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## Punic farms and Carthaginian colonists: surveying Punic rural settlement in the central Mediterranean

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After a long period of neglect, a flurry of new research projects and fresh approaches to long-standing questions testifies to the vigour of the field of Phoenician and Punic archaeology. Key moments were marked by the massive volume *Phönizier im Westen* (1982), which presented a wealth of new evidence brought to light by excavations, the block-buster exhibition *I Fenici* in Venice (1988), which brought together academics from very different backgrounds, and M. E. Aubet's ground-breaking synthesis *Tiro y las colonias fenicias de Occidente* (1987). Together, these publications were instrumental in bringing Phoenician and Punic archaeology back into the limelight of Mediterranean archaeology.<sup>1</sup>

One field currently emerging amidst these inspiring developments is that of a rural archaeology of the Phoenician and Punic world. This is particularly pertinent to Punic studies, for the agrarian expertise of Punic agronomists and the thriving agricultural production of the Carthaginian countryside were renowned. The large extant body of Roman agricultural texts owes much to the Punic expertise, as is evident from references in the agronomic writings of Varro, Columella, and Pliny the Elder: they range from quotes from the famous handbooks by the agronomist Mago to examples of Punic technical innovations, such as the *plustellum punicum* (a threshing device), or introductions of new crops, such as the *nulum punicum* or pomegranate.<sup>2</sup>

Newly-emerging rural studies shed light on Phoenician and Carthaginian colonialism which created the overseas settlements and is an inherent feature of Phoenician and Punic society and culture. Because control over land and resources usually lies at the heart of colonial encounters, the inhabitants of the rural areas surrounding the colonial settlements in many cases bore the brunt of colonial intervention and occupation. The colonial impact on rural organisation and production inevitably changed people's relationships with the land. While this may be less relevant to Phoenician colonialism, which had a strong maritime focus and which only in the course of the 7th c. BC. ventured into inland districts of the colonised regions, it is a crucial feature of Carthaginian colonialism, which is widely accepted to have been driven by the search for, and the exploitation of, agricultural and mining resources. With regard to Sardinia, for example, it has been claimed that the exploitation of agricultural and mining resources constituted "the primary goal that shaped the ways and means of the Punic presence in Sardinia".<sup>3</sup>

In this light, it is surprising that Phoenician and Punic archaeologists did not pick up on the rise of survey and landscape archaeology in Mediterranean archaeology in the 1970-80s, following the pioneering field surveys in Messenia and S Etruria. An explicit call to Phoenician and Punic archaeology to follow in those footsteps was made as early as 1979, but it has gone unheeded, and any attention given to Punic agriculture has remained largely based on literary and iconographic evidence.<sup>4</sup> It took until the early 1990s before the first regional surveys were organised that were based on systematic data-collection and aimed specifically at rural Phoenician and Punic remains. It was no accident that these were carried out in S Sardinia, as

1 Vella 1996. The appearance of Aubet's book in English in 1993 (reprinted in 2001) was the first report to the English-speaking world on these new developments. The exhibition catalogue was edited by S. Moscati (1988a); Niemeyer 1982 is the proceedings of a conference held at Cologne in 1979.

2 Lancel 1995, 273-79 and Morel 2000 for detailed references.

3 Moscati, Bondi and Bartoloni 1997, 73 (my transl.). See also Aubet 1993, 280-84; ead. 1995; González Wagner and Alvar 1989; Wagner 2000; van Dommelen 2005.

4 A typical instance is the attempt to characterise cereal production in Punic Sardinia on the basis of the ears of grain depicted on Punic coins minted in Sardinia: Manfredi 1993. B. Issertlin's call for field surveys was published in 1983. For field surveys in Mediterranean archaeology, see now Alcock and Cherry 2004.