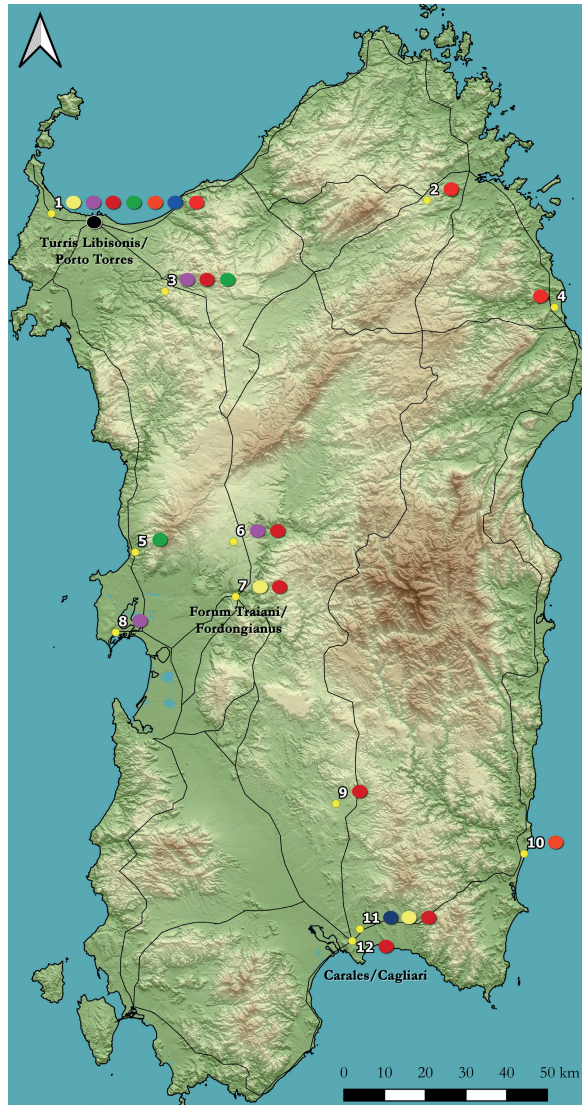


Fig. 2. Map of the findings of the 'Byzantine Mint' of Sardinia. 1. Porto Torres/Stintino ('Nurra hoard'); 2. Telti, Santa Vittoria; 3. Ossi, San Giovanni di Noale; 4. Posada, Santo Stefano/Part'e Sole; 5. Santa Caterina di Pittinuri, Cornus-Corchinas; 6. Abbasanta, nuraghe Aiga, nuraghe Losa; 7. Fordongianus; 8. Cabras, San Giorgio; 9. Ortacesus (Unknown provenance); 10. Villaputzu, Cirredis; 11. Selargius, Salux; 12. Cagliari, Vico III Lanusei, Santa Caterina. Each colour corresponds to an emperor: Constantine IV (668–685 CE): purple; Justinian II (685–695 CE): light yellow; Leontius (695–698 CE): fuchsia; Tiberius III (698–705 CE): dark red; Justinian II (705–711 CE): green; Anastasius II (713–715 CE): orange; Theodosius III (715–717 CE): blue; Leo III (717–741 CE): light red (elaboration by Marco Muresu – CC OA).



Fig. 3. Map of the findings of Lombard and Muslim coins in Sardinia.

Lombard coins (orange): 1. Porto Torres/Stintino ('Nurra hoard'); 2. Sassari, Li Punti (Unknown provenance); 3. Laerru, Boppittos/Monte Ultana; 4. Ossi, San Giovanni di Noale; 5. Telti, Santa Vittoria; 6. Oliena, Domus de Janas Fenosu; 7. Abbasanta, nuraghe Losa; 8. Paulilatino (U.p.); 9. Fordongianus, San Lussorio; 10. Cabras, San Giorgio; 11. Mandas (U.p.); 12. Villanovafranca, nuraghe Su Mulinu; 13. Villaputzu, Cirredis; 14. Dolianova, Bruncu Is Piscinas.

Muslim coins (pink): a. Porto Torres, Balai; b. Sassari, Argentiera (U.p.); c. Cabras, Tharros (U.p.); d. Assemini (U.p.); e. Cagliari (G. Spano Collection, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, U.p.) (elaboration by Marco Muresu – CC OA).

**a****b****c**

Fig. 4. Seals of Theodotos, *hypatos kai doux* of Sardinia (a: from V. LAURENT, *Les sceaux byzantins...*, p. 114–115, no. 112); Zerkis, *archon* (b: from P.G. SPANU, R. ZUCCA, *I sigilli bizantini...*, tav. VII); Torbennios, *archon* (c: from P.G. SPANU *et al.*, *L'Arcontato di Arborea...*, p. 530, fig. 3) (elaboration by Marco Muresu – CC BY SA).

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