Social Organization in Nuragic Sardinia: Cultural Progress Without 'Elites'?

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After the collapse of most early states in the East around 1200 BC, parts of the western Mediterranean experienced technological progress and demographic rise, apparently without adapting forms of hierarchic political organization. A very good example is Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age nuragic Sardinia, which had been connected to eastern trade networks since Mycenaean times, and developed into one of the most important venues for culture contact and exchange in the West after 1200 BC. However, its rich archaeological record, including figurines, architecture, sanctuaries, villages and tombs, does neither indicate the existence of 'elite' groups, nor does it show any traces of a hierarchic society. This article examines the possibility that a non-hierarchical form of socio-political organization devoid of elites developed to a high level of cultural complexity and progress on the island. Other important aspects are the role of immigration as an integrant in nuragic society, considering comparable situations of non-hierarchic politics in ethnography and history, as well as theoretical approaches to forms of social organization. It is concluded that socio-economic development does not necessarily require a centralized political authority.

By the Late Bronze Age (LBA), *c.* 1200 BC, Sardinia had become a protagonist in an exchange network spanning from the Levant to the Atlantic (Bernardini 2010a; Lo Schiavo 2003a). Although the culture contact which evolved along this network represented a great challenge to Sardinian society, it still managed to preserve many traditional elements of its nuragic culture, while also developing a distinctive identity and ways to benefit from the situation (Lo Schiavo 2012a; Webster 1996). The archaeological record includes impressive cultural achievements in the realms of architecture, metallurgy and art. Technological innovations seem to have arrived along the sea routes and appear to have been further refined on Sardinia (e.g. Lo Schiavo *et al*. 2005).

Typical examples of nuragic metalwork include ritual objects such as the bronze figurines (*bronzetti*), which are mostly found at the characteristic sanctuaries (e.g. Araque Gonzalez 2012; Lilliu 1966; Lo Schiavo 2003b). *Bronzetti* have been interpreted as votive offerings, highlighting the rank and status of the donator (Bernardini 1985; 2010a, 34; Contu 1998). Tronchetti (1997) sees them as illustrating the development of nuragic aristocracies from warrior elites to aristocracies in possession of surplus. Tronchetti and van Dommelen consider them to be artefacts of the elite (2005, 194–5).

The social organization of this Mediterranean community is barely understood. Though it was in close contact with the contemporary early states of the eastern Mediterranean throughout the LBA and Early Iron Age (EIA), there is no evidence of any attempts to form a state; social hierarchy cannot be easily detected. In the archaeological record a Sardinian 'warrior elite' has been sought for in vain: 'the stratified society and warrior élites indicated by the monumental architecture and bronze figurines had little echo in differentiation in the material culture. ... no prestige residences or burials, no notable variations in equipment or clothing' (Burgess 2001, 189).

So why is the existence of such an elite taken for granted by most researchers? A widespread but utterly evolutionist concept (cf. Lull & Micó 2007, 202–28) is that societies which reach a high technological and

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cultural level do so because they become hierarchical, with a small group, the 'elite', organizing the cultural progress. Even non-evolutionists use the term 'complex society' as a synonym for hierarchic societies (cf. Kienlin 2012). Accordingly, the state with centralized power and administration is seen as the most refined form of social organization. This concept will be challenged in this article.

Nuragic Sardinian evidence, social strategies of more recent stateless societies, and advantages of non-hierarchic organization will be considered. A non-evolutionist approach respecting efficient social techniques completely different from those that prevail in Western society is proposed. This article is partly based on my discussion of Sardinian bronze figurines and iconography in their Mediterranean context (Araque Gonzalez 2012).

Heterachy, hierarchy, anarchy: who is complex?

Recent archaeological research expressing 'dissatisfaction with Service's band-tribe-chiefdom-state model of sociocultural complexity' (Crumley 1995, 1), has challenged evolutionist ideas while simultaneously employing new theories which seek to explain social, political and cultural complexity (e.g. Blanton 1998; Blanton & Fargher 2008; Crumley 1995; Yoffee 2007).

Many researchers discussing social complexity, however, are concerned with the emergence of states and often see social complexity as synonymous with inequality (cf. Paynter 1989). Nonetheless, it remains important 'to emphasize that political complexity — a means of referencing certain sociological features such as inequality or centralized organs of governance — does not equate with cultural complexity, which tends to centre on an evaluative positioning of social groups along broad trajectories of social development' (Smith 2003, 103). In other words, political life becomes complex as soon as inequalities are established, but social relations and cultural expressions can still be complex in a society without hierarchic power relations. However, as I try to show below, political practice can also be complex in non-hierarchical society. As Kohring (2012, 335) pointed out: '[W]e fixate on centralization and hierarchy as indicators of social complexity, yet these aspects only relate to socio-political organization. They fail to consider the socially complex networks mediating the daily lives of individuals within society.' She suggests a network approach to get a better understanding of how and which types of complexity emerged on several scales (2012; cf. Kohring 2007). Though a very helpful and interesting approach, the establishment of power relations is difficult to explain alone with this.

The conception of the state and the chiefdom-state distinction have been challenged in recent research (Lull & Micó 2008, 229–30; Smith 2003; Terrenato & Haggis 2011), but what remains is that the political entities in question are based on the centralization of power. Smith's 'early complex polities' are defined by the constitution of (central) authority (2003, 102–5) and territoriality, and thus refer to the same thing as Yoffee (2007, 17) when he defines a 'state' by it's 'governmental centre' (i.e. centralized political authority), and the territory politically controlled by it. To keep it simple, I will use the terms 'state' for systems with centralized political authority and a strong sense of territoriality.

Blanton agrees that 'non-hierarchical, egalitarian societies should not be perceived as having failed to develop centralized government or economic inequality. Rather, these societies have in place specific cultural practices that prevent unacceptable degrees of accumulation of power or wealth in the hands of specific persons or groups' (Blanton 1998, 151–2). In the same article he puts a lot of emphasis on collective action and egalitarian behaviour in early state societies (cf. also Blanton & Fargher 2008). However, his model of corporate political economy (Blanton 1998, 146–8, 154–70) does not uniformly fit a society which has eschewed the state as a form of political organization.

An important concept new to social archaeology was the notion of heterarchy. Crumley defines it as 'the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways' (1995, 3). Thus, it does not exclude hierarchical constellations, but puts emphasis on the non-permanency of ranking, constant shifts of power-constellations and dynamic self-organization of systems making them more adaptable and flexible to react to unstable conditions than permanently ranked systems (Crumley 1995, 3–4; see also Brumfiel 1995).

While heterarchy provides some interesting possibilities, Damilati and Vavouranakis assert that 'both traditional and heterarchical approaches, … invariably fail to take into serious account the ways in which relations of power are formed and actively constituted' (2011, 35). While there would definitely have been heterarchies in all of the societies mentioned in this article, the main topic under consideration here is the examination of power relations and their negotiation in society, as well as the question how non-centralized societies can be socio-culturally complex.

Because it does not explain power relations, heterarchy can occur literally everywhere. It neither excludes social hierarchy nor anarchy, even though the latter two do exclude each other, since they refer

to polar opposites in power relations *per se*. As we have seen, centralized political authority is a crucial element of hierarchical society. Political power is maintained through the permanent threat of force by the government or the 'elite', and, most importantly, the *servitude volontaire* of those accepting this authority, and thereby legitimating it (La Boëtie 1987 [1548]).

I shall deal with societies which are not only not organized in states, but also with ones which consequently avoid the emergence of hierarchic power relations within themselves: they can be referred to as 'societies against the state' (Clastres 1989). A crucial element of their politics is the avoidance of centralized political authority.

The term 'egalitarian society' is not very useful in many aspects, since absolute equality does not exist in any known society. I agree with the criticism of egalitarianism summarized by Angelbeck and Grier (2012, 549–51), stating first that relative equality is not a natural state but something that has to be constantly negotiated and actively maintained by a society through cultural practices that prevent wealth accumulation and centralization, including resistance. Secondly, that emergent leadership in 'egalitarian' societies that do not have (or want) consolidated hierarchies is a common phenomenon, leading to relativisms in terminology, e.g. calling societies 'transegalitarian' (Hayden 2001) or detecting 'reverse dominance hierarchies' within them. So, it seems most fitting to 'call these anarchic societies, having leadership but no government or true legal sanctions' (Angelbeck & Grier 2012, 550 after Barclay 1993, 241).

Angelbeck and Grier's (2012) paper on anarchic societies and the application of anarchist theory to archaeology presents an alternative to deal with non-hierarchical societies that do not fit in common, maybe out-dated, anthropological categories: 'Anarchism provides a body of theory for an alternative framework, one that we submit can be used to resolve many of the apparent contradictions engendered by state-focused models of social hierarchy and complexity.' (Angelbeck & Grier 2012, 548). They state (2012, 571) that 'anarchism also integrates a dialectical perspective in that it posits mutual aid and justified authority as a key dynamic of active resistance to centralization'. It would help to overcome the weaknesses of the concept of egalitarianism and could explain shifts in socio-political formations by acknowledging that every society constantly renegotiates the terms of the latter (2012, 568).

I argue that anarchic societies can be socially and culturally complex. I chose LBA–EIA nuragic Sardinia, owing to its specific archaeological record, as a possible example for a past complex anarchic society: while there are a lot of indicators for cultural complexity and complex social relations, there are none which would point towards hierarchy.

The archaeological record of nuragic Sardinia

This is not the place to discuss nuragic archaeology in detail (see e.g. Lilliu 1988; Webster 1996). Instead, I will try to give an overview of the features relevant to this article. The abundance of material and architectural remains left by nuragic society confront the archaeologist with a puzzling image of a unique society which seems different to its contemporaries in many ways.

Chronology, however, remains a problematic and heavily discussed topic among Sardinian researchers (e.g. Bernardini & Perra 2012; Lo Schiavo 2007; Usai 2007). The lamentable lack of published modern excavations often makes absolute dating difficult (notable exceptions are e.g. Ialongo 2011 and Manunza 2008). Furthermore, a Mediterranean perspective may help to establish relative and absolute chronology (Araque Gonzalez 2012).

The Sardinian LBA is subdivided into the Recent Bronze Age (RBA), fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BC, and its later part, the twelfth–tenth centuries BC, is referred to as the Final Bronze Age (FBA). In the ninth–eighth centuries BC, the Sardinian Early Iron Age (EIA), when permanent Phoenician settlement at trading posts began to be socio-culturally independent from nuragic society, the first notable changes in social practices occur. This led to a completely new situation in settlement patterns and also in material culture in the seventh–sixth centuries BC (Bernardini & Perra 2012; Usai 2007, 56–7). The EIA is considered to be the final phase of nuragic society, and after the eighth century BC, its characteristic cultural identity is lost in most parts of the island, giving way to an 'orientalized' society which appears to be strongly influenced by Phoenician culture (Usai 2012).

The present article is concerned mostly with the FBA–EIA nuragic world, though referring to RBA evidence as well, since the FBA–EIA situation is deeply rooted in the significant changes and innovations of this period regarding demography, nuragic metallurgy and architecture (e.g. the construction of complex nuraghi and the foundation of the first sanctuaries), as well as intensifying contact with the Aegean. The RBA is often seen as the moment when nuragic society became hierarchical and elites emerged (e.g. Webster 1996, 108–97).

In Perra's (2009) work on socio-political evolution in nuragic Sardinia, he analysed the previous viewpoints of several scholars: Lilliu (1988) sees the RBA as a time when Sardinia was ruled by *re-pastori* (shepherd

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kings), the heads of a hierarchical, patriarchal warrior society, residing in the nuraghi. For the FBA–EIA the same author proposes an aristocracy-oligarchy. Lilliu is strongly inspired by medieval paradigms, associating the nuraghi to castles (Perra 2009, 355–6).

Many of the authors cited by Perra consider a chiefdom-type society as the most probable form of political organization (e.g. Webster 1996) from at least the FBA onwards, and nearly all of them agree on some kind of aristocracy-oligarchy in the EIA (Perra 2009, 361). Perra himself (2009, 364–6) suggests a more dynamic model of nuragic society, proposing a collective organization with social differentiation and a strong ancestor cult, as well as emergent individuals on their quest for prestige and wealth for the MBA–RBA. His conception of FBA–EIA nuragic society is that of a still communitarian, federal system spanning over wider areas with an elite coordinating and manipulating socio-political affairs through religious ritual at the sanctuaries. Essentially, he acknowledges that communitarian and individualistic tendencies exist in both periods and create tensions and internal contradiction, which lead to transformation, innovation and instability. Thus, he considers mechanisms that would be defined as heterarchies by Crumley (1995).

Tronchetti (1997) elaborated a model of nuragic socio-political evolution that would become evident in *bronzetti*-iconography. *Bronzetti*, to him, are always the representations of the ruling elite, and political evolution could be perceived through changing iconography. It starts from an 'Asiatic mode of production' in the LBA until the ninth century BC, where a small group (elite) accumulates and redistributes surplus without directly participating in its production, and legitimizes its position within society through their religious function. From the late ninth century onwards, Tronchetti proposes the emergence of an (warrior-) aristocracy, evidenced by the warrior-*bronzetti*. After crisis and decline of the latter in the sixth century, a group of *bronzetti* depicting *offerentes* and the '*capotribu*' is argued to represent an oligarchy, where power was based on wealth and control of the means of production. At the end of the sixth century, the very schematic Mediterranean-style *bronzetti* would not represent the ruling class anymore, but are more connected to cult practices introduced by the Phoenicians.

However, in a recent paper (2012b), Tronchetti admits 'extreme difficulties' in finding the nuragic aristocracy, citing the following facts:

- prestigious goods are always found at public spaces (sanctuaries) and never in private contexts
- nothing points towards elite feasting
- tombs do not highlight individuals
- villages show no signs of aristocratic residences.

He cites Monte Prama as an example for 'elite' families, where it is not the individual, but the lineage that enjoys aristocratic status. He concludes that the Sardinian situation is obviously totally different from other Mediterranean regions (Tronchetti 2012b, 856).

For Campus and Leonelli (2009, 273), elite groups organized the redistribution of surplus at the nuraghi in the RBA. They discuss the rise of sanctuaries to the most important centres of accumulation, organization and redistribution in the FBA, after the abandoning of many nuraghi. They conclude that political power was now more concentrated in religious spaces, from where surrounding communities were controlled. However, they do not explain why it could not be the communities themselves that organized redistribution at the sanctuaries.

Russu examined several aspects of nuragic material culture, considering the only possible hint for social stratification may be found in architecture, and only from the RBA onwards. She argued that complex nuraghi are 'attractive to think of' (Russu 1999, 218) as status symbols or princely residences. She concluded that there 'must have been persons of rank, perhaps chiefs of clans or tribes — but can *primus inter pares* be inferred from the lack of obvious status differentiation?' (Russu 1999, 218).

Usai (2011, 11–12) suggested that the complex nuraghi of the RBA point towards forms of inter-community cooperation as well as competition. They would indicate a polycentric structural hierarchy of the territory, regarding resource control and lines of communication. However, he added that it is far from clear if this territorial hierarchy (marked through monuments in certain geographic spots) entailed stable differences in rank and power within nuragic society.

Usai (2006; 2011, 14) thought that the rise of the sanctuaries and the abandonment of many nuraghi in the FBA–EIA was a time of stronger social differentiation, since wealth was accumulated at the sanctuaries, and he proposed that this was due to elite control of cult practices. As I will argue below, the shift in ritual practices and reorganization of socio-political life towards a system that involved 'federal' sanctuaries as places of inter-community organization can be seen in a quite different light, and without elites.

The lack of a stable political organization, unsustainable demographic rise, decay of ancient forms of community and inter-community collaboration, and rising competition between elites concerned with personal rank and power are reasons cited to have led to the crisis and collapse of nuragic society from

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the late eight to seventh centuries BC (Usai 2009, 272).

Lo Schiavo (2003b, 31) pointed out that there is nothing that proves the '*aristocrazia nuragica*', and that it seems pretty much like even religious affairs at the sanctuaries were a collective phenomenon. However, stating that we know little or nothing about nuragic political organization, she asks (2012a, 147): 'How were they led, was there a single leader or more than one, or is Sardinia the unusual example of a tribal society that reached a peak of perfect efficiency, ...?'

However, after this incomplete summary of what scholars wrote on the problem of nuragic socio-political organization, some points become evident: with the exception of Lo Schiavo, most authors assume an elite. In the RBA, this elite is mostly thought to reside in or around the complex nuraghi, which serve as centres of redistribution. Only Usai remarks on the fact that polycentric structuring of territory does not imply social stratification. However, in the FBA–EIA, an aristocracy is commonly accepted on the basis of wealth accumulation at the sanctuaries and *bronzetti* iconography. It seems that the main argument for its existence is that respective cultural achievements and iconography are not possible without an elite. But even its advocates often admit that it is hardly visible in the archaeological record. It is worth reconsidering some of the evidence.

Nuraghi

The huge single-tower-buildings (Fig. 1), characteristic for the Sardinian Middle Bronze Age (MBA) from at least 1600 BC onwards and for the LBA, when some of them were extended to massive multi-tower-complexes (Fig. 2; Blake 1998; Webster 1996), remain enigmatic monuments with regard to their function, symbolic meaning and socio-political significance (Usai 1995). They have long been considered fortresses or even the homesteads of rulers (Lilliu 1988; cf. Usai 1995, 254). Recent research has shown, however, that a military use is unlikely, and that they do not appear to have been inhabited (Burgess 2001; Depalmas 2006; Usai 1995).

Usai (1995) proposed a strong collective symbolism that justified the sacrifice of the work-intensive construction to community, and emphasized that, for whatever possible function, there could have been found much easier solutions. The effort would by far not be justified from a utilitarian point of view. However, he assumes the existence of an aristocracy that could demand and coordinate public labour.

Whatever their function, be it for storage, ceremonies, communication through inter-nuraghe visibility, control of the surrounding territory etc., their most important aspect was that they were works

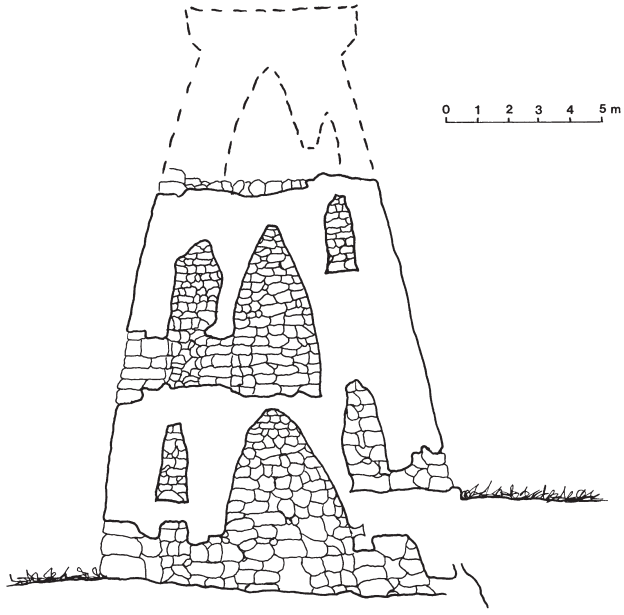

Figure 1. *Reconstructed section of a single-tower nuraghe. (From Webster 1996, 93, fig. 31.)*

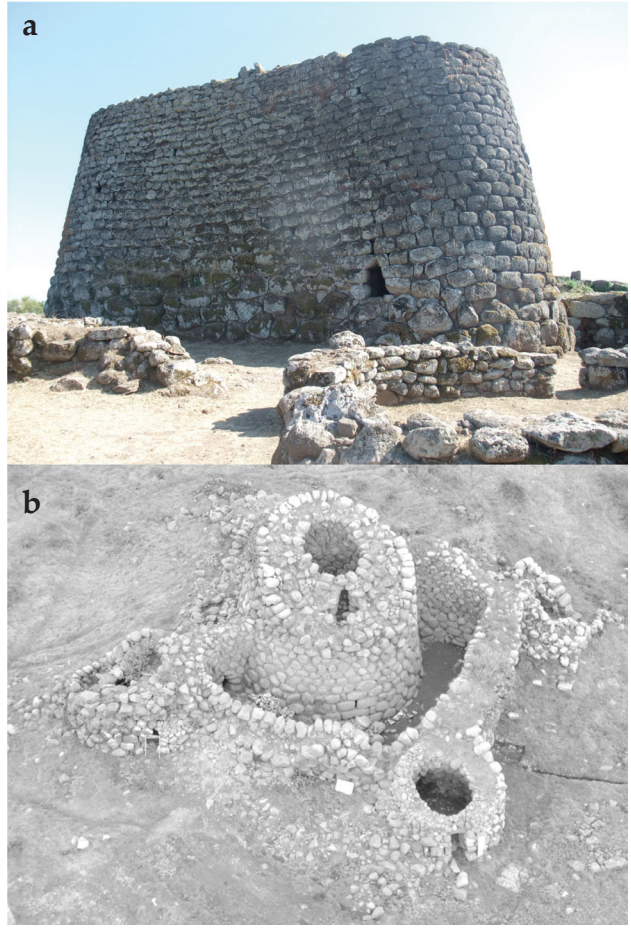

Figure 2. *Complex nuraghi: (a) nuraghe Losa, (b) nuraghe Nuracale-Scano Montiferro. (From Usai 2009, fig. 2b.)*

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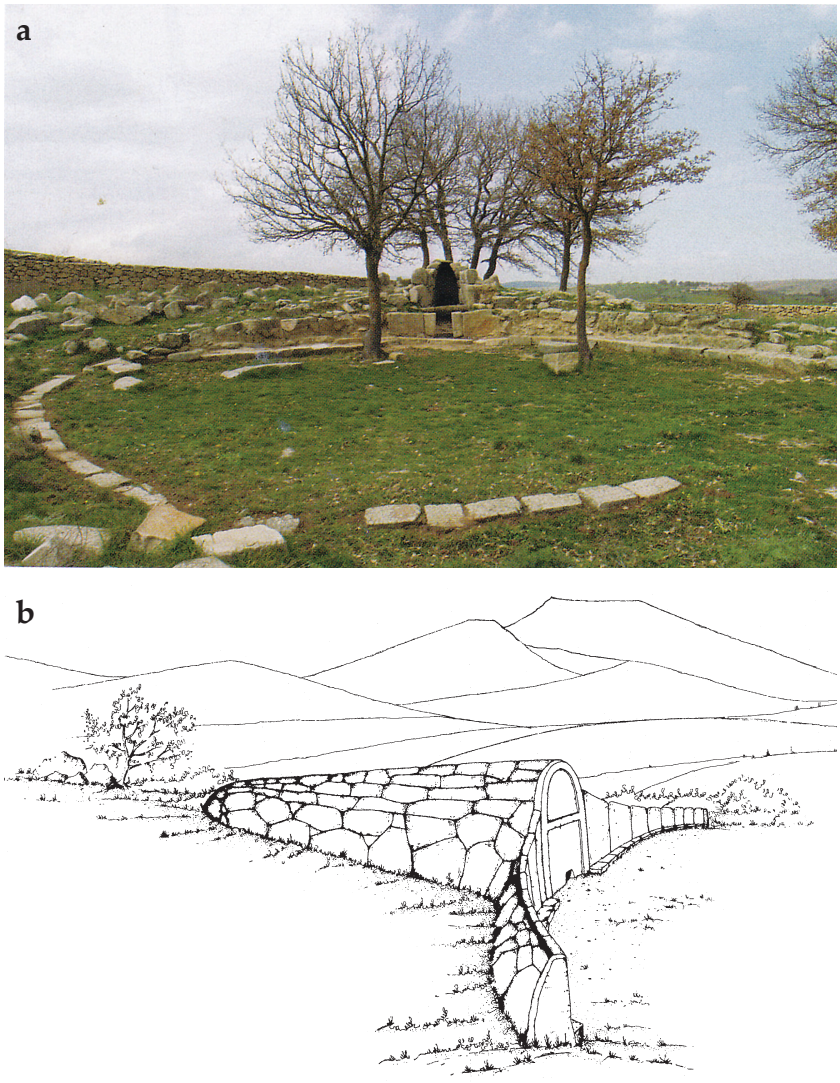

Figure 3. *Giant's tomb at (a) Madau, tomba 3 (from Fadda & Posi 2008, 71, fig. 74) and (b) idealized reconstruction (from Bernardini 2010a, 26, fig. 19).*

of community effort. I believe that there is no way they could be interpreted as tributary works for an aristocracy, since nuragic communities were too small (see below) to let a repressive apparatus, necessary to extract forced labour, emerge.

Blake (1998, 68) stated that 'nuraghi would have been involved in the creation and recreation of Nuragic society' since they were a place of social interaction. Their construction probably involved most of the population, and they were permanent and impressive symbols of what people could accomplish with their collective workforce. Some nuraghi were extended to multi-tower complexes in the LBA (Webster 1996, 108–24), what might have been the work of several surrounding communities to confirm their social bonds. From the MBA to the RBA, the nuraghe, together with the megalithic 'giant's tomb' (Fig. 3), seem to have been the main symbols of identification for the community.

No more new nuraghi were built after this period. Usai proposed that time and effort spent on their construction were no longer deemed proportional to their practical and symbolic use (2009, 272). The FBA–EIA only saw a few old ones extended or modified, but their symbolic importance persisted: some were transformed into sanctuaries, e.g. nuraghe Nurdole-Orani (Fadda 1991), and models in stone, often at the centre of a 'meeting hut' (see below) as well as bronze miniatures, underline the persistence of their symbolism (e.g. Blake 1997). By then, the construction of sanctuaries, some of them of super-regional significance, would have been a more typical expression of communal work.

Tombs

Nuragic Sardinia's 'giant's tombs' are megalithic, collective tombs containing remains of up to 300 individuals, and a few were probably in use until the EIA,

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although most 'giant's tombs' seem to have lost their ritual importance in the RBA (Perra 2006, 646). None of the grave-goods which have been found emphasize the interred individual's status. Sometimes they are remodelled from Neolithic or Chalcolithic structures. Since they feature a semi-circular forecourt, where mostly the remains of drinking vessels were found, feasting must have been part of the rites performed there (Burgess 2001, 177–8; Russu 1999, 216). It seems probable that an ancestor cult was in existence (Perra 2006). This is, however, not an indicator for a stratified society. The use of burial caves and natural holes in the rock (*tafoni*) (both without status-indicating grave-goods) is attested for nuragic times — but this still does not hint of social differentiation in the funerary ritual (Burgess 2001, 178).

There are only three cases of nuragic single graves known so far (cf. Bernardini 2010b), all dating to the EIA. Antas and Sardara are mentioned below. Monte Prama, a possible sanctuary complex, includes 33 stone-cist tombs in a row, without grave-goods (Rendeli 2010; Tronchetti 2012a). On top of the burials, there were scattered fragments of at least 25 stone statues representing characters from the *bronzetti* iconography. The tombs date to the tenth–ninth centuries BC (Lo Schiavo pers. comm.). Unfortunately, further excavation is necessary to fully understand this so far unique site.

The landscape of nuragic burials is heterogeneous, with the 'giant's tombs' indicating an ancestor cult, and few known individual inhumations. The latter are extremely rare, heterogeneous, very poorly equipped compared to mainland EIA tombs and, to my contention, to be seen as exceptions that are not necessarily linked to the actual social status of the buried. A big part of the population must have been buried in a way which leaves no traces detectable by archaeology (Usai 2007, 53). Highlighting individual status, however, was never part of the ritual in the LBA and still extremely uncommon in the EIA (Tronchetti 2012b).

Villages

The villages are not fortified and consist of small round stone huts, none of which seems to be outstanding in any way. Their size varies from just a few huts to larger settlements, but seldom would there have been more than 150–200 inhabitants (Usai 2006, 559). The small village size is, according to Bintliff's (1999, 526–32) study, optimally scaled to promote a 'face-to-face' society where everybody knows each other and egalitarian social bonds do not favour the emergence of elites.

Many villages show continuity of use from the MBA to the EIA. From the RBA to the FBA, a considerable demographic increase is detectable, and this seems to have led to the foundation of new villages. Some of these appear to have been abandoned due to their 'unfavourable' situation regarding natural resources, while more convenient areas saw a general rise in population density. However, village size still remains around the 200 inhabitant-limit (Usai 2006, 557–9). Tendencies towards urbanization did not exist.

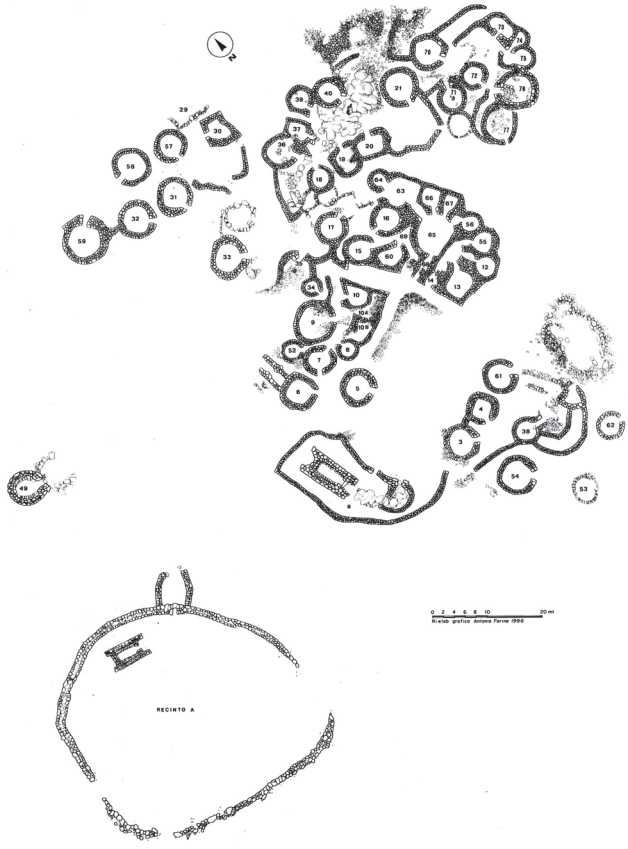

Figure 4. *Nuragic village of Serra Orrios with ritual structures. (From Moravetti 1998, 34, fig. 25.)*

Villages can often be associated with a nuraghe (as in St Imbenia-Alghero), sometimes to a sanctuary (as in Abini-Teti), or include sacred structures or 'meeting huts' (e.g. Fadda 2006a), but there is no regular pattern, and nothing permitting conclusions regarding social differentiation within them (Fig. 4). Furthermore, it is interesting that unlike most of contemporary Europe, nuragic villages are neither situated in strategic positions nor circumscribed by defensive walls. The nuraghi are unlikely to have had any defensive use, and completely inappropriate to provide shelter for villagers and cattle (Usai 1995, 257). This fact implies that raiding was uncommon, and that large-scale inter-village warfare certainly did not occur throughout nuragic times.

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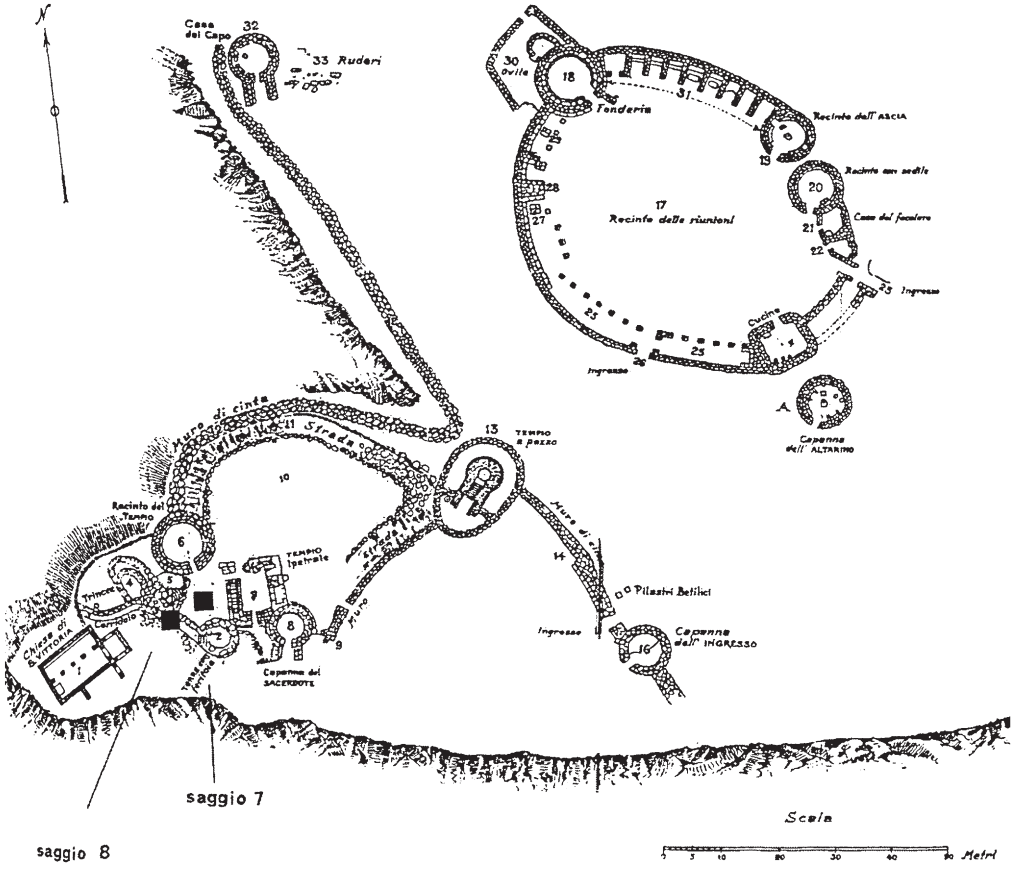

Figure 5. *Plan of the federal sanctuary at Santa Vittoria-Serri, (From Lo Schiavo* et al. *2005, 103,)*

Thus nuraghi, tombs and villages give no clue as to social organization (cf. Burgess 2001; Tronchetti 2012b). As Lull *et al.* (2011, 289) stated for late third-millennium BC Wessex, 'there is no archaeological evidence that suggests the concentration of surplus in the hands of particular individuals or groups, or separation of a dominant group from the rest of the population.'

Water, land and people: nuragic sanctuaries

Architecture: community effort

Elaborate architecture is a hallmark of nuragic society. Complex, 'federal sanctuaries' (Ialongo 2011; Lo Schiavo 1990) can take huge dimensions and contain a number of different structures. Typical architectural features include holy wells or springs, sophisticated water ductworks and pools, round and rectangular buildings, or vast open spaces circumscribed by low walls, where hundreds of people could participate in activities (Figs. 5 & 6; Burgess 2001; Burgess & Vešligaj 2007; Fadda 2006a; Ialongo 2011; Lo Schiavo 1990; Webster 1996, 145–9, 180–90). Most sanctuaries were founded in the LBA, and the period of intense activity at most sanctuaries, simple well sanctuaries or those being used by several surrounding communities, continues throughout the EIA (Usai 2007, 49–52).

Smaller sanctuaries, nearly always associated with water, for example springs or wells, were sometimes built in villages, and these seemed to have served the religious needs of the community. Countryside spring-sanctuaries (Fig. 8) may have been used as shrines that could be visited or where water could be obtained.

One architectural component which appears at all of the 'federal sanctuaries', and in many nuragic villages, is the 'meeting hut' (Fig. 7), which is generally seen as a place of political discourse (Tronchetti & van Dommelen 2005, 194–7). The term refers to round huts much bigger than usual habitations with stone benches lining the walls, sometimes including a fireplace and a nuraghe model at their centre.

The large number of exceptional monuments shows that nuragic people dedicated much of their workforce to their construction (cf. Lull *et al.* 2011, 287). Be it nuraghi or sanctuaries, a large degree of effort and sophisticated technology were necessary to build them. After no more new nuraghi were built at the end of the FBA, sanctuaries seem to have taken their place as the main focus of architectural community effort.

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Figure 6. *Federal sanctuary at Santa Cristina-Paulilatino. (From Usai 2011, 15.)*

Figure 7. *'Meeting hut' at Santa Cristina-Paulilatino. (Photograph: Ralph Araque Gonzalez.)*

Perra (2006) has also emphasized the shift from the 'giant's tombs' as ritual foci in the MBA–RBA to the sanctuaries as ritual centres of the FBA–EIA.

The construction of sanctuaries and nuraghi could only be realized as community effort by a society that was enthusiastic about it and shared the benefits created by it. It seems unrealistic that it would have been tributary work for the 'elite'. Projects of such dimensions, heavily affecting subsistence activities by withdrawal of workforce, would face resistance in a non-hierarchic society if they had no evident use for community (Clastres 1994; Miller *et al.* 1995; Paynter 1989).

Roscoe, re-considering the Big Man model in Melanesia, highlights the important aspect of the Big Man as a monument builder. The 'enormous spirit houses that characterized much of the Maprik region' (Roscoe 2011, 50), elaborate and richly adorned wooden constructions about 100 feet (30 m) high, might have had a similar symbolism as the nuraghi and sanctuaries of LBA–EIA Sardinia: 'the sheer size and quantity of materials they embodied were

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an incontrovertible demonstration of the labour the sponsoring group could muster and of their capacity to function as a group' (Roscoe 2011, 51). This observation led Roscoe (2011, 52) to the conclusion that 'small-scale societies are capable of mounting major political undertakings in the absence of elite control'. He suggested considering relevancies that Melanesian 'Big Man society' has to prehistoric Europe. Actually, his characterization of 'Big Men' shows many similarities to leaders in anarchic societies. The overall argument is essentially the same as Lull *et al.* (2011) proposed as an alternative to Eneolithic Wessex chiefdoms.

Water: resource distribution

Water always has been an important factor for sociopolitical organization in Sardinia: the restricted resources had to be shared by several communities, usurpation by one community could mean death for another. Therefore, some kind of arrangement was obligatory. Land and water in the Barbagia of central Sardinia were common property until recent times, and unhindered access to the sparse water resources was essential for pastoral society. After the Piemontesi sold land to private landowners in the nineteenth century AD, territories were fenced off, and many shepherds lost access to water and thus their base of subsistence (G. Pilloni pers. comm.; Ricci 2007).

Nuragic sanctuaries, that do not include defensive structures and most probably were used by several communities (Ialongo 2011; Lo Schiavo 1990; 2003b), incorporate holy fountains and wells, assuring access to water on neutral territory, protected by a religious aura. Many are situated at geostrategically important sites, maybe to prevent the usurpation of the land. In Sardinia, land and water seem to have been common property throughout prehistoric times and after.

Bronze: wealth accumulation and surplus consumption

In nuraghi, tombs and villages, very little metal has been found compared to the sanctuaries, where most bronze artefacts appeared (Lo Schiavo 1998). While *bronzetti* and votive swords (Lo Schiavo 2007) were produced exclusively for display at the sanctuaries, many other metal objects such as daggers, weapons and pins were used as votive offerings. The fact that after sanctuaries were abandoned, massive amounts of precious metal objects were left behind or buried at them, would seem to point towards strong religious taboos concerning the objects.

Ialongo (2011), in her remarkable study of nuragic sanctuaries and votive deposits, states that, for the FBA, deposits have a marked collective and impersonal character, consisting of mostly ingots, ingot fragments, and votive sword fragments. In the EIA, deposits include objects that she considers to be of individualizing character, like weapons, objects of personal adornment, etc. This change is seen as an indicator for emerging hierarchy and the quest for status. Since some of these objects were also found in two EIA individual burials, she suggests three hypotheses: first, the 'personalized' deposits are either an offering to a deity, highlighting wealth and status of the donator; second, the objects are offerings to a deity that represent its according attributes; third, the offerings are dedicated to a deceased person of a certain status (Ialongo 2011, 421–2).

In the overall context of the sanctuaries, I would support the second hypothesis, and add that the offering was very probably made in the course of symbolic superabundance consumption by withdrawal of precious metal artefacts from profane circulation. I do not believe that the shift from ingots and fragments to finished, emblematic objects hints at hierarchy, but rather at refined ritual practices including special emphasis on representing a deity through its attributes.

The greatest part of metal-production and imports that was withdrawn from profane circulation ended up at the sanctuaries and not as grave-goods or private property. Superabundance of bronze is displayed in the forms of the ritual and votive metal artefacts in a public context. Scrap hoards and ingots at some sanctuaries may also indicate activities as metallurgy or trade, some structures are reminiscent of workshops or 'market places', pointing towards barter between communities and with groups from further afield.

Bronzetti

The iconography of the bronze figurines includes anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations, boats, nuraghi and miniature objects (e.g. Araque Gonzalez 2012; Depalmas 2005; Lilliu 1966). They were produced from the FBA onwards (e.g. Lo Schiavo 2007; Manunza 2008) and thus emerged in an era when contacts with the eastern Mediterranean and Iberia intensified and pictorial art employing common archetypes became a distinctive element in the western Mediterranean (Araque Gonzalez 2012, 99–102, 104–6).

There are two stylistic groups that can be distinguished: the larger and older is the Uta-Abini style (Fig. 8). Uta-Abini *bronzetti* communicate religious information, reaffirm local identity by typical Sardinian design and motives and also signify massive metal consumption on *bronzetti* regarding their number and average size (Araque Gonzalez 2012, 86–90, 106).

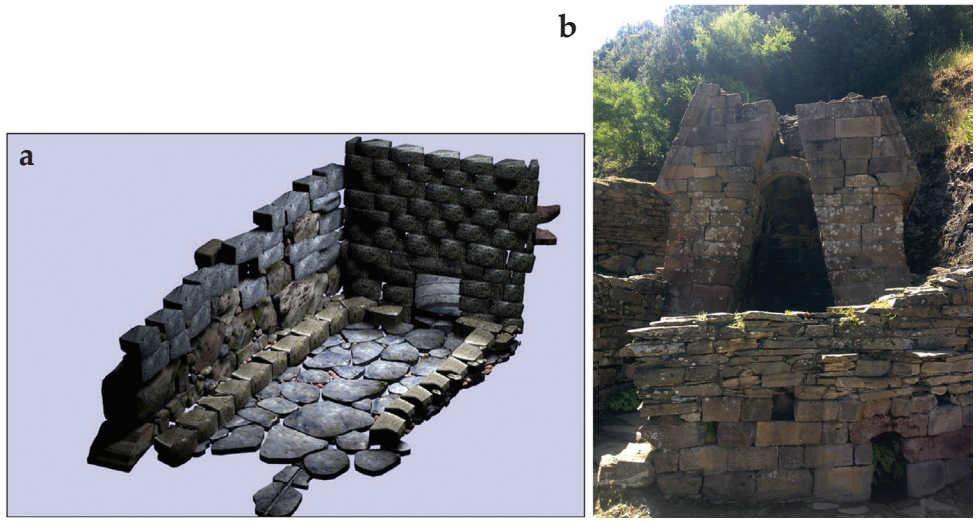

Figure 8. *Well sanctuaries: (a) Su Lumarzu-Bonorva (reconstruction by N. Ialongo; from Boninu* et al. *2012, fig. 5 D); (b) Su Tempiesu-Orune (photograph: S. Kpoti).*

There are two common figures in Uta-Abini iconography that are often cited as representing elites: the warrior and archer is the first example (Fig. 9a–c, e). This archetypical image, as I argued earlier (Araque Gonzalez 2012) seems to represent a divinity connected to water/weather, the bull, fertility and warfare or destructive weather forces if analysed in its overall Mediterranean context. It is not a representation of individuals or a 'warrior-elite', but of a symbolic entity with warrior attributes. Nothing points towards frequent armed conflict in nuragic Sardinia, nor towards an aggression from outside the island (e.g. destruction levels: Campus & Leonelli 2009, 274). The warriors that were certainly there, indicated by the weapons found in nuragic contexts, may have been engaged in occasional, probably ritualized warfare as one of the centrifugal forces which prevents centralization (Angelbeck & Grier 2012; Clastres 1994; Sastre 2008). They might also have been involved in raiding or piracy, but this topic cannot be discussed here in detail. Unfortunately, the fact that in many societies, a warrior is not an elite status but may gain prestige (which does not equal power), and leaders in war have no power in peace (Clastres 1977; 1994), are often ignored by archaeologists.

The second example, the *capotribu*, a man with cloak and staff and much bigger than most of the other figurines (Fig. 9d, e), is often believed to depict a chief-like person. Again, I argue that it is not an individual

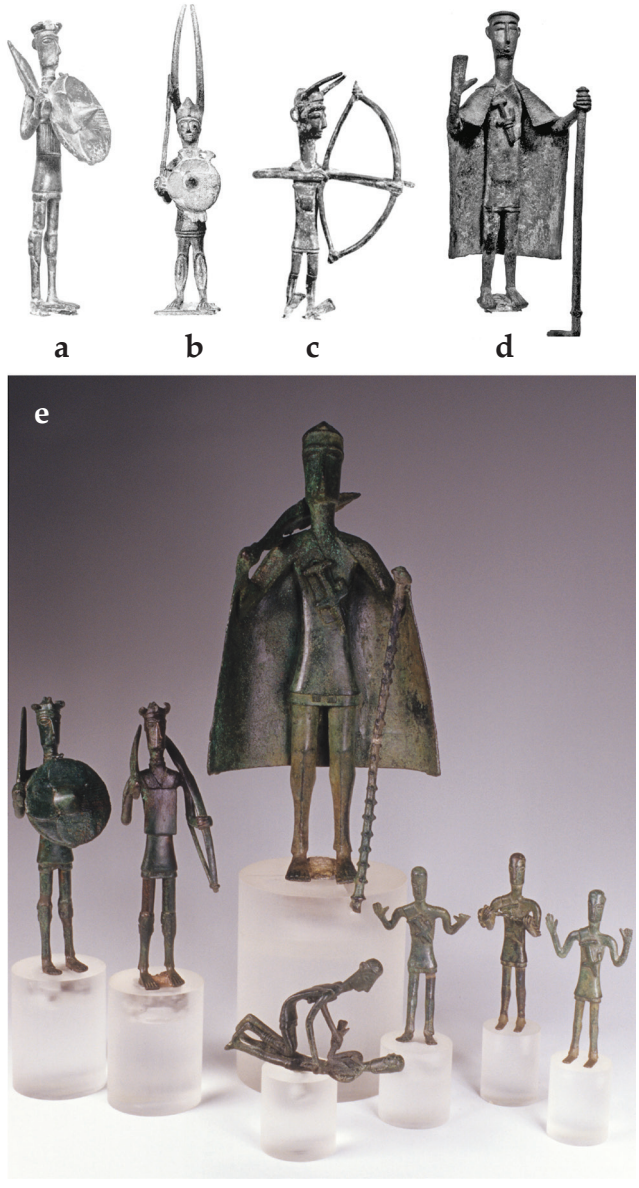

Figure 9. *Uta-Abini style* bronzetti *from: (a) Uta (Lilliu 1966, no. 12); (b) Senorbí (Lilliu 1966, no. 96); (c) Abini-Teti (Lilliu 1966, no. 18); (d) Santa Vittoria-Serri (Lilliu 1966, no. 4); and (e) examples from Monte Arcosu-Uta (courtesy of the Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici della Sardegna Cagliari).*

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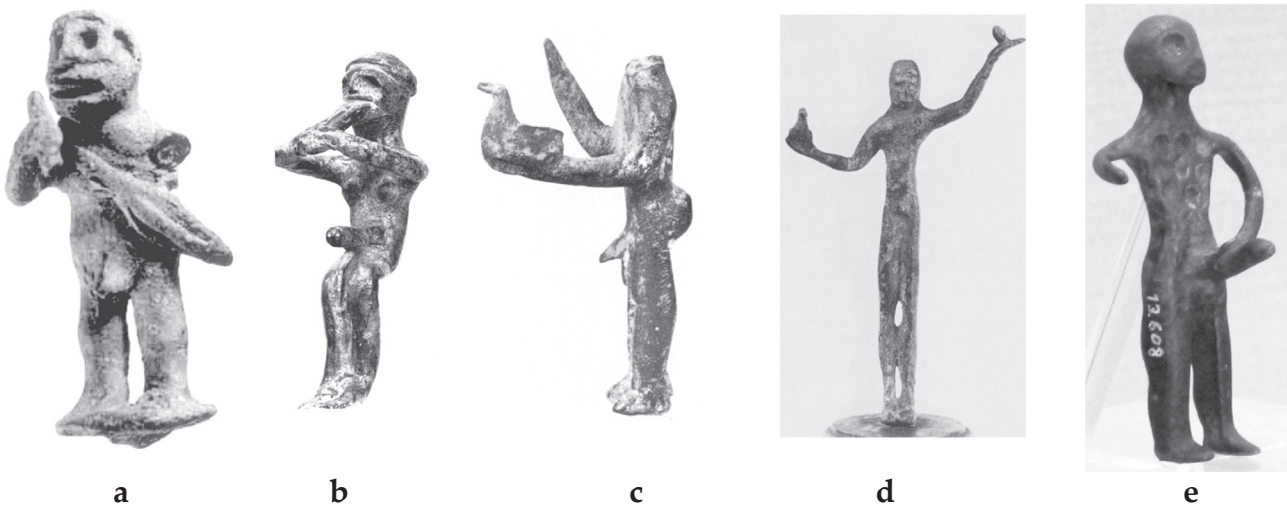

Figure 10. *Mediterranean-style* bronzetti *from Sardinia: (a) Nurdole-Orani (Fadda 2006b, 53, fig. 54); (b) Ittiri (Lilliu 1966, no. 183); (c) Santa Teresa di Gallura (Lilliu 1966, no. 180); Etruria: (d) Fonte Venezia (Colonna 1985, 178, 10.2 13); and Iberia: (e) Badajoz (photograph: Ralph Araque Gonzalez).*

represented, but the idealized social role that should be expressed by this symbolic entity is not as easy to trace back in Mediterranean iconography as the warrior. It might be the archetypical, idealized image of a leader, serving the purposes of the community with his diplomatic and organizational skills, and maybe a specific Sardinian deity. However, in socio-political reality, a leader not acting according to the standards represented by the ideal archetype would easily lose his/her position.

From the EIA onwards, the *bronzetti* undergo iconographical and quantitative changes, which most likely indicate social and cultural changes. The more recent Mediterranean-style figurines which fit well into the 'orientalizing' style of the eighth–sixth century BC Mediterranean (Fig. 10), are less numerous and smaller on average. They also omit the detailed depiction of elements that would usually refer to a local identity. Warrior-representations are insignificant in this group. They communicate religious information, reaffirm participation in a Mediterranean community by their design and motifs and also indicate a decrease of metal consumption on cult figurines (Araque Gonzalez 2012, 90, 106).

Neither of the styles represents individuals or social classes, but archetypical divine entities, which apart from their transcendental symbolism may be idealizations of social roles, and also communicate religious and ideological contents. Furthermore, they do not refer to private property in their original contexts at the sanctuaries, where they are exposed at public spaces (Araque Gonzalez 2012, 96–8, 106).

At Antas, a bronze figurine has been found alongside amber-beads dated to the ninth century BC (Ugas & Lucia 1987) in an individual inhumation. Another single grave at Sardara contained two *bronzetti* and EIA material (Bernardini 2010b). In Italy, Sardinian *bronzetti* have been deposited in rich Villanovian and Etruscan tombs from the ninth century BC onwards (cf. Depalmas 2005). The use of such figurines as grave-goods in Sardinia, as well as in Etruria, is a custom that probably arises around the ninth century BC, when the permanent presence of Phoenicians in Sardinia and intensified contact with Etruria created new social challenges and led to initially few, but notable changes in cultural practices.

The co-existence with hierarchic groups on the island might well have destabilized nuragic social structures by inspiring the adoption of aristocratic ideas, relating to the accumulation of private property, for example. Major changes in social organization took place only after the eighth century BC, however, and become even more evident after the Punic conquest at the end of the sixth century BC.

Feasting

Pottery at the sanctuaries is usually associated with drinking (Fadda 2006a; Lo Schiavo 1990), thus feasting must have been an important event. The open spaces at the 'federal sanctuaries' could have been used for assemblies and big feasts that welded together surrounding communities (cf. Blake 2005). Creating a space in which surplus of food and drink was consumed by the producing communities might also

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have been a motivation for participating in a sanctuary's construction.

Collective consumption of surplus is a decisive feature of non-hierarchic stateless societies and one of its purposes is to prevent accumulation of wealth in the hands of a restricted number of people (Bardelle 1986, 97–101; Clastres 1989, 196–8; 1994, 105–18; Kuhn 2010, 37). There is no hint of exclusionary feasts (Blake 2005, 107; Dietler 2001, 85–7) in nuragic society, where implements to celebrate a 'symposion', or 'elite feasting', are missing (Lo Schiavo 2012b, 31; Tronchetti 2012b).

Sacred and neutral spaces

The sanctuaries were more than places of religious life: they were also most likely the basis of nuragic politics. Architectural features indicate political activity, like the 'meeting huts'. If sanctuaries were a place of political debate, assemblies regulating inter-community relations were held on neutral territory, probably under the protection of the divinities venerated there.

LBA–EIA Sardinia cannot have been a war-torn island, since nuragic communities accomplished large-scale architectural projects that could only be realized through mutual aid, and created spaces for peaceful assemblies at the sanctuaries. The creation of such spaces, where independent communities could organize land and water distribution, settle conflicts (since small-scale warfare may certainly have occurred), as well as manage external affairs which impacted the island as a whole, became necessary in the FBA: pressure was put on Sardinia by its integration in the exchange network of the Mediterranean.

To enjoy the advantages of this trade without giving up their own identity and independence, and without centralizing political power, seems to have been a crucial issue to nuragic people. Finally, there is evidence for the accumulation of wealth at public spaces and for its communal consumption, instead of it ending up in the hands of powerful individuals. Maybe 'communities were trying to reinforce solidarity links over large territories, perhaps in order to avoid the appropriation of production by particular groups and the consequent emergence of surplus' (Lull *et al.* 2011, 289).

Culture contact, change and politics

Sardinia obviously played a significant role in the traffic in the Mediterranean between east and west from the FBA onwards. The foundations of these contacts must lie in the RBA, since nuragic pottery datable to this period has been found at Cannatello in Sicily, Kommos on Crete, and Lipari. Campus and Leonelli therefore suggest a permanent presence of Sardinians at strategic points along the sea routes (2009, 273). There is also Mycenean-style pottery in nuragic contexts on Sardinia, much of it produced locally, but its number and distribution are very limited (Hayne 2010). The high number of ox-hide ingots, actually more than anywhere else in the Mediterranean, and mostly of Cypriot origin, datable to the thirteenth–eleventh centuries BC, is another invaluable proof of close links to the east (Fig. 11; Lo Schiavo 2012a; Lo Schiavo *et al.* 2009).

Though nuragic society was basically composed of small independent communities based on stock farming and agriculture at subsistence level, it reached a remarkable level of cultural complexity by the RBA. The internal connections of nuragic communities on the island seem to become more intense, and thus there was a need for creating symbols of supra-regional significance and inter-village cohesion. The first step taken by nuragic people seems to have been the accomplishment of larger architectural projects based on the traditional nuraghe, an endeavour that would reinforce bonds by the participation of several surrounding communities in a common project: the complex, multi-tower nuraghi. Doing so, the territory would be re-structured by creating permanent 'points of interaction' for communities. By the FBA, the sanctuaries with their more utilitarian spatial layout replace the nuraghi. They are multi-functional monuments designed to host greater groups of people and complex activities.

In the thirteenth century BC, significant technological progress took place and was at least partly attributed to the intense culture contact emerging at the time. The collapse of most early states in the eastern Mediterranean around *c.* 1200 BC, resulting in major movements of people searching for better conditions in other regions (Gitin *et al.* 1998; Knapp 2008; Lo Schiavo 2003a; Oren 2000), most probably had a major impact on the culmination of changes on Sardinia. People in contemporary eastern Mediterranean states faced an authoritarian system based on tribute, an imminent feature of the state (Clastres 1977, 115). Chances to escape this system might have been gladly taken by some. It does not come as a surprise that Sardinia changed significantly at the time when scattered 'Sea people', Cypro-Aegean refugees and adventurers, hit the Mediterranean Sea, travelling and settling down where they found good conditions.

Immigration generally takes place along known routes (cf. Knapp 2008, 48), and regarding the material evidence mentioned above, the western islands must have been known to a certain number of eastern LBA sailors. At the same time, some travellers from Iberia

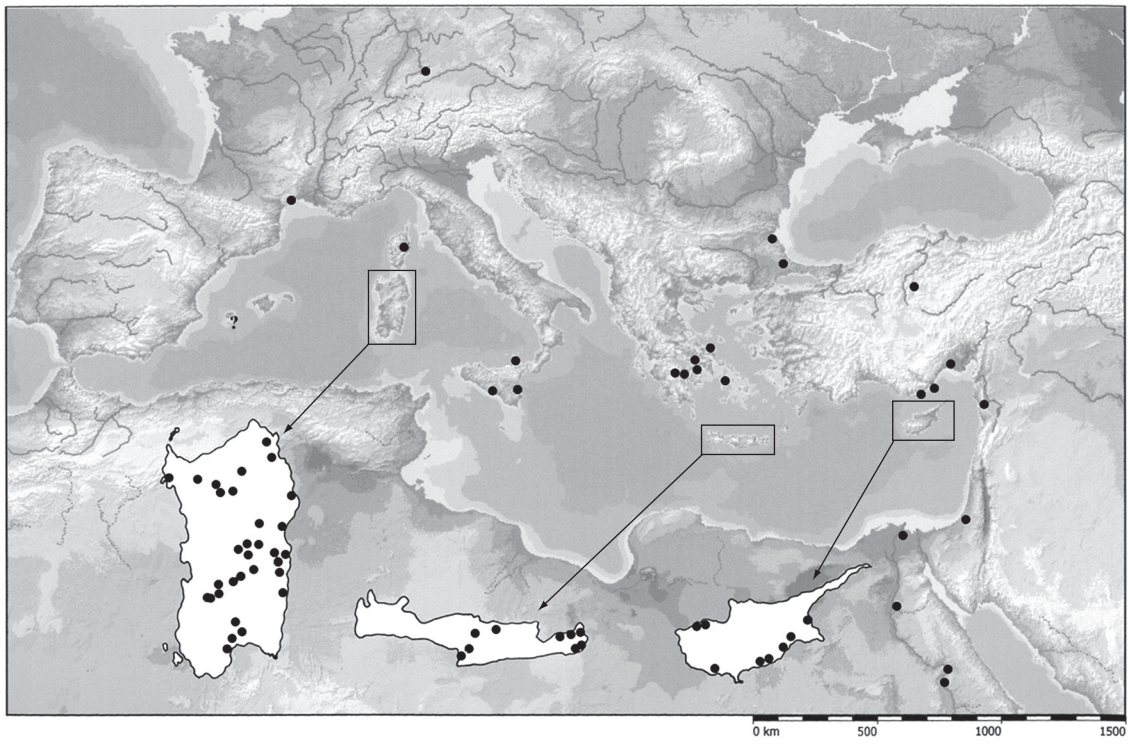

Figure 11. *Distribution map of ox-hide ingots, indicating relations between east and west in the Late Bronze Age. (From Lo Schiavo* et al. *2009.)*

may have settled down on Sardinia since close contact between the two regions is attested. Reasons that made Sardinia attractive could be the absence of a tributary system and repression by central authorities, as well as acceptance by the indigenous population and good living conditions including abundant metal resources.

Nuragic society seems to have been open to integrate immigrants: artefacts of Iberian origin are nearly as widespread as locally produced artefacts of Cypriot tradition (Lo Schiavo *et al.* 2005), which led Bernardini (2010a, 39–44, 58–9) to the idea that immigrants could have lived in indigenous villages. Lo Schiavo, proposing that the transport of ox-hide ingots was taken over by Sardinian ships (2012a, 147), assumes the presence and cultural integration of immigrants from the east after the 'Sea people's' activities in the LBA (Lo Schiavo 2003a, 161). Despite the adoption of many elements of Cypriot and Atlantic technology, the subsistence, settlement and social systems remained essentially nuragic (Lo Schiavo 2012a).

Immigration provides new ideas and ways of thinking. Combined with indigenous developments, there can be a fruitful exchange that results in great cultural achievements. For a better understanding of the role of immigrants, one has to be aware of the fact that people from hierarchic societies sometimes deliberately abandon the latter to change their own living conditions for the better. Nevertheless, they would maintain any achievements that facilitate life as far as possible under the new circumstances.

It is my contention that in the FBA, nuragic Sardinian society reached an extraordinary level of technological know-how while also simultaneously integrating newcomers from the east (mainly Cypro-Aegean) and from the west. Knowledge of similar archetypical divine entities (Araque Gonzalez 2012, 100–106) could have facilitated integration into religious life. A 'new' nuragic culture with its own distinguished identity formed on the island in the absence of internal or external dominating forces. This culture apparently developed its specific socio-political dynamics by not permitting centralization of power in groups or individuals, but still using a federal system to cope with greater political issues.

There have been comparable situations in history and with regards to the problem of immigrants from the eastern Mediterranean. I will employ an unusual example: the golden-age pirates in the Caribbean. The uncontrollable situation in the Caribbean of the seventeenth century AD promised an opportunity to break out of the structures of absolutist states with their repressive tributary systems.

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Many Europeans chose to live in small, independent communities rejecting allegiance to any nation and were often joined by runaway slaves and *indigénas* (Kuhn 2010, 59–61). Material culture was heavily influenced by the local Carib tribes (Bardelle 1986, 34, 90–95; Kuhn 2010, 48–9), a 'hybrid culture' (Tronchetti & van Dommelen 2005, 193) was created in a zone not controlled by any dominating force, and, in the absence of central authorities, left space for experimentation with social organization (Hauser & Armstrong 2012).

Anarchic leadership

In the Caribbean case, socio-cultural influences emerged: each criterion that Clastres (1989) set for a 'chief without coercive power' is matched by historical sources on the position of a pirate captain (Kuhn 2010, 30–34). Both were elected, power rested on merit only and was controlled by community, while no means of using coercion were handed over to the chief/captain. Generosity and diplomatic skills, as well as being an able leader in war, were features that were expected from chiefs/captains, making them 'the effective instrument of his society' respectively 'the creature of his crew' (Kuhn 2010, 33). Roscoe's Melanesian Big Men, with their leadership being achieved and constantly threatened by desertion of an unsatisfied community, and their function as leaders in war, 'were noted for their generosity, their ability to speak eloquently and mediate conflict, their "cool and calculating disposition" and their capacities as "social entrepreneurs" or organizers' (Roscoe 2011, 50).

In Angelbeck and Grier's study of Coast Salish society, it is noteworthy that 'authority was granted to individuals with particular skills, but only for duration of the activity', and that 'a chief had to be generous' (2012, 566). The potlatch was one way of surplus annihilation, and several social dynamics that avoided wealth accumulation in individuals/groups were at work. Furthermore, they discuss how centralization of power was avoided among the Coast Salish, resulting in 'high social complexity' combined with *'low political complexity'* (Angelbeck & Grier 2012, 568).

With regard to nuragic society, similar politics to early Carib, Melanesian and Coast Salish tribes as well as pirate crews, i.e. refusing centralization and chiefs without coercive power, seem a highly probable form of socio-political organization. Not only does the Melanesian example prove that major projects can be handled without elites, but the integration of immigrants from hierarchic societies also becomes more plausible. The absence of elite burials, residences and status indicators is not that unexplainable if there simply was no elite and status lasted only as long as a leader, or organizer, was doing his/her job to society's contentment. The strengths of anarchic organization will be considered below.

Society without elite

Annihilation of superadundance or the avoidance of economic surplus

Superabundance (Lull *et al.* 2011, 287, 292) is generated if a community decides to produce more than is necessary to fulfil its needs (Sahlins 1972). It may be considered 'surplus, obtained without surplus labour' (Clastres 1989, 196). Its production is *not* a feature of hierarchical societies (Clastres 1989, 14) — what makes the difference is its distribution and consumption.

However, the use of superabundance is a crucial factor for social relations. Its usurpation as private property by individuals creates economic surplus, allowing them to obtain means for manipulation of community affairs, and is the embryo of a hierarchic society. Yoffee (2007, 36) places emphasis on the role of wealth accumulation and accordingly, surplus, and its subsequent institutionalization, for the emergence of the earliest states.

Nuragic society, as well as recent indigenous groups or golden age pirate crews, had to find a way in which superabundance could be integrated into socio-political life without damaging existing structures by allowing individuals to accumulate wealth. The most common type of surplus annihilation is the collective consumption of superabundance, e.g. feasting.

Moreover, I want to propose that *bronzetti* and other valuable ritual artefacts are another example for the annihilation of material wealth. Cult images do not create profit if they are not traded, and prestige if they are not associable to or representing individuals. They are community property exposed at the sanctuaries and serve as communicative artefacts (Micó Pérez 2005, 279–81) reaffirming common ideas and identity. This can be seen as part of a strategy of managing power relations, avoiding centralization, and enrichment of parts of the population.

Refusal of centralization

The deliberate avoidance of hierarchy is a neglected aspect of human behaviour. What connects tribal societies of the Americas, buccaneer society and nuragic Sardinia is that all are — in Clastres' (1989) words — societies against the state. Examples from history and ethnography show that there are people who refuse centralization and delegation of power to individuals. They do employ a complex set of cultural practices (Brumfiel 1995, 128; Clastres 1989) to avoid

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unacceptable concentrations of wealth and power in the hands of individuals or 'elites'.

Keeping groups small and independent makes it difficult for individuals inside a community to usurp power, since social control by the rest of society would not permit this. Interaction with neighbouring groups has to be kept on a level where domination of one over another is made impossible, for example by federal structures, freedom of movement, and ritualized warfare (Bardelle 1986; Clastres 1989; 1994; Kuhn 2010): 'there are too many levelling devices, too many places to escape to, too many authorities, and too many weapons too widely spread throughout the population to foster accumulation of power by the few' (Paynter 1989, 379).

I believe that in the protohistoric Mediterranean, as well as in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, some people who knew life in a state deliberately abandoned this system, met societies that consciously refused a state from the beginning and accepted some of their social strategies: centralization is avoided, surplus annihilated, and leaders for certain tasks are elected and de-elected without handing over coercive power (Clastres 1989; Kuhn 2010, 43–6). Sastre (2008) proposed the deliberate rejection of hierarchic structures also for the Galician castro-culture.

Advantages of a non-hierarchical society

The strength of a system which does not allow individuals to accumulate wealth, and thus usurpation of power, is that only those most capable of solving certain tasks will be elected for their execution, and if they fail they can be replaced at any time with a more competent person. As Paynter (1989, 381) put it 'thus while egalitarian societies empower the individual, they offer the individual less opportunity to wreak havoc than is found in contemporary stratified societies'.

Another factor known from both non-hierarchic tribal societies and pirate crews is that labour was not alienated, 'work is not divorced from life, there is no "job", no time and place where one spends most of one's time not being oneself' (Kuhn 2010, after Sahlins 1968, 80). With respect to power relations, alienation is political before it is economic, since it consolidates the base for domination of one group, or class, namely the ones who enjoy economic surplus production, over another, who have to produce for a ruling class 'without exchange or reciprocity' (Clastres 1989, 197–9).

I argue that in nuragic Sardinia, although there were probably dedicated experts in architecture and metallurgy, people usually participated in several productive activities and thus in culture (Service 1979, 74–5): community's integrants carried out subsistence activities, were involved in the construction of monuments, the extraction of raw materials, and the creation of art. For the individual, this means a 'more varied and challenging' life than he or she would pursue in a complex economy with strict division of labour (Brumfiel 1995, 129).

If so, culture was reproduced by society as a whole and not directed by an 'elite'. One effect of this full participation is quality work, since people produce for *themselves*, not for others, and thus do work with a different motivation. Collective projects also enforce learning, since a constant exchange of people involved in production results in optimizing processes from a grass-roots level.

There are some recent examples in history where this form of organization proved to be efficient. During the Spanish Civil War, collectivized factories in the libertarian-ruled regions of Catalunya and Aragon, run by worker's councils, often reached a significantly higher productivity than while being private enterprises. Surplus was administrated by the collectives and used on social projects or war expenses, but never converted to private property (Alba 2001; Diéz Torre 2009).

A non-alienated work process guarantees a better life for many than could a hierarchical system at any level and leads to an optimized, balanced productivity and enhanced creativity. A culture with full participation of its integrants in reproduction is more dynamic, since information exchange and learning are promoted, not being subject to stiff regulations. It was probably this awareness, as well as the refusal of tribute and compliance as a consequence of coercion, that lead the three societies mentioned above to refuse centralization and delegation of coercive power. In political terms, regarding power relations within them, they decided to be anarchic societies.

Conclusions

The archaeological evidence for power relations in LBA–EIA nuragic Sardinia can be summarized as follows.

A) Tombs

- Funerals that leave no traces are the most common.
- Grave-goods highlighting status are absent, even at Monte Prama, with the two exceptions of EIA single graves mentioned above.

B) Villages

- The small village size of 200 or fewer people results in communities that could easily maintain face-to-face relationships without power centralization or institutionalized authority.

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- There are no structures which point towards 'elite' residences.
- Settlements are not fortified and not in strategic locations, ruling out permanent conflict.
- Socio-political stability is proven by long occupation periods of some villages from MBA to EIA.
- No steps were taken towards urbanization (i.e. centralization) before the establishment of Phoenician colonies.

C) Sanctuaries and nuraghi

- Abandoning of old ceremonial or symbolic spaces is strongly linked to ancestor worship ('giants' tombs') and small community efforts (nuraghi) in the FBA.
- Construction of complex nuraghi in the RBA may be a step towards super-community organization, creating symbolic places that would connect several participating communities. The concept of the nuraghe as the main social space is abandoned in the FBA and replaced by the sanctuaries.
- New ceremonial and political spaces were created and architecturally planned to permit interaction of several communities at the larger, federal sanctuaries.
- Cult practices changed from ancestral worship to the worship of divinities, probably representing natural forces as water, fertility etc., allowing interaction with travellers and possibly the integration of immigrants, who had no ancestral roots on the island, into a syncretic belief system.

D) Economy

- Metallurgy and long-distance trade intensified in the FBA.
- Surplus at the sanctuaries was annihilated as detectable in pottery and animal remains indicating feasting, and huge amounts of bronzes, often figurines and other cult objects, and weapons, deposited at the sanctuaries.
- There is no evidence for wealth accumulation in the hands of individuals.

In LBA–EIA Sardinia, technical innovations can be the result of communities choosing from a broad spectrum of experts in metallurgy, architecture, arts and other activities, to improve their living conditions. Thus, the boom could have been caused by the interaction of input through culture contact together with space for experimentation created through anarchic political structures.

There is no rupture, but a 'growth trend' from MBA to FBA–EIA, which is visible in the nuragic record (Lo Schiavo 2012a), and some great innovations on the socio-political level, enabling non-hierarchic decision making on a super-community level through federal structures. What follows is the remarkable stability of nuragic society from the LBA to the EIA, self-consciously sustaining its identity.

Final thoughts

1. The resulting working hypothesis is that Sardinian LBA–EIA society was a 'society against the state', or an anarchic society, and as such probably shared features like surplus annihilation, absence of central authorities, community decision-making, or election of chiefs without coercive power that are bound to public will with other societies who chose this form of organization. Communities most likely organized political life on a federal level at the sanctuaries. The notable absence of 'elite-residences', prestigious grave-goods, or 'chiefly' ornaments, as are found in most other European regions in the LBA, offers no archaeological base to postulate a ruling 'elite' in nuragic society.

2. The main difference to hierarchic (and modern capitalist) society is the denial of wealth accumulation for individuals and of power centralization, the possibility for the community to elect and replace leaders without further complications since they have no coercive power, and thus avoiding despotism and oligarchic elements which tend to delegate important tasks to the richest instead of the most capable. Recent examples from Spain, to mention but one, prove the efficiency of non-hierarchic organization and anarchic power-relations in modern industrial society.

3. Heterarchies exist in both hierarchic and anarchic societies. In hierarchic ones, interest groups such as nobility, clergy, military, as well as craftspeople, workers etc. would constitute heterarchical elements. Reformist tendencies in some individuals, usually aimed at improving their own situation within the system, constitute a degree of instability, and with each group working for their interest, frequent changes might occur.

These interest groups generally accept centralized political power as a given, and thus live in *servitude volontaire*. Even if collective action takes place, it does not question political authority. Conflict might lead to collapse of one hierarchic constellation only to give birth to the next, with the hierarchy/state as a constant surviving. There might be great political divisions, but tendencies to completely overthrow the state as a system are usually insignificant.

In anarchic societies, heterarchies exist in the form of interest groups that would try to manipulate a community's decisions to their favour. However, none of them would have coercive power to enforce their will. Short-term hierarchies do exist in anarchic societies as long as they are deemed useful for community. For example, leaders chosen for a certain task will be obeyed as long as results of their work are deemed convenient. But no means to enforce their will are handed over to those leaders and they are not deemed superior at a personal level, or outside the given task they have to accomplish for their community. An anarchic society 'prevents any one of the sub-groups that constitute it from becoming autonomous; that it holds all the internal movements — conscious and inconscious — that maintain social life to the limits and direction prescribed by society' (Clastres 1989, 212). There is no compliance. Under these conditions, a state cannot form because its very foundation, the *servitude volontaire*, is absent.

4. The fusion of Atlantic, eastern and indigenous elements is evident in the archaeological record of nuragic Sardinia. It is a marker of an open and dynamic society, where culture is reproduced by the people, as opposed to hierarchic systems that are conservative by nature with culture being reproduced by the ruling few. The cultural 'hybridization' under non-colonial conditions, but in a realm without centralized control, connects nuragic Sardinia and Caribbean pirate societies.

5. There is strong evidence that anarchic societies may have existed in prehistory, reaching remarkable levels of cultural complexity, as can be seen in nuragic Sardinian material remains. I propose that archaeologists should consider the following working hypothesis in their research on prehistoric social structures:

a. While some societies permit hierarchies to establish, some deliberately decide to be anarchic, which means they do not permit political power to be concentrated in the hands of 'elites'.
b. A society can achieve a high cultural level without centralization, hierarchy or forming a state. People are capable of guaranteeing cultural progress and prosperity by participation instead of centralization.
c. Centralized political authority is not a condition for socio-economic development.
d. People escaped from states throughout the ages and settled in regions outside their grasp for the following reasons: avoidance of tribute, refusal of centralized structures and delegation of coercive power, and ambitions to reproduce culture without directives from others. The latter refers to a refusal of submission to maintain individual and group autonomy.
e. Participation of people in culture makes the latter more dynamic than a culture which is reproduced mainly by an elite.
f. Though non-centralized organization usually works in small-scale communities (Clastres 1994), federal structures may enable the system on a larger scale.

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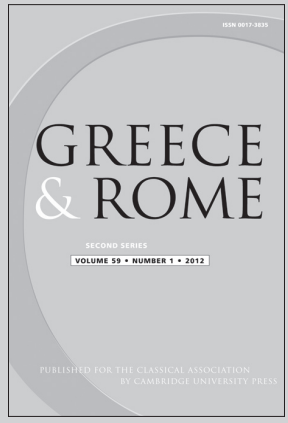

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