

Rural settlement and land-use in Punic and Roman Republican Sardinia

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The study of rural settlement, land-use and agrarian practices in the Classical world sits at the intersection of history and archaeology, as scholars draw on both literary and archaeological evidence to explore these topics. While ancient historians have long studied rural and agrarian topics such as the *agri mensesores* and the *annona*, the archaeological contribution to these debates has arisen only since the 1970s, when archaeological surveys began to document rural settlement in earnest.¹ While rural studies have become well established in Classical and Mediterranean studies, it was only in the course of the 1990s that systematic field surveys and excavations of rural sites began to be carried out in the regions of Phoenician and Punic settlement in the Western Mediterranean.² Starting with S. Gsell's seminal study in 1920,³ the topic has tended to remain the realm of ancient historians, but the paucity and complex nature of the literary sources have meant that there has been little movement until recently.⁴ This is all the more remarkable since Carthage and her overseas Punic territories were renowned in antiquity for their agricultural expertise: the Roman Senate, for example, commissioned a Latin translation of the agronomic treatises of the Carthaginian agronomist Mago before ordering the destruction of Carthage. Only in the last two decades does new archaeological evidence throw fresh light on the topic and also suggest new questions and approaches.⁵

Sardinia plays a key rôle in debates about Punic agriculture, in part because the Carthaginian occupation of the island has long been understood in terms of a colonial exploitation of the agrarian and mineral resources. Moreover, Sardinia has been central to increasingly intensive investigation of Punic rural landscapes; no less than four systematic surveys have been carried out in the last two decades, and several rural sites have

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- 1 See, e.g., G. Barker, "Archaeology and the Etruscan countryside," *Antiquity* 237 (1988) 772-85; S. Dyson, *The Roman countryside* (London 2003); S. Alcock, "The essential countryside: the Greek world," in ead. and R. Osborne (edd.), *Classical archaeology* (Oxford 2007) 120-38; N. Terrenato, "The essential countryside: the Roman world," *ibid.* 139-61; R. Witcher, "Agrarian spaces in Roman Italy: society, economy and Mediterranean agriculture," *Arqueología Espacial* 26 (2007) 341-60.
 - 2 As first noted by B. Isserlin, "Phoenician and Punic rural settlement and agriculture: some archaeological considerations," *Atti del I congresso int. di studi fenici e punici, 1979* (Rome 1983) 157-63. For a fuller discussion, with references, see P. van Dommelen and C. Gómez Bellard, *Rural landscapes of the Punic world* (London 2008) 1-2 and 12-17; most recently, N. Vella, "Views from the Punic countryside," *JRA* 23 (2010) 459-63.
 - 3 S. Gsell, *La civilisation carthaginoise* (Paris 1920) 1-52.
 - 4 More recently, M. H. Fantar, *Carthage: approche d'une civilisation* (Tunis 1993), but see also the critical contributions by C. G. Wagner and J. Alvar, "Fenicios en Occidente: la colonización agrícola," *RStFen* 17 (1989) 61-102; most recently, V. Krings, "L'apport des sources littéraires classiques à notre connaissance de l'agriculture punique," in A. M. Arruda, P. van Dommelen and C. Gómez Bellard (edd.), *Sitios e paisagens rurais no Mediterrâneo púnico* (Lisbon 2007) 17-34; ead. "Rereading Punic agriculture: representation, analogy and ideology in the classical sources," in van Dommelen and Gómez Bellard (supra n.2) 22-43.
 - 5 For overviews of recent archaeological studies, see C. Gómez Bellard (ed.), *Ecohistoria del paisaje agrario. La agricultura fenicio-púnica en el Mediterráneo* (Valencia 2003); P. van Dommelen, "Punic farms and Carthaginian colonists: surveying Punic rural settlement in the central Mediterranean," *JRA* 19 (2006) 7-28, and van Dommelen and Gómez Bellard (supra n.2).