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DECOLONIZING THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN: LESSONS FROM V CENTURY BCE ATHENS AND CARTHAGE

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ABSTRACT

During the V century BCE, Athens gained unprecedented levels of wealth and power, largely through land appropriation and tribute collection. Whether this imperialistic model was necessary for the economic and cultural achievements traditionally associated with Athens and other sea powers of the time remains an open question. This paper contributes to this debate by offering a Mediterranean perspective and examining the ancient and modern historiographical traditions that depict imperialism as a defining feature of Athenian political identity. Using the lesser-known but equally remarkable maritime expansion of Carthage as a contrasting case, it examines the limitations of this imperialistic framework. Drawing on archaeological evidence such as land surveys and funerary settlements in Spain, North Africa and Sardinia, the study suggests that conventional models centered on imperialism inadequately capture the distinctive nature of Carthaginian influence during this period. Overcoming such predetermined notions through comparative and postcolonial approaches can improve our understanding of local historical processes in regions such as Sardinia and Tunisia, while placing more emphasis on concepts such as that of Mediterranean connectivity and the related networks of commercial and information exchange.

Keywords: Imperialism, Ancient Economy, V Century BCE, Naval Power, Colonialism.
JEL Codes: N34, N94, N01.

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Introduction

The V century BCE, following the Persian Wars is traditionally regarded as the period of greatest cultural, political and economic blossoming in Athens.[1] Equally well-known is the fact that Athens, especially at that time, devoted incredible resources to warfare and in the maintenance of its navy. According to the most recent estimates, these resources far exceeded the expenditures devoted to the financing of democratic institutions and the vast number of Attic festivities.[2] The sources of revenue that made this military expenditure possible varied over time. Direct taxation had already been introduced in pre-classical times, also to fund military power. However, additional sources of revenue were gradually introduced. These included the discovery of new silver in the Laureion in 483 BCE, revenues from the law courts, direct taxes levied on specific sectors of society, customs duties on imports and other revenues from the Piraeus, liturgies, indirect taxes, the sale of land in cleruchies, and, most importantly, imperial tribute.

Athens was an important trading center (French 2015 [1964]: 108), and the standard of living of Athenian citizens was very high, due to consistent public expenditure drawn from the many sources of revenue that the city was able to accumulate (O'Halloran 2019: 128-228). According to the most recent estimates, Attica had a population of up to 400,000 people just before the Peloponnesian War of 431 BCE (Akrigg 2019).

The ancient historiography famously teaches us that one of the key reasons for the economic prosperity of Athens, and of Greece in general, was the decision of Themistocles to use the extra revenue from the Laureion mines to fund the fleet instead of redistributing it among the citizens (Her. VII-144; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 22; Polyaenus I, 30.6). This decision gave Athens the naval power to gradually establish predominance over the Aegean and beyond. Athenian sea power was both political and economic in nature: colonization often targeted areas of strategic trading significance, particularly with regard to precious metals and grain supplies (Kallet 2013). Many studies have focused on the preconditions that led Athens to become the most important imperial and maritime power in the

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[1] This period is referred to in the *Cambridge Ancient History* as the period of the 'Athenian Revolution' (Rhodes 1992: 62-95). Robin Osborne (2007) edited a book titled *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution*.

[2] Recent estimates suggest 500 talents per year during wartime in the 370s and 150 talents per year during peacetime (Pritchard 2015: 114), compared to the approximately 100 talents per year spent on maintaining democratic institutions and sponsoring festivals. Cf. Migeotte 2014: 679-684 and Fachard and Bresson 2022: 106-123. For a detailed study of the festivals of Attica, see Simon (1983: 7-104).

eastern Mediterranean during the V century BCE and beyond.[3] Another stream of studies has been devoted to the important and difficult task of gathering information about living standards and inequalities in Athens. Fewer studies have directly looked at how Athens acquired wealth through its imperialistic outlook: Athenian military dominance in the Aegean was a persistent source of tension throughout the Pentecontaetia and, according to Thucydides, constituted the fundamental cause of the Peloponnesian Wars.

The question of whether and to what extent imperialism can account for the accomplishments traditionally associated with V century BCE Athens remains an open question. This question is particularly difficult to answer since we have relatively rich historiographical and archaeological information about the history of Athens but virtually no information about how the Athenian empire was perceived by the subjugated population, or by the neighbouring powers of the time, such as Achaemenid Persia. This study compares key aspects of Athenian power with those of Carthage to shed new light on this critical question. By identifying points of assonance and dissonance between these two major naval powers, the analysis aims to reassess the necessity of the conceptual framework of imperialism in shaping the political and economic landscapes of the V century BCE Mediterranean.

Imperialism is difficult to define because it can take different forms, even within a single state. When describing the organization of the Athenian League, Thucydides first uses the word ἡγεμονία (within a voluntary alliance) and then the word ἀρχή (oppressive empire).[4] Although the word ἀρχή has become common among today's Greek historians due to its flexible connotation of control rather than organised military authority (Kallet 2013: 55-56), most existing studies consider empires to be states whose foreign policy is based on the violent appropriation of resources formerly belonging to others, whether in the form of tribute or land appropriation (Raaflaub 2009: 89-124).[5] The motivations behind this type of action can be

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[3] Examples of the extensive literature on this subject include Meiggs 1987 [1972]; Graml *et al.* 2019; Galpin 1983; Kallet and Kroll 2020.

[4] See Thuc. 1.95-99. Scholars generally agree in interpreting Athensian ἀρχή as an empire. A notable exception is Morris 2009: 99, who translates ἀρχή as 'greater Athenian state' and argues that we should speak of the Athenian state rather than of the Athenian empire, because "we should study imperialism as a subset of the larger process of state formation, and [that] state formation was one of the major dynamics in ancient history". According to Kallet 2013: note 78, Athenians instead perceived their ἀρχή as an empire because literary and epigraphic documents instead emphasize "subjugation and [related] kinds of taxation".

[5] It could be argued that this definition of imperialism omits some important aspects, such as the imposition of a similar political system, and the presence of garrisons and imperial

political and economic, but the defining aspect is that the empire seeks to establish some form of control, which is maintained with the aid or threat of military power. As Kallet and Kroll (2020: 4) put it, "The translation *archē* as 'empire' is not inappropriate as long as we recognize that it cannot easily be compared with empires with institutional structures such as formally annexed territories", referring to the satrapies of the Persian Empire or the provinces of imperial Rome.

While acknowledging the difficulties of drawing analogies given the different historical origins of empires, experts in Carthaginian history may argue that the Persian Empire is a better candidate for comparison with the Athenian Empire than Carthage. Indeed, it has already been studied how, despite the reciprocal hatred that was assumed before, during, and after the Persian Wars, Athens was very receptive to the Persian culture. Archaeological evidence of the commercial exchange of everyday and luxury goods makes this clear (Miller 1997: 63-183). Raaflaub (2009: 89-124) argues that Athenian "instruments of empire" were derived almost entirely from Persia, including the tribute system, due to cultural proximity and Athenian receptivity.

The Persian Empire, however, was a territorial empire in the VI and V century, ruling over land rather than over the sea, despite the occasional acquisition of an important fleet from the Phoenicians. This implied very different administrative needs and solutions to those of Athens, which relied more on cavalry than ships and on a decentralized administration through satrapies that represented the central power in the various provinces, as well as efficient terrestrial transport systems.[6] The more centralized nature of the Athenian empire also meant that, even though the Athenian tribute system was probably modelled on the Achaemenid one, as Raaflaub (2009) argues, tribute was collected in a less bureaucratic way because Athenian imperialism did not rely on satrap-like administrative divisions. comparing Athens with Carthage allows us to abstract from Athenocentric historical narratives and embrace a Mediterranean perspective.

Even so, the histories of Carthage and Athens share many parallels. Around the time that the Athenian oarsmen were victorious against the Persians in the Battle of Salamis, the Carthaginians lost a comparably sized fleet (200 ships) to the Syracusans at Himera. Carthage was likewise a wealthy city, and archaeological remains suggest that it remained so

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officials in colonies. This definition intentionally contains only the *sine qua non* of what is usually intended as imperialism and is therefore more suited for comparative contexts.

[6] See Burn 1962: 123-125 for an overview of the administration of the different satraps, and Kuhrt 2001:114-117 for an introduction to the land-based instruments of government within the Persian Empire.

throughout the V century, despite historiography depicting the battle of Himera as a complete tragedy for the Carthaginians, and a definitive victory for the Greeks in both the East (Himera) and the West (Salamina).

Despite the vast limitations and challenges involved in studying the administration of Carthaginian overseas territories in the V century BCE, even a tentative comparison between the maritime powers of Athens and Carthage is a much needed one, as it may be one of the few comparisons that can provide new insights into the *modus operandi* of sea power in the ancient Mediterranean, particularly with regard to the practical applicability of concepts such as imperialism in the development and operation of ancient sea-based economies. The recent reappraisal of archaeological data provides encouraging signs of a new, decolonized, history of Mediterranean sea powers. Moreover, abstracting from the context of Athens allows us to understand the workings of sea power in a way that is less influenced by the commonplace narratives of Thucydides (especially Thuc. 1.73-8), who depicts the aggressive imperial expansion of Minos (and, indirectly, of Athens) as a necessity, given the opportunities for human progress that naval power creates (e.g., by getting rid of piracy and forming a new state), making it morally justifiable as long as the surplus wealth (περιουσία χρημάτων) is also spent for the benefit of the city.[7]

The paper focuses on the V century BCE, particularly the period between 480 and 410 BCE. It follows the methodological framework set out in John Papadopoulos's *The Archaeology of Colonialism* (Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002). Imperialism is conceptualised in terms of two key features of the Athenian empire: permanent territorial expansion and the extraction of tribute. The focus is placed on the Punic city of Carthage, while the better-documented city of Athens in the 5th century BC serves as a comparative framework. The aim is to explore how Carthaginian expansion operated, and what its material traces suggest about the underlying social processes, thus challenging predetermined definitions of imperialism or ἀρχή. In doing so, I adopt the conceptual approach to ancient colonialism pioneered by Peter van Dommelen (1998, 2011). In his study *On Colonial Grounds*, van Dommelen argues that Mediterranean archaeology has been strongly influenced by the "modern Western colonial experience", and also that "it may seem as if Mediterranean archaeology has altogether ignored decolonization and post-colonial approaches to colonial situations of the past" (*ibid.*: 32). The upshot of this paper is that through a close analysis of literary and archaeological evidence from Punic Carthage, we can trace a Carthaginian expansion into foreign territories

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[7] See Kallet 1993: 15-18, 25-26, and Irwin 2007: 197-198.

that diverges from the Athenian model. Most importantly, it hardly fits the models and definitions of imperialism put forward to explain the history of V century BCE Athens. The case of Carthage suggests that economic benefits could be gained from sea power through technological investment in the navy without necessarily engaging in the conflict and violence of Athenian foreign policy. While this does not rule out the presence of any imperial power or imperialistic tendencies in Carthage, it highlights how little imperialism alone can explain about the history of Carthage and the ancient Mediterranean.

The first section introduces the Carthaginian evidence as it can be derived from its territorial outposts. The much better documented and studied V century Athens will be used as a frame of comparison, informed as it is by a rich stream of literature. The second section introduces the reader to the various ways in which the term "imperialistic" has been used to describe Athenian and Carthaginian foreign policy in the V century BCE, while also defining the key terms that are used in Greek and Roman literature to refer to colonies and other forms of territorial control. The core of the paper, the third section, considers what the existing archaeological evidence of Carthaginian commercial outposts, emporia, and colonies can and cannot tell us about the nature of territorial expansion and, indirectly, tribute, if we avoid applying preconceived notions of imperialism. The fourth section is conclusive.

1. Ancient imperialism and beyond: Models, definitions, and structures

Scholars have developed several models of the forms of Athenian and Carthaginian imperialism.[8] With regard to Carthage, the primary reference work is Whittaker (1978). He argued that Carthage was already a commercial sea-power already in the V century, relying more on profitable alliances than on military power. According to Whittaker, Carthage became more aggressive in response to the threats posed to its commercial network by Syracuse and, later, Rome.[9] His work, along with that of Moscati (1966),

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[8] For an excellent introduction of Carthaginian imperialism as seen from literary evidence, see Pilkington 2019: 1-24. For Athens, contributions are too many and many are also mentioned in the introduction. Finley 2016 [1978] is a good starting point. For an introduction, see also Ma *et al.* 2009. Other studies worth mentioning are Whitehead 1998; Meiggs 1987 [1972]; Graml *et al.* 2019; Galpin 1983; Kallet 2013; Kallet and Kroll 2020.

[9] More specifically, Whittaker 1978: 59 attributes a key factor to the establishment of Carthaginian sea power to the resentment of extraneous populations in Carthage's surroundings toward an expansion into the rich, fertile territories surrounding Carthage. As

has prompted many subsequent studies on this subject. Most of these studies have attempted to associate material and epigraphic evidence to direct colonial intervention by Carthage.[10]

A second approach to studying of Carthaginian forms of control has been to examine the material evidence in agro-towns and neighboring rural areas. For example, it has been documented that fortifications were particularly capillary especially in the agricultural area of Sulcis in south-west Sardinia (Barreca 1978). However, more recent evidence attributes most of these fortifications to the Romans (see Botto 2017 for an exception). Studies of this kind have argued that the material evidence from Sardinia indicates that there was some form of Carthaginian influence on the island, as evidenced by changes in burial customs that occurred in the middle of the VI century BCE (Bartoloni *et al.* 1997). Interpretations of Sardinian evidence have been used both to support and to refute Carthaginian colonization (Roppa and Van Dommelen 2012). In the case of Carthage in particular, however, most of the evidence dates from later periods, as evidence for the V century BCE is particularly scarce. This has even led scholars to acknowledge the existence of a 'V century gap'.

To make progress in the social and economic history of Carthage in comparison to Athens, and to move beyond a-historical definitions and models, it may be useful to clarify other terms, besides ἀρχή, that ancient texts may have used to refer to imperialism. This is particularly important in the Carthaginian context, where the words used by contemporary (Graeco-Roman) historiographers implicitly associate the Carthaginian state with imperialism.

The word 'colony', suggesting some sort of foreign control, is often used in the literature to describe the seaborne territorial expansion of the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, and other archaic Mediterranean states (van Dommelen 1998). A common form of settlement among the Carthaginians and Greeks was the *emporion*: a trading area and place of exchange that usually did not entail any form of imperial control.[11] Around Athens, imperial power could be seen more directly in the form of allies

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a result, Carthage would have started to expand overseas. However, *ibid.*: 73-76 also contends that, while colonists were sent from Carthage, there is no evidence that Carthage retained control of the colonies after having sent colonists.

[10] Roppa and van Dommelen 2012; Roppa 2014; Pilkington 2019; Bonetto 2021; Finocchi and Tirabassi 2021: 112-113.

[11] As Counillon 1993 puts it, "l'emporion ne représente pas une catégorie politique". Yet, the definition of the *emporia* is a particularly difficult one. For recent debates on the use of the term cf. Rouillard 2018 and see Bresson and Rouillard 1993 and Ampolo 1994 for a collection of pioneering work.

who paid tribute but were not directly governed by the Athenians, as well as in Attic settlements abroad. These were known as ἀποικία (colony) and κληρουχία (cleruchs).[12] The main difference between the two forms of settlement was that cleruchies were plots of cultivable land (κλῆρος), assumed to be of equal size, and located in foreign territories which were allotted to Athenian citizens, often poor, for their own personal gain and for the benefit of the state through taxation.[13] The contours of ἀποικία were more blurred, but as for κληρουχία it also included Athenian citizens, who settled in the territories of allies, organizing their own offices, liturgies, and military units.

With regard to the permanent presence of the Carthaginians elsewhere in the form of ἀποικία, the most direct comparison is the use of the term ἀποικία by Greek authors before the Roman period to refer to Carthaginian colonies. Whittaker (1978: 73-76) argues that, although colonists were sent from Carthage, there is no evidence that Carthage maintained control of the colonies after the colonists had been sent.[14] Although there is no comparable evidence for forms of agrarian land appropriation such as that of a κληρουχία, we know from archaeological remains that the Carthaginian rural economy was very prosperous. Therefore, it is possible to conceive rural territories such as the fertile Cape Bon, not far from Carthage, or Ibiza, as rural outposts where the local population may have been reorganized or dislodged for the benefit of Carthage.

The concept of φυλακή (defence and protection) can also be related to imperialism. The word φυλακή means protection and defence, both of a city's own territory and of that of its allies. Although it is mentioned in Hellenistic Greek inscriptions, it was most likely an important part of a city's defences also in other periods and beyond Greek cities.[15] Literary and archaeological evidence suggests that a similar defensive system existed in many Carthaginian towns (Rawlings 2010: 259-260). This at least suggests that the Carthage entertained defensive relationships with allied cities. However, it does not reveal much about Carthage's active imperialistic attitude. Building walls to defend cities and harbours may simply have been a necessity to protect against more aggressive outsiders. Four defensive treaties were also signed between the Romans and the Carthaginians

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[12] IG I³ 66.17, 53-58. See Figueira 2008: 435-436 for a more detailed discussion on the difference between the two terms as they were used by contemporaries.

[13] IG I³ 71, 11. 20-2. This interpretation of the cleruchy is based on two fourth-century inscriptions discussed in Moreno 2007: 93-96, 2009: 213-214.

[14] The examples mentioned by Whittaker 1978: 75 include Motya and Thermae in late V and early IV century BC. Sicily, Caralis and Sulcis in Sardinia, and a single ἀποικία in Spain.

[15] See Chaniotis 2005: 123-137 and especially note 62.

between 509 and 279 BCE, demonstrating that both cities recognised each other's power but were also willing to tolerate it.

The last form of colonialism that I will discuss is that which took the form of military campaigns or exploratory expeditions. Examples of this type of colonialism include the Athenian expedition to the Black Sea in 430 BCE, led by Pericles, which probably included soldiers and sailors among the six hundred colonists, and the Carthaginian military expeditions to Sardinia. The first of these was led by the general Malchus and was unsuccessful, while the second was led by Mago. According to Justinus, Mago 'was the first to organize military discipline and thereby to establish a Punic empire' (Just. XIX.1.1); Another example is the Periplus of Hanno the Carthaginian around Africa, for which we have some surviving fragments of the original travel account.[16] However, I do not consider this evidence in the main analysis that follows, as it is unclear whether Athens and Carthage retained control of the settlements.[17] Regarding Carthage, we have literary evidence to the contrary and no archaeological data suggesting otherwise. Pliny the Elder argued that no traces remained of the cities that Hanno was said to have founded: "It is Hanno whom most Greek and Roman writers have followed in the somewhat mythical accounts that they have published on a number of cities founded by him [in Africa], of which neither any memory nor trace is in existence" (Pliny the Elder *NH* V, 1, 8). As a result, we cannot consider this Carthaginian expedition to have been imperially motivated. Nevertheless, two key details of this expedition are important to note, as we can derive them directly from the Greek text:

> It was decreed (ἔδοξεν) by the Carthaginians that Hanno should sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules and found (κτίζειν) cities for the Libyphoenicians (Λιβυποινίκων). So he started his voyage leading sixty ships of fifty oars (πεντηκοντόρους) each, and a number of men and women approaching the count of thirty thousand as well as [taking] food provisions and other preparations. (Hanno, *Periplus*, *Cod. Palat.*, 398 fol. 55r, 5-10).

The first observation is operational: despite the likely inaccuracy of the exact numbers, the expedition included warships and was monumental in size. Although penteconters were less technologically advanced than triremes, they were still impressive vessels. At least an equivalent number of commercial ships would have been needed to accommodate all the colonists, given that the total size of the expedition is said to have been thirty thousand people, and sixty penteconters would have required

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16 For more examples of this sort of colonization, see Figueira 2008: 447.

17 English translation from Oikonomides and Miller 1995: 6.

at least 3,000 rowers. Although thirty thousand people is probably an exaggeration, given the discrepancies between the account of Pliny and the Byzantine account recorded elsewhere (see Kroupa 2018: 7), it was clearly a large expedition. Even after 500 years, however, by the time of Pliny the Elder, it had left no trace. This suggests a lack of interest or need among the Carthaginians in establishing imperial control over the African coast, despite the possibility of doing so. Secondly, the potential settlers were 'Libyphoenicians'. This is not the only literary reference to Libyphoenicians displaced by Carthaginian operations, although it is the only one from Carthaginian sources.

I will leave aside the question of the identity of the Libyphoenicians here, except to mention that the evidence we have suggests that the Libyphoenicians themselves perceived themselves as culturally distant from the Carthaginians and other Mediterranean peoples, such as the Iberians.[18] According to Aristotle's *Politics* (1320b5), it was common practice among the Carthaginians to send "to the surrounding territory" people who were dissatisfied with the oligarchy. Assuming that this passage refers to the Libyphoenicians, it would suggest an imperial strategy that was never adopted by the Athenians. However, it could still be a sign of imperialism, recognized as such even by Aristotle, who had a positive opinion of Carthaginian institutions, and by a very skeptical observer of any form of Carthaginian imperialism such as Whittaker (1978: 77):

> If it means the Phoenician cities of Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain were prepared 'constantly' to accept Carthaginian peasants and poor in return for the aid Carthage offered them against their neighbors, then here indeed is an instrument of imperialism which Carthage exploited to the advantage of her political economy.

Even though the condition of protection that Whittaker identifies as necessary for interpreting the displacement of the Libyphoenicians as imperialistic, that is, the acceptance of the colonists by allies in exchange for protection from enemies, is absent, this forced displacement can still be conceptualised as a manifestation of imperial power. The displaced population was compelled to emigrate, potentially under the threat of violence. It is also possible that they were subsequently evicted from their territories, which would have benefited Carthage in terms of political stability and possibly economic gains due to reduced demographic pressure.[19]

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[18] See coinage evidence from Jiménez 2014, and for an earlier review, see Manfredi 2003, 397-404.

[19] One could argue that the colonization of territories that occurred while the Athenians were campaigning was also coerced. But the direct evidence for Carthage derived from Aristotles'

What follows is an examination of what the literary and archaeological evidence can tell us about V century BCE Carthage, if we dispense with the definitions of imperialism put forward by previous research.

2. A post-imperialistic history of the Carthaginian V century BCE

The literature now recognizes that V century BCE Carthage was a vibrant and aspiring metropolis, as witnessed by the large import of Greek wares and sizeable urban expansion, which included the construction of a new protective wall and new necropoleis (Lancel 1992: 154-154). In looking for possible forms of Carthaginian imperialism, however, we need to look outside of the metropolis.

2.1. *Acquisition of land in strategic territories: Ibiza and North Africa*

Whittaker (1978: 59) identifies the resentment of the indigenous populations towards expansion into the fertile territories surrounding Carthage as a key factor in the establishment of Carthaginian sea power. As a result, Carthage would have started to expand overseas. However, before looking too far afield, we should review the archaeological evidence for Carthaginian expansion in North Africa. Unlike Athens, Carthage received supplies of grain and other agricultural products also from the hinterland in the IV century BCE (Lancel 1992: 269-271), and it could be argued that a similar agricultural pattern was in place also in the V century BCE (Docter 2009). Given the economic importance of grain supplies in ancient times, it is possible that imperialist strategies were developed to ensure a steady food supply for the population of Carthage. No rural sites in the vicinity of Carthage could be identified as Carthaginian prior to the V century BCE (Fentress and Docter 2008: 108-109). Six rural sites have been identified within a 30 km radius of Carthage, but they are all located at least 15 km from the coast. The pottery remains in these settlements indicate that it was produced locally. During the IV century, six more rural sites were established much closer to Carthage, suggesting that the earlier sites were not under Carthaginian influence.

Most literary evidence concerning Carthaginian territorial administration focuses on the area of Cape Bon, the oldest 'zone of influence' of Carthage on the African mainland.[20] Cape Bon was also a

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Politics and from the Hanno's *Periplos*, suggests that the displacement of Libyphoenicians was a political decision enacted to counteract insurgencies and related economic consequences.

[20] Manfredi 2003: 414. Literary evidence of the wealth of this area can be found in Diod. V, 8, 2-4 and Polyb. 29.

fertile land and a key point in the East-West Mediterranean navigation network. Although it was surveyed by the Tunisian *Atlas Archéologique* project in the 1980s, no survey data has yet been published for Cape Bon. Even if maps were published, however, it would be difficult to date the sites to a specific period, as the surveys lack analyses of the types of pottery found (*ibid.*: 113). Unfortunately, this limitation is quite common in Tunisian archaeological field surveys (see Stone 2016: 138). Fortifications dating to the V century BCE can be observed at Ras Zebib, Ras Fortas and Kelibia on Cape Bon, providing evidence that supports the argument of Bondì (2021: 15-17) that the efforts of Carthage in the V century BCE were aimed at consolidating its presence in previously acquired territories.

Further evidence for Cape Bon can be gathered from the necropoleis, bearing in mind the interpretative caution this implies. J.K. Quinn has conducted in-depth research on the spread of tophets (open-air sanctuaries dedicated to child sacrifice) in the central Mediterranean. Reflecting on what these sites can tell us about Carthaginian imperialism, Quinn argued that:

> Quite apart from the fact that serious doubts can be expressed about the scope and enthusiasm of Carthaginian imperialism [in Sardinia] in this period, it is not very clear why tophets would be a useful part of or response to imperial strategy […] we do not need to invoke active imperialism on Carthage's part to explain the consolidation of the visual aspect of the *tophet* phenomenon (Quinn 2013: 34-35).

Similar caution should be exercised in interpreting the burial evidence around Cape Bon. There is evidence of megalithic tombs (*houaunet, dolmen*, *bazina*) scattered throughout present-day Tunisia, but only in a few areas, including Cape Bon, have tombs been extensively studied (Bartoloni 1973).[21] Archaeological studies have collected evidence of 286 tombs, scattered across four main necropoleis (Dar Essafi, Djebel Mlezza, Areg el Ghazouani, and Quota 27), At least one of these, Dar Essafi, dates back to the foundation of Kerkouane in the mid-VI century BCE. Only 36 of the tombs were simple pit tombs; the remaining 250 were chamber tombs. The expense of building chamber tombs confirms the relative wealth of the Cape Bon population. The population included Libyans, who were buried in a similar way to non-Libyans. Libyan names are attested in two tomb inscriptions in Carthaginian. The contents of Cape Bon tombs often differed from those in Carthage, suggesting a high degree of cultural

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[21] An example of a study using burials to ascertain Punic identity is Ben Younès and Krandel-Ben Younès 2014, who however focus on other parts of North Africa that were influenced by Carthage later than the V century BCE.

independence (see tombs T. 68 and T. 72. Cf. *ibid.*: 23-35). The Cape Bon population also enjoyed relative autonomy from Carthage in terms of funerary practices. Carthaginian tombs were positioned along specific cardinal directions, whereas those in Cape Bon were positioned randomly. The Cape Bon population also enjoyed relative autonomy from Carthage in terms of funerary practices: Carthaginian tombs were positioned along specific cardinal directions, while in Cape Bon they were positioned randomly (*ibid.*: 33), even when positioning them along parallel lines would have been functional, for example on steep hillsides. The style and decoration of the tombs more closely resembled those of present-day Algeria than Carthage (*ibid.*: 25). However, these data cannot reveal much about the degree of interaction between Carthage and Cape Bon, and they are very limited evidence on which to base any inferences about imperialist influence in Africa. This is also because a general tendency towards continuity with previous funerary practices can be observed in Sardinian cities during the transition from the Phoenician to the Punic period (Melchiorri 2021: 368-369) and in V century BCE Carthage (Docter and Bechtold 2021: 178-179).

Archaeological land surveys derived from regional fieldwork are potentially a more effective tool for investigating settlement patterns, including in relation to political events (White and King 2016). This methodology typically enables the mapping of large areas and the collection of information over time, such as the number and types of settlements. More broadly, survey archaeology can be useful for assessing patterns the organization of diasporas and the role of parent communities in structuring under-documented host communities.[22]

This technique is also problematic, particularly when comparing the results of different surveys. This is due to the difficulty of classifying the size and function of a site based on the pottery findings, as well as variations in the areas covered. Ibiza was the first 'colony' that Diodorus Siculus (V, 16) attributes to Carthage (654/3 BCE). Ibiza had a well-sheltered natural harbor and abundant natural resources.[23] As a result, it was a vital stopover on the Northern Mediterranean route to and from Gadir and Iberia (Aubet 1993: 160-162). The Phoenicians had already established at least a staging post in Ibiza before the colonization of Carthage, as attested by

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[22] See Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002, for an archaeological example of Greek settlements. See also Domínguez 2002 for the resulting trade (pottery) and emulation (Greek stone sculpture, architecture, writing) patterns in Iberia.

[23] Other well-established key points of this route comprise, already in 800 BCE, Carthage, Utica, Motya, Malta and the southern Sardinian settlements of Nora, Tharros, Sulcis and Caralis (Harden 1980 [1962]: 62-63).

a change in the burial style.[24] If the settlement of Carthaginians – or of other populations sent by the Carthaginians to Ibiza – sent was a unilateral imposition, significant changes in material culture or settlement patterns in Ibiza should be observed.

However, it is only in the V, and especially IV century BCE, that rural settlements began to spread across the island (van Dommelen and Gómez Bellard 2008: 58-60, 128, 238), even in rural areas very close to the port. This makes it difficult to establish a relationship between the intensity of rural cultivation and Carthaginian settlement. Nevertheless, influences relating to trade or politics can be seen in burial practices, such as the introduction of inhumation and changes in the nature of grave goods to shapes typical of the central Mediterranean (*ibid.*: 48). As always, however, it is difficult to use burial evidence as direct proof of colonial control; the changes in burial practices could be the result of independent imitation by local elites (see Dominíguez 2002 for a similar setting). Evidence from Ibiza shows that Carthaginian maritime expansion was associated with significant cultural changes and continuity in settlement and land use patterns. Changes to such forms would signal changes in the dynamics of control and power. Such changes occurred in the V and IV centuries BCE, but are better explained by the development of Ibiza as an independent economy that retained Carthage as its main trading partner and the rest of the Western world, including Iberian counterparts, as other trading partners.

2.2. *Tribute: Monte Sirai and Nora*

In addition to direct territorial control and expansion, tribute is another important criterion that has been considered when defining ancient imperialism. If this instrument of power was employed, it was certainly used in key, economically significant centers in the trading network of Carthage. This network predominantly comprised urban centres in Sicily (such as Motya and Panormo), as well as rural areas in North Africa, which together provided 'grains and other supplies' to Carthage as early as in 480 BCE (Diod. XI.20.2-5).[25]

Carthage is often described as being in an alliance with Sicily, or in a state of "beneficial quiescence" (Whittaker 1978: 66). This would make Sicily an exception within the realm of the more more aggressive Carthaginian ἐπικράτεια elsewhere. This interpretation is based on extensive literary

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[24] van Dommelen and Gómez Bellard 2008: 46-47.

[25] The rural landscapes of ancient Sicily have not been surveyed as extensively as other settings of Carthaginian influence, such as todays' Tunisia or Sardinia. See Spanò Giammellaro *et al.* 2008.

evidence (see, for example Longo 1999: 82-83). More recently, De Vincenzo (2012) undertook a study of material evidence gathered from Sicilian urban topography, architecture, and necropoleis, in order to ascertain the extent to which material culture was exerted in Sicily. Interpreting this new evidence, De Vincenzo argues that the term ἐπαρχία (suggesting 'to govern') is more appropriate than the ἐπικράτεια (suggesting 'to dominate') to describe Carthaginian sea power, despite the fact that Roman and Greek sources preferred to use the latter term. The Carthaginian presence in Sicily being based on bilateral agreements rather than unilateral top-down imposition is supported by the existence of four direct historiographical accounts of Carthaginians demanding εἰσφορά (tribute) in Sicily.

This type of tribute to enemies may have been temporary, and in any case, may simply have reflected Sicily's special status within the Carthaginian hegemony (see also Bondì 2009). Although there is no evidence of tribute from Spain, Sardinia, or North Africa, this should not be interpreted as proof that tribute systems were absent. Material evidence from Sardinia indicates that there was some form of Carthaginian influence, if not imperialism, on the island, as evidenced by changes in burial customs in the middle of the VI century BCE (Bartoloni *et al.* 1997).

Thanks to significant data collection efforts, many important studies have already examined the evidence for Phoenician and Punic influence in Sardinia. Notably, Bartoloni *et al.* (1997: 115) argued that Rome was responsible for the construction of small and medium-sized agglomerations that had previously been attributed to the Carthaginians: *"la presenza fenicia e punica in Sardegna risulta dalle nuove indagini molto più frazionata e articolata di quanto non si credeva; né è più possibile sostenere un disegno generale di controllo"*. This is perhaps not surprising given the large size of the island of Sardinia. Southwest Sardinia was a strategically important part of the island because it was located on the main Mediterranean trade routes to Spain and the Balearic islands. The area was particularly suitable for agriculture and provided relatively easy access to the mine-rich Iglesias region.

The Punic cities of Nora and Monte Sirai both played an important role in coordinating the rich agricultural production of the surrounding countryside (van Dommelen and Gómez Bellard 2008: 216; Roppa 2014: 272). According to classical sources, Nora is the oldest town founded in Sardinia. It is located on a tiny promontory facing the sea in southern Sardinia. The hinterland of Nora is an alluvial plain bordered by mountainous terrain rich in mines. The sites in the hinterland are quite close together, and are all within walking distance of each other. This suggests a hierarchical organization of the countryside, with smaller centers gravitating around larger ones and supplying them with agricultural and artisanal products, with Nora at the top (Botto *et al.* 2003: 160-163; see Figure 2). Further

archaeological evidence supports this interpretation (Roppa 2014: 269-271). Given the coastal location of the city, this production chain may also have aimed to supply Carthaginian ships at anchor, potentially organizing production according to the needs of Carthaginian trade. However, the rural settlement network in the hinterland cannot be dated earlier than the IV century BCE. The role of Nora as a supplier of grain to Carthage, potentially within the context of colonial relations, can only be substantiated in the IV century BCE. Before then, rural expansion can be explained by the need to support the growing urban demands of Nora itself. Indeed, in the early Vcentury BCE, Nora underwent a transformation from a simple commercial emporium to a city (Bonetto 2021: 100-102; Finocchi and Tirabassi 2021: 112-113). This urban expansion led to a greater need for local interactions with the hinterland.[26]

While the relationship between the city of Nora and the surrounding countryside provides some evidence in support of the hypothesis that Nora supplied grain to Carthage, funerary evidence sheds light on other aspects of the movement of goods and people. Since the 1990s, the archaeological mission to Nora led by the University of Padua has revealed new insights into its archaeology, including on funerary practices. While the oldest tombs in Nora date back to the VIII-VII century BCE (Cecchini 1969: 61), recent geophysical surveys and excavations conducted by the University of Padua suggest that two main necropolises were continuously present in Nora between the VII century BCE and the end of the III century BCE (Bonetto 2016). Of the 59 to 67 tombs in the previously studied eastern necropolis, 40 preserved grave goods (Bonetto and Mazzariol 2017: 13-14). These grave goods included local productions, imported goods of Greek origin, and locally produced items imitating the imported ones (Bartoloni and Tronchetti 1981; see also Canepa 1985).

Excavation of the western necropolis began in 2012, with the initial analyses of Phoenician burials and new Punic chambers cut into natural sandstone bedrock presented by Bonetto *et al.* (2017). The nature of the grave goods, alongside the gradual transition to Graeco-Roman rituals between the IV and II centuries BCE (Bonetto *et al.* 2020: 1058), suggests that Nora, like other Sardinian necropolises including Monte Sirai (Bartoloni 1982: 284-286; Guirguis 2010), engaged in significant trade with other Mediterranean cities. However, similar funerary evidence cannot substantiate imperialistic interaction between the Carthaginians and the local population.

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[26] A similar pattern of rural expansion motivated by urban dynamism, is documented in Malaka (today's Malaga) by Arancibia Román and Mora Serrano 2018.

Monte Sirai was located on a highland. Since the first Phoenician presence in the second half of the 8th century BCE (Bartoloni 2000: 15), there have been strong patterns of interaction between Phoenicians and indigenous populations, as evidenced by recent DNA studies (Mattisoo-Smith *et al.* 2018). This interaction is also evident from the presence of a Nuragic settlement that existed alongside the Phoenician settlement. Furthermore, unlike that of Nora, the urban plain of Monte Sirai has retained its original structure, which is similar to that of Motya in Sicily and Kerkouane in North Africa in that residential buildings were constructed alongside the walls (De Vincenzo 2012: 127-128).

Fourteen sites that were inhabited during the Phoenician and Punic periods have been identified in the hinterland of Monte Sirai (Finocchi 2005: 77-85). Most of these sites are located in the plains surrounding Monte Sirai. This suggests that the inhabitants of Monte Sirai cultivated the land themselves rather than simply receiving the agricultural produce from the surrounding area, as was the case in Nora (Roppa 2014: 272-273). This is supported by the fact that little Punic pottery was found at the sites, suggesting that they were not inhabited (Finocchi 2005: 255). Despite their differences, the rural settlements of Monte Sirai and Nora share two key features: they both date back to the late V and early IV centuries BC, and they demonstrate that, despite their different hierarchical structures, Sardinian rural sites always gravitated around one key centre. These characteristics are the only ones shared by all the rural settlements in Sardinia that have been studied so far (in the Campidano and Terralba regions). Therefore, Roppa and van Dommelen (2012: 66) argue that:

> Despite the evident connection with pre-existing Punic settlements, most with Phoenician roots, this development is unlikely to represent direct Punic colonial intervention, as similar processes have been documented throughout the western Mediterranean, including regions as far apart as Etruria and Iberia. The appearance of dispersed rural settlement patterns is therefore better understood as a general, Western Mediterranean-wide phenomenon than a specifically Punic pattern of colonial exploitation.

The most recent archaeological evidence thus speculatively supports the hypothesis that Carthage did not exploit the rural areas of Sardinia to obtain in-kind tribute. The fact that rural organisations varied from place to place also suggests that individual cities were given considerable freedom in terms of how to exploit the land more efficiently (see Garbati 2021). While the physical presence of Carthage in Sardinia is undeniable, the nature of the relationship appears to have been one of alliance rather than empire.

Conclusion

This paper compares the foreign policies of Athens and Carthage, the two greatest sea powers of the V century BCE, to highlight the similarities and differences in their imperialistic attitudes. Athens is used as prototypical case of imperialism during this period to contextualize Carthaginian foreign policy. Archaeological land surveys in territories under Carthaginian control suggest that Carthage, while being a maritime power, did not seem to engage in similar imperialistic practices. More specifically, there is very little evidence of Carthaginian cultural or political influence in North Africa, Sardinia and Sicily, which suggests that the territories and cities under Carthaginian influence were relatively autonomous. Furthermore, it appears that Sicily was not the only territory to benefit from special ally status within the Carthaginian sphere of influence. In the V century BCE at least, the Carthaginian presence was also limited to the rest of its maritime sphere of influence. This suggests that, unlike Athens, which based its sea power and economic and cultural achievements on its empire, Carthage was able to coexist with a similar sea power while employing few or no instruments of imperialism.

This paper attempts to contextualise V century BCE Athenian imperialism within the wider Mediterranean region. However, the survey and funerary data on which the conclusions are based are difficult to interpret, meaning that the conclusions can only be very general. Furthermore, it could be argued that Athens is not an appropriate comparison for Carthage due to geographical distance, differing preferred trade routes, and different historical origins of expansionist attitudes – Athens' being driven more by urgent defence following the Persian Wars, whereas the Carthaginian one was driven more by gradually increasing resource needs – as well as related demographic differences. A more appropriate comparison for Carthage might be the Greek city of Massalia in the western Mediterranean. Shortly after its foundation in the VI century BCE, Massalia established a strong trading and maritime presence along the Rhône and the Iberian coast. However, using Massalia as another case study would not help to clearly define a prototypical V century BCE empire for comparison, whereas Athens can.

Further research should question the applicability and relevance of the imperial framework to contexts other than V century BCE Carthage. This question remains unresolved, and this paper merely adds a comparative dimension to the debate. Further research is also needed to determine what prompted the increased military involvement of Carthage, particularly in Sicily, towards the end of the V century BCE. Comparisons between Athens and Carthage focusing on naval operations and imperialist rhetoric

would help to shed more light on the difficult subject of questioning the importance of imperialism as a framework for investigating ancient Mediterranean history. Comparing Carthage to other nearby naval powers of the time, such as Massalia, using evidence from trade routes for example, would clarify whether the key features of Carthaginian commercially driven foreign policy in the V century BCE were specific to Carthage or more general to western Mediterranean powers.

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