

BETWEEN MYTHOPOIESIS, STEREOTYPES AND UNCONSCIOUS PROJECTIONS. SOME CASE STUDIES OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY ON MEDIEVAL SARDINIA (19TH-21ST CENTURIES)

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes some reflections on the historiography produced in the last century and a half on medieval Sardinia, used as a case study because in the island the Middle Ages has been showered with nationalistic and identitarian values and references, which have often been used for contemporary political and cultural purposes. A historiography that in some cases shows a sort of automatic and unconscious overlap of various consolidated interpretation schemes to what the sources literally say, as when it continues to propose topics of the alleged isolation and peripherality of the Island that were thought to be outdated.

KEYWORDS

Medieval Sardinia, *Giudicati* Sardinia, Historiography, Isolation, Peripherality, Fathers/Ancestors.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Sardinia Mediaevalis, Iudicati Sardiniae, Historiographia, Loginquitas, Peripheria, Patres/Antecessores.

1. Introductory reflections

As we have said in some previous works, we consider more than ever necessary a deep reflection on the historiography so far produced on medieval Sardinia, because in the island the Middle Ages has been showered with nationalistic and identitarian values and references, in the contemporary sense of the terms. Consequently this period has often been used for political and cultural purposes with results that should be discussed.¹ Looking at the historiography produced in the last century and a half, we can not fail to notice how, often unconsciously, some scholars came to claim a *status*, prestige or even a full belonging within the international community of the time to medieval Sardinians. As to deny another of the leitmotifs of the island's history, that of its peripherality and its alleged isolation during long periods of its history, including especially the early Middle Ages.²

Trying to draw an initial balance and to make some considerations on the reconstruction of Sardinia's medieval history, we can not fail to mention the so-called rebirth of Sardinian historiography occurred between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, mainly thanks to scholars such as Arrigo Solmi and Enrico Besta. However, even with all its merits, this rebirth is based on the unfinished results of the well-known story of the *Falsi d'Arborea* (Arborea Forgeries), which, in our opinion, is still extremely significant in terms of the thorny exegetic relationship between the sources of Sardinia's history and some of their scholars.³ Even though, nowadays, the falsification of documents is no longer active, in many cases we can find in several historians a sort of automatic and unconscious overlap of various consolidated interpretation schemes to what the sources literally say.⁴

1. Gallinari, Luciano. "Dieci anni di storiografia sulla Sardegna catalana (2000 - 2010): considerazioni e prospettive", *Sardegna catalana*, Anna Maria Oliva, Olivetta Schena, eds. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2014: 373-394; Tognetti, Sergio. "La Sardegna catalana. Storiografia sarda e storiografia italiana a confronto", *Nuova rivista storica*, -XCIX/3 (2015): 1037-1046; Gallinari, Luciano. "Reflections on Byzantine Sardinia between 7th and 11th centuries in the light of recent historiographical proposal", *Bilanci e prospettive storiografiche*, Maria Giuseppina Meloni, Anna Maria Oliva, Olivetta Schena, eds. Rome: Viella, 2015: 83-107; Gallinari, Luciano. "Some criticalities on exegetical and methodological issues of researching the Sardinian identity profile", *Sardinia from Middle Ages to Contemporaneity. A case study of a Mediterranean island identity profile*, Luciano Gallinari, ed. Bern: Peter Lang, 2018: 1-15.

2. For further and more detailed considerations we refer to chapter 4 on the historiography of the 21st century.

3. The story of the *Falsi* really began around mid-19th century, following the purchase, between 1845 and 1868, by the Royal Library of Cagliari (the current University Library of the city), of a collection of 8 parchments, 17 paper volumes and 15 other paper sheets, which had been put into circulation by a clergyman, Cosimo Maria Manca a Minor Observant friar of the church of Santa Rosalia in Cagliari. These documents made it possible to fill the period between 8th and 15th centuries, which was characterised by a serious lack of documentary and narrative sources that prevented specialists from having a complete picture of Sardinian history of this period.

4. Veyne, Paul. *Comment on écrit l'histoire. Texte integral*. Paris: Seuil, 1996: 31 highlights that we have to write History as we have always done, with commensurate inequalities to the unequal preservation level of the past documents.



Our explanation of such a *modus operandi* of many historians during the last century lies once again in the true and authentic core of the *Falsi d'Arborea*. As it was pointed out by a renowned psychiatrist from Cagliari, this essence was not the superficial aspect of the mere economic gain from the sale of falsified documents. This first main point hid another much deeper one, which revealed a deep wound of the self-esteem of the 19th century cultured Sardinians. They, being almost completely devoid of historical sources on the island's Middle Ages found themselves without a memory, and therefore of an identity that was dignified and acceptable to them. Hence the idea of filling some of those gaps, focusing on the Middle Ages given the counterfeiters' professional skills and the importance of that historical period for an identitarian discourse.⁵ So, according to the mentioned psychiatrist's opinion the *Falsi* are not historical memory, but a medium of the *linguaggio illusorio dell'identificazione, dell'aspirazione all'onnipotenza e del non ancora raggiunto accesso al reale*.⁶

It seems possible to find this deep wound in the self-esteem of Sardinians also in other historical periods far from ours, in which however other historians/scholars created interesting and prestigious genealogies for Sardinians of their period.

In this work, we present only a few examples.

2. Mythopoesis and the search for illustrious ancestors in the 16th-17th centuries: Giovanni Francesco Fara and Giovanni Arca

One of the most interesting periods for the construction of a Sardinian identity is the Modern Age and, in this case, the time span between the end of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century when islanders were deeply catalanised and hispanicised after the first century of warfare (1323-1420). At that time a sense of Sardinian identity arose in the upper classes and in some intellectuals who, while

5. Rudas, Nereide. *L'isola dei coralli*. Roma: Carocci, 1997: 69-76. After she had confirmed the most evident economic aims, the psychiatrist supposed that the absence of sources on Sardinia's Middle Ages "*che negava ai Sardi una storia e un'identità*" ("that denied Sardinians a History and an identity") would cause the forgers a narcissistic wound that could stimulate "*l'invenzione di padri, secondo fantasie totipotenti*" ("the invention of fathers, according to totipotent fantasies"). The scholar highlighted the sharing of these same needs also in the 19th century upper classes of Sardinian society.

6. "illusory language of identification, ambition to omnipotence, and the not-yet-achieved access to the reality". Loddo Canepa, Francesco. "Dizionario archivistico per la Sardegna". *Archivio Storico Sardo*, XVII (1929): 331-420; *Le Carte d'Arborea. Falsi e falsari nella Sardegna del XIX secolo*, ed. Luciano Marrocu. Cagliari: AM&D, 1997; Marrocu, Luciano. *Theodor Mommsen nell'isola dei falsari*. Cagliari: Cuec, 2009 and the bibliography therein. The *Falsi*'s episode supports what mentioned with regards to Halbwachs by Assmann, Jan. *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*. Turin: Einaudi, 1997: 22. [*il passato è] una costruzione sociale la cui composizione risulta dal bisogno di senso e dai quadri di riferimento del presente. Il passato non si fissa naturalmente, ma è una creazione culturale.* ("[The past is] a social construction whose composition results from the need for meaning and the reference frameworks of the present. The past does not fix itself by nature, but it is a cultural creation"). On psychological interpretations, see Rudas, Nereide. *L'isola dei coralli*.: 76.



not denying their Hispanic component, increasingly tried to recognise themselves as something different from the natives (*naturals*) of the other kingdoms of the Crown of Spain. They also sought to promote and obtain a growing capacity for self-government by insisting that Sardinia's main institutional and ecclesiastical offices be entrusted to the islanders.⁷ Within this political and social process, two figures of historians emerge, with different human and professional values: Giovanni Francesco Fara and Giovanni Arca.

One of the elements that unites them, particularly useful for the purposes of this text, is the *Passio Sancti Ephysii*, martyr of the Diocletian era and patron saint of Cagliari. This source offers interesting points for historical and historiographic reflections on some closely intertwined topics: the *Barbari/Pagani*, the "resistant" identity of Sardinians through time, and the research of illustrious Fathers/Ancestors. The latter topic is linked to what we said in the Introduction, and appears as a sort of red thread in the weave of the island's historiography.

These are the events. *Ephysius* from *Caieta* (current Gaeta, Italy) went to Tharros, an ancient Phoenician-Roman city on the west coast of Sardinia, where he defeated a pagan and idolatrous *gens Barbarica*, who did not want to submit to the Romans and devastated Sardinian plains.⁸

The examined codices speak of two different types of enemies. In this case, a *Barbarica gens* or *Barbari* are mentioned by the Vatican one, the oldest and the most faithful to the original life of Procopius/Neania: the base of the *Vita* of Ephysius. On the contrary, the Calaritan codex speaks of "*Ilienses et Jolenses populi montani*", two of the peoples that belonged to the *Civitates Barbariae* already mentioned by the Roman sources in the Augustan age. According to some scholars, this identification shows that the Calaritan codex, even though it derives from a previous medieval one, and is a sort of synthesis of the Vatican *recensio*, contains more precise topographical details with humanistic-renaissance characteristics.⁹

In 1580 Giovanni Francesco Fara, the most important Sardinian historian of his time, mentioned twice the island barbarians in his work *De Rebus Sardois*. The first of these mentions report that *dux Ephysius* in 303 A.D. *in Sardinia contra*

7. Manconi, Francesco. "De no poderse desmembrar de la Corona de Aragón'. Sardegna e Paesi catalani, un vincolo lungo quattro secoli". *Archivio Sardo. Rivista di studi storici e sociali*, Second Series, 1 (1999): 45-57; Murgia, Giovanni. "Ceti privilegiati e Corona nella Sardegna spagnola durante la Guerra dei Trent'anni", *Corts i Parlaments de la Corona d'Aragó. Unes institucions emblemàtiques en una monarquia composta*, Remedio Ferrero Micó, Lluís Guia Marín, eds. València: Universitat de València, 2008: 469-492; Tore, Gianfranco. "Città, oligarchie e Corona nel Regno di Sardegna (XVI-XVII)", *Corts i Parlaments de la Corona d'Aragó. Unes institucions emblemàtiques en una monarquia composta*, Remedio Ferrero Micó, Lluís Guia Marín, eds. València: Universitat de València, 2008: 445-467; Manconi, Francesco. "Il Regno di Sardegna in età moderna. L'impronta catalana", *Il Regno di Sardegna in età moderna. Saggi diversi*, Francesco Manconi, ed. Cagliari: Cuec, 2010: 24-25.

8. According to some scholars, this battle could refer to the great victory on the river Garigliano, near *Caieta*, obtained against the Saracens in 915 by the Byzantine army, aided by the armies of Apulia, Calabria, Campania, Apostolic See and Spoleto. See Spanu, Pier Giorgio. *Martyria Sardiniae: i santuari dei martiri sardi*. Oristano: S'Alvure, 2000: 64, 69-81 and 163-173.

9. Zedda, Corrado; Pinna, Raimondo. "La nascita dei Giudicati. Proposta per lo scioglimento di un enigma storiografico". *Archivio Storico Giuridico Sardo di Sassari*, Second Series, 12 (2007): 49-52.



montanos Barbaricinos insulam devastantes profiscitur (“went to Sardinia against the mountainous *Barbaricini* that devastated the island”). The second one, conversely, report the Sardinian events of the 6th-7th centuries and the Byzantine *duces* that *in montibus Sardiniae iussu imperatorum residebant: nam ibi aderant Barbaricini populi illi antiqui, qui numquam a Carthaginensibus, Romanis et Vandalis, ut diximus, debellati fuere*.¹⁰

From this work, therefore, arose a double equation: *Barbaricini* = *Populi Montani* and *Barbaricini* = *Populi illi antiqui*, which were never conquered except by the Byzantines: among those *Populi* there were the *Iolenses* and *Ilienses* mentioned in the Calaritan codex of the *Passio*.¹¹

With another Sardinian historian, a contemporary of Fara, the elaboration of the concept of *Populi Montani/Barbaricini* underwent a new and interesting advance that led to the development of a lineage of Sardinians’ illustrious ancestors, in view of what we said about the Arborea Forgery. The scholar we are referring to is Giovanni Arca, a shady Jesuit with no scruples in plagiarising entire parts of previous works without mentioning their authors. In 1598 he published *De Sanctis Sardiniae*, in which he also identified the *Iolenses* and *Ilienses* with the *Barbaricini*, but he added some considerations of nationalist flavour. Later, between the years following 1598 and March 1613, he wrote two works entirely dedicated to the moral and cultural rehabilitation of *Barbaricini*: *De Barbaricinorum origine* and *De Barbaricinorum fortitudine*.¹²

In our opinion, the importance of Arca is the further step forward in the research/creation of illustrious ancestors. In fact, in the clergyman’s extremely interesting cultural and political operation, it seems as if we can almost grasp the idea that *Barbaricini* themselves were not sufficiently illustrious ancestors for the Sardinians of the 17th century. Therefore, it is not surprising that at the beginning of the *De Barbaricinorum origine* Arca committed himself to highlight the illustrious ancestors of the *Barbaricini* themselves.

Although he was aware of Fara’s somewhat earlier texts, in order to give greater “reliability” to his statements, Arca went even deeper into the search for the *Barbaricini*’s Fathers/Ancestors. By following a well-known classical literary text that identified them with two specific peoples, he was able to give an even more cultured and prestigious version of the lineage of the *Barbaricini* and, therefore, of Sardinians of his days.

They descended nothing less than from the very noble people of Trojans —the Sardinian *Ilienses*—, from the Thespiads —sons of Hercules and nephews of Thespis—, and especially from Iolaus son of Iphycles and nephew of the demigod, after which

10. “lived in the mountains of Sardinia by order of emperors: in fact were there those ancient peoples, the *Barbaricini*, who never, as we said, were defeated by Carthaginians, Romans and Vandals”. Ioannis Francisci Farae, “De rebus sardeis. Liber I”, *Opera*, ed. Anna Maria Pintus. Sassari: Gallizzi, 1992: 151-184.

11. Turtas, Raimondo. “Giovanni Arca. Note biografiche”, Arca, Giovanni. *Barbaricinorum libelli*, ed. Maria Teresa Laneri. Cagliari: Cuccu, 2005: LXXXI-LXXXII.

12. Turtas, Raimondo. “Giovanni Arca. Note biografiche...”: LXIX.



the Sardinian people of *Iolenses* took his name: *ab antiquissimis nobilissimisque Troianis atque Thespiadum manu quae propius aberant a rerum ortu. Suam primam duxerunt originem a Iolao Iphicli filio Herculisque nepote*.¹³

With such ancestors, it is comprehensible that *Barbaricini* did not tolerate slavery and fiercely opposed all the rulers of the island, who were always defeated by them.¹⁴ The only one who succeeded in winning them was St. Ephysius, but just because they fled before him and a threatening angel.

The former Jesuit inserted in his narration an extract from the *Passio S. Ephysii*, where he spoke only of *Barbaricae gentis/Barbari*, but the passage was preceded by an introductory narrative, in which Arca proposed the identification of those islander enemies of Ephysius with the *Barbaricini*: *Mittebant [the Roman emperors] aliquando duces fortissimos cum exercitu, ut diximus, contra Barbaricinos, ut fecit Diocletianus cum sancto Ephysio in quem discenderunt Ilienses ex montibus (...)* (“Sometimes, as we have said, [the Roman emperors] sent very valiant *duces* with the army against the *Barbaricini*, as did Diocletian with St. *Ephysius*, against whom the *Ilienses* descended from the mountains”).¹⁵

This epic narration of Sardinians’ origin crossed the centuries like a karst river, responding to dreams, needs and expectations of part of the island’s people by feeding a new interpretative theory of the island history, formulated more than half a century ago by Giovanni Lilliu, a Sardinian archaeologist who called it the *costante resistenziale sarda* (“constant Sardinian resistance”). According to him, the inhabitants of the interior of Sardinia would resist any attempt at conquer by Phoenicians, Punics, Romans, Byzantines, etc.¹⁶ A historiographic myth, which nourished an identity concept based on notions of purity and uncontamination, contradicted by linguistics and archaeologists that, however, took root in the island society. As a result of this “resistance” over time, two types of islanders would live in Sardinia: those from the coasts and plains, whose “Sardinian” identity would be

13. Arca, Giovanni. “De Barbaricinorum origine”, *Barbaricinorum libelli*, ed. Maria Teresa Laneri, Cagliari: Cuccu, 2005: 1 and 14. Laneri, Maria Teresa. “Introduzione”, Arca, Giovanni. *Barbaricinorum libelli...: CXVI*: points out that: (...) *la fusione fra Iolensi e Iliensi, e la conseguente identificazione con i Barbaricini, è tutta e soltanto di Arca: infatti né i testi antichi né Fara operano tale equivalenza*. (“the merger between *Iolenses* and *Ilienses*, and the consequent identification with the *Barbaricini*, is made entirely and only by Arca: in fact neither the ancient texts nor Fara make such equivalence”).

14. The narration of the independence and military resistance of Sardinians and, in particular, of those who resided in the mountains, against external attackers is taken from Diodorus Siculus. The historian stated that Carthaginians and Romans, in spite of their great military efforts, tried in vain to subjugate the descendants of Iolaus and the Thespiades because of the roughness of the places, leaving them free: *Carthaginenses cum saepius eos bello tentassent, difficultate locorum eorum absterriti, liberos relinquerunt. Postremo a Romanis armis saepius lacessiti, locorum asperitate inuicti permansere*. Siculus Diodorus. *Bibliothecae historicae libri XV*, ed. Wilhelm Xylander. Basileae: ex officina Henrici Petrina, 1578: 139-140, (Book V, Chapter V). <[https://books.google.it/books?id=sPNCAAAACAAJ&dq=inauthor%3A%22Diodorus%20\(Siculus\)%22&hl=it&pg=PR4#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=sPNCAAAACAAJ&dq=inauthor%3A%22Diodorus%20(Siculus)%22&hl=it&pg=PR4#v=onepage&q&f=false)>.

15. Arca, Giovanni. “De Barbaricinorum fortitudine”, *Barbaricinorum libelli*, ed. Maria Teresa Laneri, Cagliari: Cuccu, 2005: 46.

16. Lilliu, Giovanni. *La costante resistenziale sarda*, Antonello Mattone, ed. Nuoro: Ilisso, 2002.



mixed with the external dominators' ones, and those from the Mountains, who would have remained "uncontaminated" by the Other.

This historiographic theory has been recently resized: historical, anthropological and archaeological studies over the last few decades have increasingly highlighted the osmosis between the *Civitates Barbariae* and the "other" Sardinia, even during the Roman imperial period.¹⁷

Nevertheless, sometimes it reappears and is present, very often more emotionally and unconsciously, in both scientific and popular publications, dedicated not only to the ancient history of Sardinia, but also to the *Giudicati* Age (11th -15th centuries) which is the other period of the island's history, loaded with nationalistic and independent values, as we will see in the next paragraph.

3. The origin of modern historiography on medieval Sardinia

The identitarian and nationalistic reading of the *Giudicati* history is well rooted in part of the 20th century historiography on Sardinia, and in particular, in that of the second half of it. Within this Age, the last two centuries of the Middle Ages are the focus of a particular attention as they were marked by the opposed relationship between Aragonese and Sardinians, which ended with the disappearance of the *Giudicato* of Arborea, the last Sardinian polity in 1420.¹⁸

17. See among others: Stiglitz, Alfonso. "Confini e frontiere nella Sardegna fenicia, punica e romana: critica all'immaginario geografico", *L'Africa romana. Ai Confini dell'impero: contatti, scambi, conflitti*, Mustapha Khanoussi, Paola Ruggeri, Cinzia Vismara, eds. Rome: Carocci, 2004: XV/1, 805; Mastino, Attilio, ed. *Storia della Sardegna antica*. Cagliari: Il Maestrale, 2005; Caltagirone, Benedetto. "Identità sarde", *Sardegna. Seminario sull'identità*, Giulio Angioni, Francesco Bachis, Benedetto Caltagirone, Tatiana Cossu, eds. Cagliari: Cuec, 2007: 188-189.

18. On the causes of the Aragonese presence in Sardinia following the enfeoffment of *Regnum Sardiniae et Corsicae* to King James II of Aragon in 1297 we refer to a selection of works among many others: Arribas Palau, Antonio. *La conquista de Cerdeña por Jaime II de Aragón*. Barcelona: Instituto Español de Estudios Mediterráneos: 1952; Salavert y Roca, Vicente. *Cerdeña y la expansión mediterránea*, 2 vols. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956. Cadeddu, Maria Eugenia. "Frontiere dell'espansione catalano-aragonese nel Mediterraneo. L'epoca di Giacomo II d'Aragona (1291-1327)", *Frontiere del Mediterraneo. Seminario Internazionale di Studi (Cagliari, 10-12 Ottobre 2002)*, Maria Eugenia Cadeddu, Maria Grazia Mele, eds. Pisa: ETS, 2003: 31-39; Maria Eugenia Cadeddu, Maria Rosa Muñoz, Vicente Pons, Mateu Rodrigo, "La participación valenciana en la conquista de Cerdeña," *La Mediterrània de la Corona d'Aragó, segles XIII-XVI. VII Centenari de la sentència arbitral de Torrellas, 1304-2004*, Rafael Narbona, ed. València: Universitat de València, 2005: I, 225-50; Cadeddu, Maria Eugenia. "L'espansione catalano-aragonese nel Mediterraneo: riflessi nella storiografia iberica contemporanea", *Quel mar che la terra inghirlanda. Studi mediterranei in ricordo di Marco Tangheroni*, Franco Cardini, Maria Luisa Ceccarelli Lemut, eds. Rome: Pacini editore, 2007: 149-155. Sanna, Mauro G. "Papa Giovanni XXII, Giacomo II d'Aragona e la questione del Regnum Sardinie et Corsice", *Tra diritto e storia. Studi in onore di Luigi Berlinguer promossi dalle Università di Siena e di Sassari*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008: II, 737-52. Sanna, Mauro G. "Bonifacio VIII, Giacomo II d'Aragona e la questione del regnum Sardinie et Corsice". *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medioevo*, 112 (2010): 503-28. Sanna, Mauro G. "La Sardegna, il Papato e le dinamiche delle espansione mediterranea", *La Sardegna nel Mediterraneo tardomedievale. Convegno di studi. Sassari, 13-14 dicembre 2012*. Trieste: Centro Europeo Ricerche Medievali, 2013: 103-121.



In such historiography the interpretation was deeply embedded in a partisan vision almost completely detached from what was the reality of feudal relations, especially in the Iberian world of the late Middle Ages.

In this work we will examine some of the most significant scholars of Sardinia's medieval history, who worked between the last decades of the nineteenth century and nowadays, in order to find once again some interpretative lines that go through the decades. And, despite the elaboration of new critical proposals of the history, these lines continue to be present and re-emerge as karst rivers in a large part of scientific production on both Byzantine and *Giudicati* Sardinia.

By rereading several old texts, our impression is that some historians did not realise the short circuit contained in their political and institutional reconstructions of the the last centuries of Sardinia's Middle Ages.

We can see some concrete examples that can help to understand these statements.

Let us start with one of the two new founders of the historiography on medieval Sardinia, the jurist Arrigo Solmi who tried to answer the basic question of the true nature of relationship between the Kings of Aragon and the Judges of Arborea:

(...) non erano tutti questi potenti [Doria, Malaspina, Gherardesca, Arborea e Sassari] ugualmente soggetti alla corona aragonese? (...) è certo che il giuramento di fedeltà prestato, dagli altri antichi signori dell'isola, era identico, nella sostanza, quello di qualunque altro signore feudale; (...). Ben diverso doveva essere il punto di vista di quegli antichi signori [I giudici d'Arborea], rimasti in realtà autonomi. Essi si erano rivolti alla potenza aragonese soltanto per debellare gli ideali e l'opera assidui e tenaci di dominazione perseguiti da Pisa, non già per veder limitati i propri diritti d'autonomia. Il fondamento del loro potere nell'isola aveva preceduto, nel suo nascere, lo stesso dominio aragonese; ed era quindi, per indole, diverso da quello che nasceva da una comune concessione feudale.¹⁹

In these few lines there is already *in nuce* a series of distortions in the vision of the relationship between the Kings of Aragon and the Judges of Arborea.

The first misrepresentation is Solmi's slight deviation from the level of the scientific reasoning, when he contrasted the oath of allegiance made by the judges of Arborea and their own point of view of the situation. As if they were on a same level. We consider this attitude extremely indicative of a *modus operandi* present in many scholars which we will examine later.

The letters sent to King Peter IV of Aragon by Judge Mariano IV of Arborea, during the latter's uprising in the second half of the 14th century, and these statements by

19. "were not all these powerful [the political subjects such as Doria, Malaspina, Gherardesca, Arborea and the city of Sassari] equally subject to the Aragonese crown? (...), it is certain that the oath of allegiance taken by the other ancient lords of the island was substantially identical to that of any other feudal lord (...). The point of view of those ancient lords [the Judges of Arborea], who actually remained autonomous, must have been quite different. They had turned to the Aragonese power only to defeat the ideals and the assiduous and tenacious work of domination pursued by Pisa, not to see limited their rights to autonomy. The foundation of their power in the island had preceded, in its birth, the same Aragonese dominion, and was therefore, by nature, different from that which arose from a common feudal concession". Solmi, Arrigo. "Le costituzioni del primo parlamento sardo del 1355". *Archivio Storico Sardo*, 6 (1910): 193-272.



Solmi show that the historian embraced the political position of Sardinian rulers and their recriminations, and did not try to stay as equidistant as possible. It would seem confirmed also by Solmi's comment on the self-government of the judges of Arborea: "(...) those ancient lords, who actually remained autonomous (...)". It is not clear what he refers to, because even a century ago historians knew several *Giudicati*, Ligurian and Tuscan sources, certifying that the four Sardinian judges from the twelfth century took oaths of allegiance and submission to the Communes of Genoa and Pisa. Not to mention the ties with the German emperors and the Apostolic See.

But, frankly, in the above text there is firstly an erroneous vision of the presumed protagonism of the House of Oristano that would call the Aragonese to chase Pisa from the island. This idea is coincidentally closely related to a second erroneous element: the absence from this political stage of the Apostolic See, the true political *domina* of Sardinia and, at least, of the western Euro-Mediterranean world according to the juridical culture of the late Middle Ages.

Solmi's short circuit occurred in relation to what it has just been said about the nature of the feudal bond; the jurist interpreted the beginning of the rebellion of Judge Mariano IV in the mid-14th century, also due to the great concessions made by King Peter IV of Aragon to John of Arborea, one of Mariano's brothers, stating that the Iberian sovereign felt he had settled his debt of gratitude to the House of Arborea for the support given in the conquest of the *Regnum*, avoiding to further strengthen the judge but fuelling his deep discontent.

Vi era qui senza dubbio un contrasto insanabile, per il diverso modo di concepire i reciproci diritti e doveri tra il re ed il giudice. (...) questi (...) chiedeva di essere considerato, com'era, un potente sovrano, non già un comune barone del regno; instava perché non si entrasse a giudicare di un provvedimento interno contro un proprio suddito, il fratello Giovanni, che gli aveva rifiutato obbedienza; domandava che, a compenso degli aiuti prestati per 5 anni di guerra (...) gli fossero assicurati gli aumenti territoriali da lui più volte richiesti.²⁰

The above mentioned passage is extremely stimulating for the terms and concepts used by the jurist, which formed the basis of many other similar following statements. For instance, the term *sovrano* (Sovereign) addressed to the judge: Mariano IV was not a sovereign; perhaps he aspired to be one, but he was not. An imperial or papal nomination was necessary to obtain that title, as it happened for Judge Barisone I of Arborea (1164) or for Enzo (Heinrich), the husband of the *iudicissa* Adelasia of Torres, appointed as king of Sardinia by his father the emperor Frederick II.

20. "There was undoubtedly an irreconcilable conflict here, due to the different way of conceiving the reciprocal rights and duties between the king and the judge. The latter (...) asked to be considered, as he was, a powerful sovereign, not a common baron of the kingdom; he urged so that one could not judge an internal measure against one of his subjects, his brother John, who had refused him obedience; he asked that, in order to reward the aid given for five years of war he was granted the territorial increases requested by him several times". Solmi, Arrigo. "Le costituzioni del primo parlamento...": 199-200.



Solmi returned once again to the topic of relationship between the King of Aragon and Mariano IV of Arborea, reiterating that the reason for the disagreement between them was based on

*(...) una condizione di fatto estremamente favorevole al giudice, per cui questi si presentava come un potente sovrano, faceva contrasto la concezione feudale rigida del re, che tendeva a considerare il giudice alla stregua di ogni altro vassallo della Corona.*²¹

These juridical, institutional and political considerations—which appear to have been partially based on Mariano IV’s claims present in the sources produced by this judge or that concern him—show a further plan of interpretation of Sardinian ruler’s *status*. While in the passage quoted above the judge “asked to be considered, as he was, a powerful sovereign”, in the second passage, in contrast, Mariano IV “presented himself as a powerful sovereign”. We consider very interesting and significant this alternation of the terms, and also of the concepts that underlie them. Since the concepts they express, being/feeling a sovereign are not equivalent.²²

Despite all these characteristics, this interpretation had a great historiographic success, and we find it at the base of many other essays on the history of the *Giudicati* up to almost the present day. It will have negative effects on a more exact knowledge of the institutional and juridical history of the Sardinian polities and of that of Arborea in particular.

Another significant figure in this sketch of the historicographic panorama is Raimondo Carta Raspi, whose work on the history of Sardinia was widespread despite that he was not a professional researcher.

*[Mariano IV] il più grande giudice che abbia avuto l’isola. (...) Battagliero e fiero, sempre vittorioso, (...) uomo politico, fu sempre all’altezza del momento, all’interno e all’esterno; (...) riuscì a formare delle sbandate popolazioni dell’isola, un popolo con una propria fisionomia, quale la Sardegna non aveva più da oltre un millennio e che solo da allora poté mantenersi compatto, una sola anima e un unico destino.*²³

To be honest, regardless of his tone almost always rhetorical, we have to highlight that the topic of the judges of Arborea’s sovereignty, at least from Hugh II (1321-

21. “(...) the king’s rigid feudal conception, which tended to consider the judge like any other vassal of the Crown, contrasted with an extremely favourable *de facto* condition for the judge, thanks to which he presented himself as a powerful sovereign”. Solmi, Arrigo. “Le costituzioni del primo...”: 210.

22. In fact, in no source—except in some testimonies of the feudal trial against Mariano IV, which therefore must be evaluated with extreme attention, given their political nature—the judge showed he considered himself a sovereign.

23. “[Mariano IV] the greatest judge the island has ever had. (...). Pugnacious and proud, always victorious, (...) a politician, he was always up to the task, both inside and outside the island; (...) he managed to form the island’s skewed peoples, a people with its own character, which Sardinia had not had for over a millennium and which only since then could remain compact, a single soul and a single destiny”. Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d’Arborea, conte del Goceano, visconte di Bas, giudice d’Arborea*. Oristano: S’Alvure, 2001: 12-13 (first edition, Cagliari: Edizioni della Fondazione il Nuraghe, 1934).



1335) onwards, is dealt by Carta Raspi with great care. Almost as if he had put it in the background, in the sense that sometimes one surmise it in different parts of the text by the choice of some terms. Let us look some examples.

*L'erede al trono di Arborea [il 'donnikellu' Pietro III] non poteva mancare al fianco del giudice e dell'infante d'Aragona, per contribuire a una vittoria che avrebbe dovuto pesare sui destini del giudicato e sull'amicizia dei due futuri sovrani.*²⁴

In this passage, Carta Raspi shows that he still insists on the concept of the sovereignty of the judges of Arborea and their equivalence to the kings of Aragon, since he defined as “two future sovereigns” the future judge Peter III and the future King Alfonso IV of Aragon.

There is also another inaccuracy to highlight in this narrative by the Sardinian historian. It is in detail the allusion to the failure to obtain a reward by Peter of Arborea, unlike what happened to his two brothers: Mariano, his successor on the *Giudicato* throne, and his other slightly younger brother, John of Arborea: (...) *una ricompensa, un titolo ma Pietro non ne ebbe, neppure allorché si recò in Aragona, a differenza dei due fratelli che riceveranno durante il suo regno i titoli che vedremo.* (“(...) a reward, a title but Peter did not have any [of them], not even when he went to Aragon, unlike the two brothers who will receive during his reign the titles that we will see”).²⁵

In fact, in 1332 the *donnikellu* Peter went to Catalonia to attend the coronation of King Alfonso IV, and to renew the oath of allegiance made by his father nine years earlier after the enfeoffment of the *Giudicato*. In that occasion he was personally knighted by the king, as the second of a list of 19 new knights, coming immediately after the half-brother of the sovereign himself, Pere de Exerica, in order to understand what kind of consideration was reserved in the King of Aragon's Court to the House of Arborea and, specifically, to *donnikellu* Peter.

The historian repeatedly stresses the topic of the antiquity of the House of Arborea's rights on the island not only over the *Giudicato*, and therefore its rights to sovereignty: “lawful sovereigns” are defined the judges of Arborea, while on the other hand there is a totally biased judgment about the king of Aragon and their monarchy, which without rights had taken possession of the island and usurped it to the judges of Arborea themselves:

*[la Sardegna] era passata, pur attraverso cruenta ribellioni, da una dominazione all'altra, e (...), dopo il glorioso antico governo giudiciale, anziché stringersi intorno ai legittimi sovrani, sottostava a un'ambiziosa monarchia che se ne era impadronita senza giusto titolo, usurpandola ai d'Arborea.*²⁶

24. “The heir to the throne of Arborea [the *donnikellu* Peter III] could not fail to be at the side of the judge and the *Infant* of Aragon, to contribute to a victory that should have weighed on the fate of the *Giudicato* and on the friendship of the two future sovereigns. (...)”. Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 71.

25. Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 71.

26. “[Sardinia] had passed, through bloody rebellions, from one domination to another, and (...), after the glorious ancient *Giudicato* government, instead of tightening around the lawful rulers, submitted to



Carta Raspi's pro-Arborean nationalistic and biased reading reached a further maturity when the historian stated that

I giudici non erano mai stati vassalli ad alcuno; tanto meno gli ultimi rispetto al re d'Aragona, che appunto ad Ugone dovevano la conquista dei territori pisani. Fin da tempi remoti, gli antenati di Mariano erano stati sovrani indipendenti dell'Arborea, e verso loro nulla avevano potuto neppure gli Imperatori e i pontefici, che invano aveva affacciato pretese di dominio. Anzi, proprio dall'imperatore, Barisone era stato insignito della dignità regale.²⁷

Affirmations such as these are directly related to what we said earlier about the presence in some historians' texts of assertions that correspond to the needs and unconscious desires of the scholars and their times. Without attaching the conscious desire to manipulate the events to them, in such statements one can see an unconscious, emotional participation in the reconstruction of the History.

Statements that the judges of Arborea were never vassals of anyone, and certainly not the last of them, reflect the scholar's wishes, since even Carta Raspi could not be unaware of the documents published by Pasquale Tola almost a century earlier, relating to the oaths of allegiance made by all four Sardinian judges to the Communes of Pisa and Genoa, and also to the Apostolic See between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Not to mention the real oath of vassalage taken by Hugh II himself to King James II of Aragon, in exchange for the investiture of the *Giudicato*.

Not even the mention of the imperial investiture of Barisone I of Arborea by Frederick I means that Carta Raspi reflects on the short circuit of his interpretation, in the sense that if the judges of Arborea since ancient times had been independent sovereigns, it is not clear why Barisone I had requested the imperial investiture. To this end it is also necessary to mention the testimony of Otto of Morena, the German chronicler who, narrating the story of the appointment of Barisone I as king of Sardinia, referred to the episode by saying that the judge had asked the emperor to be raised to a higher *dignitas*, that of *Rex Sardiniae*.²⁸

However, all the historical reasoning made by Carta Raspi is extremely interesting, and it was widely diffused in the following historiography.

Another remarkable aspect of Carta Raspi's writings is that, although his text on Mariano IV is extremely impregnated with a nationalist and identitarian vision, the

an ambitious monarchy that had seized it without just title, usurping it to the Arboreas". Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 82.

27. "The judges had never been vassals to anyone, much less the last ones towards the king of Aragon, who precisely owed Hugh [II] the conquest of Pisan territories. Since ancient times, Mariano's ancestors had been independent sovereigns of Arborea, and against them nothing could be done even by the Emperors and Popes, who had made vain claims of domination. On the contrary, it was the emperor himself who had bestowed Barisone with royal dignity". Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 88-89.

28. *quidem iudex de Sardinia de civitate Herborea maxime opulentus ad maiorem dignitatem provehi desiderans, ut regio solio decoraretur ab imperatore cepit implorare*. Morenae, Ottonis et continuatorum. "Historia Frederici I", *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series*, ed. Ferdinand Güterbock. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1930: VII, 176.



historian also managed to maintain a partially objective position by commenting on the opinion of some scholars who had previously dealt with Sardinian history. He literally said that it was a purely rhetorical operation without any scientific base

*l'infervorato racconto di alcuni scrittori, che mostrano in quegli anni tutta la Sardegna levarsi al primo appello dell'Arborea. La realtà (...) è ben diversa. Mariano IV, che si è dimostrato il miglior conoscitore dei Sardi e della loro mentalità, spinse in tutta l'isola l'esercito dei militi e dei funzionari, non come un liberatore, ma come un conquistatore.*²⁹

These statements by Carta Raspi did not mean, however, that he did not believe in a nationalistic and identitarian discourse, simply did not draw it to the “phantom” Sardinian people, but he placed it in the project of a person with the characteristics of Mariano IV, in possession of a political project, the means to support it and a medium and long chronological and geographical vision.

In his interpretative discourse, Carta Raspi clearly distinguished the Sardinian subjects of the *Giudicato* of Arborea, who according to him had a civil, political and juridical level higher than that of Sardinians living in the rest of the island, who had been subject to institutions of a different nature obviously not comparable to the Arborea ones. Therefore, Mariano IV's project could not be applied indistinctly to all Sardinians of the island, but first it was necessary a chronological phase of political and civil “acculturation” of the islanders living outside the *Giudicato*. A policy defined by him as “nationalisation”, but that in reality is conceived as an “Arboreisation”, that is, a transformation of all Sardinians into Arborea subjects.

*Non v'erano, fra tanta anarchia, catene da spezzare; anzi, semmai, da ribadire, certo con altro fine, ma con mano ferma e implacabile, con volontà inflessibile. Dovevano prima assoggettarsi, queste popolazioni che mai erano state in qualche modo governate, poi si sarebbero emancipate, e infine parificate a quella dell'Arborea. Solo Sassari, e qualche altro centro importante, facevano rara eccezione.*³⁰

According to Carta Raspi, the main merit of Judge Mariano IV and his nationalising policy was that he wanted to give a conscience to Sardinians and gather them under a single flag, which would be the symbol of sovereignty and freedom.

One can not fail to notice the similarities -albeit *mutatis mutandis*- with the discourse made centuries earlier by Giovanni Arca. As we saw, he distinguished between the Sardinians of the Mountains (the *Barbaricini*), never conquered and,

29. “the passionate story of some writers, who show that in those years all Sardinia uprise to the first appeal by Arborea. The reality (...) is quite different. Mariano IV, who proved to be the best expert of Sardinians and their mentality, pushed the army of soldiers and officials all over the island, not as a liberator, but as a conqueror”. Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 165.

30. “There were no chains to break among so much anarchy; on the contrary, if anything, to be confirmed, certainly with another purpose, but with a firm and implacable hand, with an inflexible will. These peoples, who had never been somehow ruled, had to be first subjected, then they would become emancipated, and finally equalised to that of Arborea. Only Sassari, and some other important centres, were rare exceptions”. Carta Raspi, Raimondo. *Mariano IV d'Arborea...*: 16.



therefore, superior, and those of the coasts and plains, dominated instead by all the external cultures that have succeeded each other over time. Just as three hundred years later, Carta Raspi distinguished between Arboreans and other Sardinians, not comparable to the first for their lower level of political and social development.

What is even more interesting is that, according to Carta Raspi, this condition of inferiority of “other” Sardinians was because they had never been ruled, as if the government of Pisa, Genoa and the Aragonese—in short, the non-Sardinians—had not been a real political and civil government.

Evandro Putzulu, former director of the Municipal Library and Historical Archive of the Municipality of Cagliari, also moved on partially similar paths. However, although he had a very different capacity for critical analysis of sources, almost fifty years later Solmi, he too, takes up the topic of the feudal bond between the judges of Arborea and the Kings of Aragon, and defined it as a *vincolo di fedeltà liberamente contratto* (“bond of fidelity freely contracted”), perhaps choosing to ignore its true nature, because we do not think that he had not fully understood it.

In this case his statements are parallel to those of Solmi when he said that “They [the judges] had turned to the Aragonese power only to defeat the ideals and the assiduous and tenacious work of domination pursued by Pisa (...)”. Both underline the complete decision-making and political autonomy of Arborea’s rulers, typical of sovereigns and heads of state, as they were defined by the two scholars, and not instead of a feudatory like those created by the Aragonese king. The points in common with Solmi’s statements are therefore more than one.

*L’atteggiamento di Mariano nei riguardi della Corona si riallaccia direttamente a quello di Ugone (...) Nella concezione di Mariano, il giudice di Arborea è un capo di Stato legato a un vincolo di fedeltà liberamente contratto non un feudatario come quelli che il re va creando in Sardegna quale presidio e organo di governo delle terre soggette al suo dominio diretto. (...) L’atteggiamento di Mariano non è quello di un feudatario simulatore o di facile suscettibilità, sibbene quello di un capo di stato consapevole degli interessi supremi del giudicato e della necessità di combattere perché il giudicato sopravviva all’azione corrosiva e sopraffattrice dello straniero.*³¹

Along the lines of this reasoning, with regard to the contrast between Mariano IV and his brother John, he added other considerations more closely linked to what was said by Solmi:

Agli occhi di Mariano, il gesto di Pietro IV [le concessioni a Giovanni d’Arborea] confermava inequivocabilmente la volontà del re di non consentire nessun accrescimento territoriale del

31. “Mariano’s attitude towards the Crown is directly linked to that of Hugh (...) In Mariano’s conception, the judge of Arborea is a head of state bound to a loyalty bond freely contracted not a feudatory like those that the king is creating in Sardinia as a garrison and governing body of the lands subject to his direct domination. (...). Mariano’s attitude is not that of a simulator or easily susceptible feudatory, but that of a head of state aware of the supreme interests of the *Giudicato* and of the need to fight so that the *Giudicato* can survive the corrosive and overwhelming action of the foreigner.” Putzulu, Evandro. “Cartulari de Arborea. Raccolta di documenti diplomatici inediti sulle relazioni tra il giudicato d’Arborea e i re d’Aragona (1328 1403)”. *Archivio Storico Sardo*, 25 (1957): 94-95.



*giudice e nello stesso tempo costituiva una patente violazione dei suoi diritti di sovranità in quanto il fratello era suo suddito e perciò direttamente soggetto alla sua autorità e non a quella del re. Al di là del fatto in sé dell' infeudazione a Giovanni, dunque v'era tutta la scottante questione degli accrescimenti territoriali, della sovranità del giudice e della sua autonomia (...).*³²

In his reconstruction of the facts, however, the scholar did not highlight an extremely important element, namely that Judge Mariano IV, before imprisoning his brother John, prevented him from continuing his political and military action in favour of the king: see the embargo imposed by the judge on Bosa, so that John could not help the Aragonese. It is therefore curious how Solmi, Putzulu and then also other scholars did not take into account that the investiture of the Seigniorship of Monteaudo and Bosa had made John a direct vassal of the king. He found himself in the difficult situation of who had two direct feudal lords: his brother Mariano, since he was *naturalis* of the *Giudicato* and the king of Aragon, since he was the holder of those royal concessions. The institutional short circuit became inevitable when the judge of Arborea decided to rise up against the Aragonese sovereign. By obeying his brother, who had become an outlaw, John would be his accomplice.

In addition, but no less important, by following the interpretation that the judge of Arborea was a “head of state bound to a loyalty bond freely contracted not a feudatory (...)”, Putzulu did not stress that the King of Aragon was the holder of the *Regnum Sardiniae et Corsicae* by the papal enfeoffment, and the vertex of its feudal pyramid, above the judge of Arborea and all the island’s inhabitants whether they lived.

It is here that we see the overlapping of historian’s interpretation on the sources themselves, since this image of Judge Mariano IV’s autonomy and sovereignty was the one desired by these scholars, but not only.

Five years later the tones and terms used by Francesco Loddo Canepa, director of the Archivio di Stato di Cagliari (State Archives of Cagliari) are practically identical to those used by Putzulu in his work above mentioned. Once again a scholar used the concept of misunderstanding to explain the reasons for the contrast between the judges of Arborea and the kings of Aragon, as if the first ones did not know the Aragonese at all —notwithstanding the centuries-old relations between them at the time of the creation of the *Regnum*— and did not even know what a vassalage bond meant.

I rapporti tra i giudici d' Arborea e gli aragonesi poggiavano in nuce e fin da principio dell' alleanza, sull' equivoco. Il titolo di giudice che comportava sostanzialmente poteri sovrani era svuotato di ogni contenuto dall' investitura del giudicato a feudo rigoroso data ad Ugone nel 1323. Quello che doveva restare titolo puramente formale ed onorifico nel concetto

32. “In Mariano’s eyes, Peter IV’s gesture [the concessions to John of Arborea] unequivocally confirmed the king’s will not to allow any territorial expansion of the judge and at the same time constituted a clear violation of his rights of sovereignty, because his brother was his subject and therefore directly subject to his authority and not to that of the king. Besides the enfeoffment itself to John, therefore, there was the whole burning question of territorial increases, of the sovereignty of the judge and of his autonomy (...)”. Putzulu, Evandro. “Cartulari de Arborea...”: 96.



*del re, restava integro, per il giudice, nel suo valore intrinseco e sostanziale; e viceversa erano le clausole di investitura che egli [il giudice Ugone II] considerava cosa di pura forma.*³³

At the same time, the already mentioned Evandro Putzulu returned in another of his works on the delicate issue of the end of peaceful relations between the kings of Aragon and the judges of Arborea, going so far as to lay the foundations of such a break already at the time of the government of Hugh II of Arborea, when the Iberian sovereigns would begin not to fulfill the promises made before the conquest of the *Regnum*.

*Fu l'esplosione di un dissidio che, se pur contenuto, si era già delineato al tempo del padre, Ugone II, ed aveva i suoi presupposti giuridici e politici nell'equivoco atteggiamento tenuto nelle trattative che precedettero la conquista, da Giacomo II, il quale, dopo aver promesso, per cattivarsi un alleato prezioso quale era il giudice, di mantenerlo "integre et complete" nel godimento delle sue prerogative giudicali – sostanzialmente sovrane e autonome – di accrescere il suo dominio e altresì mostrato di voler proporre Ugone, che questo ambiva, al governo dell'isola, venne meno alle promesse e ai patti non realizzando gl'ingrandimenti, mettendo l'isola sotto un governatore generale catalano-aragonese e per giunta assoggettando il giudice all'autorità del governatore, con patente violazione dei patti e dell'autonomia del giudicato (...).*³⁴

Once again we find a wide use of terms such as sovereignty and autonomy that the judges of Arborea would have enjoyed before the arrival of the Aragonese in Sardinia: "the *Giudicati* prerogatives —substantially sovereign and autonomous". Arguments that are not supported or reflected in the documentary and narrative sources we know. In order not to stray too far from the first half of the 14th century, it is enough that one thinks only of Hugh II's difficulties in ascending to the throne

33. "The juridical relationship between the judges of Arborea and the Aragonese was based since the beginning of the alliance on misunderstanding. The title of judge, which essentially involved sovereign powers, was emptied of all content by the investiture of the *Giudicato* as a rigorous fief granted to Hugh in 1323. What was to remain a purely formal and honorary title in the concept of the king, remained intact for the judge, in its intrinsic and substantial value; and vice versa were the clauses of investiture that he [Judge Hugh II] considered something of pure form". Loddo Canepa, Francesco. "Alcuni nuovi documenti del secolo XIV sulla Sardegna aragonese", *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale di studi sardi. I - Storia*. Cagliari: Centro internazionale di studi sardi, 1962: 266.

34. "It was the bursting of a tiff that, although contained, had already been outlined at the time of his father, Hugh II, and had its legal and political premises in the equivocal attitude held in the negotiations that preceded the conquest, by James II. In order to curry a valuable ally as the judge was, [the king], after promising to keep him *integre et complete* in the enjoyment of his *Giudicati* prerogatives —substantially sovereign and autonomous—, to increase his dominion and also after showing willingness to propose Hugh, who aspired to this, to the government of the island, failed in his promises and pacts. [The King] not granted the enlargements, placed the island under a Catalan-Aragonese governor general and even subjected the judge to the authority of the governor, with clear violation of the pacts and autonomy of the *Giudicato* (...)". Putzulu, Evandro. "Tre note sul conflitto tra Mariano IV d'Arborea e Pietro IV d'Aragona". *Archivio Storico Sardo*, 28 (1962): 158.



of Oristano, and the need for him to pay a considerable amount of money to the Commune of Pisa to be recognised as a judge.³⁵

Before continuing with our historiographic analysis, we would like to point out that we deliberately did not include among the historians analysed a figure of great importance as Alberto Boscolo, because of his extensive scientific production. Both for the historical themes and for the chronological time span he took into consideration from the early Middle Ages to the Contemporaneity. All elements that would not have allowed their proper evaluation within the limits of space of this article.

Ten years later, in the 1970s, we still find traces of that above mentioned karst river formed by the concepts of the judges' sovereignty and autonomy. In fact, another historian seems to move partially on the lines of Putzulu, according to whom Mariano IV *ebbe sì aspirazioni che concernevano l'intera regione* ("did have aspirations concerning the entire region"), but with the significant difference that the judge would have liked to act *nel rispetto della sovranità aragonese, intesa come dominium eminens. E se la sua condotta può dare a tutta prima l'impressione che abbia mirato al dominio assoluto dell'isola, ciò è solo apparenza* ("in compliance with the Aragonese sovereignty, which he understood as *dominium eminens*. And if his conduct can give the whole first impression that he has aimed at absolute domination of the island, this is only appearance"). We are talking of Giuseppe Meloni (1971) according to which Mariano IV was granted the

(...) *piena facoltà di adempiere a tutti gli uffici e di svolgere tutte le le attività che erano state del defunto governatore*³⁶. *Era un alto riconoscimento che doveva soddisfare per il momento, ma solo per il momento, le sue [di Mariano IV] aspirazioni, che già erano state del padre Ugone II, quelle di poter ottenere una posizione di assoluta preminenza, se pur sotto il dominio dell'Aragona (...)*³⁶

If not even the union in the same person of the powers and competences of the most important Aragonese officer in Sardinia and the most powerful island vassal were sufficient to meet Mariano IV's aspirations, this means that the judge aimed at a complete autonomy.

In fact, the historian went so far as to say that the "most well-advised" historiography had rightly realised that according to Hugh II of Arborea the bond of vassalage meant only the recognition of the *dominium eminens* of Aragon over Arborea *alla quale però, doveva essere riconosciuto un'autonomia completa se non una*

35. Gallinari, Luciano. "Catalan-Aragonese and Arboreas identity-making discourses between historical memory and foundation myths (13th - 15th centuries)", *Identity in the Middle Ages. An Approach from Southern Europe*, Flocel Sabaté, ed. Leeds: ARC-Humanities, forthcoming, and the bibliography therein.

36. "the full power to fulfill all the assignments and activities that had been carried out by the deceased governor. It was a high recognition that had to satisfy for the moment, but only for the moment, his [Judge Mariano IV's] aspirations, that had already been of his father Hugh II, those of being able to obtain a position of absolute pre-eminence, even if under the dominion of Aragon". Meloni, Giuseppe. *Genova e Aragona all'epoca di Pietro il Cerimonioso*: 38.



sovranità assoluta. (“which, however, had to be granted complete autonomy if not absolute sovereignty”). Thus, added the scholar, *l’atto di infeudazione in nessun modo poteva essere considerato come una limitazione dei diritti del giudice nell’ambito del Giudicato*. (“the act of enfeoffment could in no way be considered as a limitation of the judge’s rights within the *Giudicato*.”) For the kings of Aragon, however, as the conquest proceeded *il vincolo di vassallaggio non appariva differente da quello che impegnava la nobiltà catalano-aragonese che veniva infeudata nell’isola e nei cui riguardi il potere regio si manifestava nella sua pienezza*. (“the bond of vassalage did not appear different from that which engaged the Catalan-Aragonese nobility that was enfeoffed in the island and in whose regard the royal power manifested itself in its fullness.”).³⁷

There is an evident contrast between the statements by Giuseppe Meloni contained in different pages of the same volume, in which he affirmed at first that the judges aimed at obtaining an absolute pre-eminence, even if under the Aragonese dominion (p. 38), whereas later he spoke of complete autonomy if not absolute sovereignty to be attributed to the Judge (p. 125). A concept that, when is applied to the Sardinian polity of the fourteenth century, leaves one puzzled.

Above all, it is clear that this is an interpretation of the bull of enfeoffment of 1297 entirely shaped not on the institutional nature of the document itself but on the wishes of historians, not only those of Meloni but also Putzulu’s ones.

How can one think that King James II of Aragon, after twenty-six years of diplomatic negotiations to enter peacefully into possession of the *Regnum Sardiniae et Corsicae*, and after about three years of belligerence, could conceive his dominion as *eminens*, and did not intend instead to recover the huge economic, military and political energy he had used for its concrete realisation? Believe in such hypothesis means not to have carefully observed the articulated project of expansion of the Crown of Aragon across the Mediterranean in the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. The Crown never gave up the idea of a concrete possession of Sardinia, even when the island seemed completely lost, except for two or three strongholds in Iberian hands.³⁸

Or, this means that some interpretative schemes already decades old at the time of the aforementioned scholar, prevailed over the textual analysis of the documents cited.

Between the 1970s and 1990s with Francesco Cesare Casula the interpretation of some figures of judges and their political action took on more and more nationalistic and identitarian tones: keys to understanding that allow to overshadow the due

37. *Le cause della contesa erano remote e la storiografia più avveduta le ha giustamente identificate nella diversa concezione dei rapporti giuridici fra i giudici ad Arborea e il sovrano aragonese, diversità che affondava le sue radici negli anni immediatamente successivi alla conquista (...)* (“The causes of the conflict were remote and the most well-advised historiography has rightly identified them in the different conception of the legal relations between the judges of Arborea and the Aragonese sovereigns, a diversity that had its roots in the years immediately following the conquest (...”). Meloni, Giuseppe. *Genova e Aragona. all’epoca di Pietro il Cerimonioso*. Padua: Cedam, 1971: I, 125.

38. See footnote 18.



attention to the nature of the institutional link between the Kings of Aragon and the Judges of Arborea.

Let us see some indicative examples of this *modus operandi*.

First of all, let us begin with a definition of the Arborea's rulers (in this case, Casula referred to Mariano IV —*il più grande sovrano arborense in assoluto* ("the greatest sovereign of Arborea ever")—, but this includes all the judges of the four Sardinian polities.³⁹ Also in the case of Casula we can find the use of the term "sovereign" to indicate the Arborea ruler.

With regard to the reasons for the clash between Sardinians and Iberians —*che gli Aragonesi chiamarono 'ribellione'* ("that the Aragonese called 'rebellion'")— the use itself of the terms is significant, since it highlights a sort of rejection of the existing feudal bond, accepted and signed by Hugh II for himself and his descendants. According to it, the non-execution of orders and any violent action of the judges against their feudal lord was a rebellion. Nevertheless, the historian went so far as to accuse all Sardinian-Catalan historiography of "acquiescence" since it has so far followed the very partial Aragonese annalist of the sixteenth century Gerónimo Zurita *il quale (...) ha fatto del 'giudice' Mariano IV un bizzoso ribelle che per pura cattiveria odiò i pacifici e benefici colonizzatori iberici* ("who (...) has made the 'judge' Mariano IV a capricious rebel who out of pure wickedness hated the peaceful and benevolent Iberian colonisers").⁴⁰ A historiography that indicates as reasons for the insurrection of Mariano IV some

*pretesti puramente personali, come la brama del Re di Oristano d'aumentare i propri possedimenti feudali ultra iudicatum con le richieste di annessione della cittadina di Alghero; oppure la contesa fratricida con Giovanni per il controllo di Bosa e delle terre circostanti (...).*⁴¹

We have to stress first of all the attribution of the title of king to the judge of Arborea. Secondly for the scholar it does not matter that in the sources Mariano himself expressed his interest in expanding precisely towards Alghero, Bosa and Gallura. Possessions confirmed or granted *ex novo* by the Aragonese sovereign to his brother John of Arborea.

From such a vision, we can only draw a negative image of this unfortunate member of the Judges' family:

La figura di Giovanni, dai documenti d'archivio, appare effettivamente un po' ambigua ed equivoca, molto asservita alla causa aragonese, troppo spesso legata a questioni di denaro e

39. Casula, Francesco Cesare. *La Sardegna aragonese. 1. La Corona d'Aragona*. Sassari: Chiarella, 1990: 246

40. Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 244.

41. "purely personal pretexts, such as the desire of the King of Oristano to increase his feudal possessions *ultra iudicatum* with the requests for annexation of the town of Alghero, or the fratricidal dispute with John for the control of Bosa and the surrounding lands (...)". Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 244.



*ad interessi economici privati anche riguardo a cose che sembrano rientrare in un quadro di politica giudiciale.*⁴²

In reality, John of Arborea's ambiguity consists in some elements: he had not rebelled against the king of Aragon and he had lent himself to help economically and diplomatically his feudal *dominus*. Therefore, he had been rewarded by him. Obviously Peter IV had all his advantages in rewarding John and not doing the same with Mariano IV, who began to appear as a suspicious person in the Aragonese sources as early as the mid-fourteenth century, even before his armed uprising.

At the end of his painting of John of Arborea, Casula provided some explanations perhaps because he was caught by some hesitation:

*ma non vorremmo neppure che questa impressione negativa nascesse a posteriori dal fatto che il 'donnikellu' nel novembre del 1349, venne imprigionato a vita da Mariano (...) per motivi sconosciuti, non necessariamente nobili (...).*⁴³

An explanation that does not explain anything, but that shows a sort of "sense of guilt" of the scholar for his statements, since the image of the judge's brother was negative because he was too "aligned" with the Aragonese sovereign, totally subject to the Crown, apparently forgetting his duties towards the "Giudicato of Arborea"- and not sided with his brother, who was starting his "national" war.⁴⁴

In fact, according to Casula, the authentic reasons that led Mariano IV to the bloody clash:

non potevano essere quelle semplici e meschine suindicate, ma altre ben più gravi e profonde, per la semplice ragione che la lotta, anche se iniziata come rivolta baronale nel 1355, divenne ben presto generale e ad oltranza, condotta con la partecipazione dei Sardi giudicali per quasi cinquant'anni, dal 1353-55 al 1364-1410/20, che mal si spiega se si séguita a

42. "The figure of John, from the archival documents, actually appears a bit ambiguous and equivocal, very subject to the Aragonese cause, too often linked to questions of money and private economic interests even with regard to things that seem to fall within a framework of the *Giudicato* policy". Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 233.

43. "but we do not even want this negative impression to be born *a posteriori* from the fact that the *donnikellu* in November 1349, was imprisoned for life by Mariano (...) for unknown reasons, not necessarily noble". Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 234.

44. Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 250. In May 1331, Judge Hugh II assigned each of his two cadet sons, the *donnikellos* Mariano (the future judge) and John. The former was assigned the castles of Goceano and Marmilla, while the latter was assigned the castles of Monteacuto and Barumele. Both assignments contemplated the relative pertinences. These assignment of castles, villages and lands were done *in feudum honoratum ad imperpetuum*. The judge's document was confirmed by King Alfonso IV of Aragon on 7 April 1332. After 3 April 1336, the new king Peter IV of Aragon confirmed the title of Lord of Monteacuto to John of Arborea, while on 11 September 1339 he granted the title of Count of Goceano and Lord of Marmilla to the *donnikellu* Mariano. For more details see Soddu, Alessandro. "Forme di decentramento del potere nell'Arborea trecentesca: donnikellos, apanages e majoria de pane". *Bollettino di Studi Sardi*, 1 (June 2008): 45-50.



*pensarla alimentata da motivi puramente personali dei Bas Serra e dei loro successori: i Doria-Bas e i Narbona-Bas.*⁴⁵

Here too the contradiction in terms and concepts is evident: previously the historian had spoken of Mariano as a sovereign. Now he talks of a baronial insurrection. Even on the unitary and enthusiastic participation of Sardinian people in this war there are some sources, including a few produced in the *Giudicato*, which show divisions, if not even a rejection of the judge's policy aimed at an all-out clash with the Aragonese.

From such an institutional interpretation of the history of the *Giudicato* derived that Mariano IV of Arborea, "the greatest sovereign of Arborea ever", ruled over

*L'Arborea [che] - come era accaduto per i 'giudicati' di Cagliari Torres e Gallura aveva smesso di essere una merèia (cioè un distretto amministrativo dell'ormai spenta Sardegna bizantina) ed era diventato uno stato sovrano alla fine del secolo IX o agli inizi del secolo X. (...) Al pari degli altri stati sardi, anche l'Arborea -oltre ad essere uno stato sovrano- era un regno perfetto (con facoltà di stringere alleanze e di stipulare trattati internazionali) e superindividuale (...).*⁴⁶

Between the 1970s and 1990s we were witnessing the development of a different historiography of the last two centuries of existence of the *Giudicato* of Arborea, and its relationship with the Crown of Aragon. One of the spokesmen for this alternative historiography was undoubtedly Marco Tangheroni, who also focused on the idea that the relationship between Aragonese and Arboreas was doomed to end in an open clash on the basis of a feudal bond, differently conceived. The scholar underlined that the premises of this had been laid at the time of the conquest, the first organisation of the island and of the arrangement of relations between the Aragonese monarchy and the *Giudicato* of Arborea.

Mentre Giacomo II ed i suoi successori intendevano trattare il giudice come un qualsiasi feudatario catalano, con, al più qualche segno, puramente formale, di onore e di particolare amicizia e considerazione, questi [il giudice Ugone II] aveva sperato di poter acquistare nell'isola una posizione di effettiva e territoriale preminenza, sia pure sotto la protezione

45. "could not be those simple and petty aforementioned, but others much more serious and profound, for the simple reason that the struggle, although it began as a baronial uprising in 1355, soon became general and to the bitter end, conducted with the participation of the *Giudicato* Sardinians for almost fifty years, from 1353 to 1355 and [then from] 1364 to 1410/20, which can not be explained if we continue to think that it was being fed by purely personal reasons of the Bas Serra and their successors: the Doria-Bas and the Narbona-Bas". Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 245.

46. "Arborea [that] - as it had happened to the *Giudicati* of Calari Torres and Gallura had ceased to be a *merèia* [that is an administrative district of the extinct Byzantine Sardinia] and had become a sovereign state at the end of the ninth century or the beginning of the tenth century (...). Like the other Sardinian polities, Arborea —in addition to being a sovereign state— was a perfect and superindividual kingdom (with the right to form alliances and international treaties) (...)". Casula, Francesco Cesare. "La Sardegna aragonese. 1...": 88-89.



*e l'alta sovranità aragonese, conservando comunque una completa autonomia nel proprio giudicato.*⁴⁷

Tangheroni's statements may seem similar to those of other historians mentioned above, but we can not fail to notice the absence of tones and terms that openly recall the sovereignty, total autonomy and independence of Arborea's rulers. On the contrary, this reading shows a greater relevance to the provision of sources and, specifically, to the provision of the papal bull with which the *Regnum Sardiniae et Corsicae* was invested to the Aragonese king James II in 1297, and of the following act of enfeoffment of the *Giudicato* of Arborea to Hugh II (1323).

Mariano IV, the one who was considered the most important Sardinian judge, was defined as *a personalità robusta ed energica* ("strong and energetic personality"), not an absolute and independent sovereign.

Also Bruno Anatra, an historian of the Modern Age and great expert of Sardinian history, had very similar historiographic positions and, still on the question of the judges' legal *status*, this time in relation to Hugh II, made a reference to his sovereign prerogatives:

*(...) Pare che l'intraprendente giudice mirasse a duplice obiettivo di svincolarsi dalla invadenza pisana e ottenere dalle trattative col re il raggiungimento del 'pieno e integrale godimento delle sue prerogative' sovrane.*⁴⁸

In the pages of Anatra, except for that aforementioned reference -that, however, seems a quotation of another text unfortunately not cited in the footnotes- there is no reference to alleged royalty, sovereignty and total independence of the judges from the Crown of Aragon. On the contrary, the importance of the enfeoffment of the *Giudicato* in 1323 is reiterated on several occasions.

With regard to the causes that led to the Arboreas' uprising, the historian pointed out some significant differences in the relations between the Aragonese sovereigns and the Sardinian judges during the reigns of Alfonso IV and his son Peter IV. For instance, he mentioned the return in 1328 with a feudal investiture of the city of Bosa with its district (*Planargia*) and the neighbouring *Curadoria* of Costa de Vals [an administrative District of the former *Giudicato* of Logudoro], which the Arboreas had been pledged by the Malaspina in 1308 and which Hugh II had ceded to the

47. "While James II and his successors intended to treat the judge as any Catalan feudal lord, with, at most, some sign, purely formal, of honour and particular friendship and consideration, he [Judge Hugh II] had hoped to be able to acquire on the island a position of effective and territorial pre-eminence, albeit under the protection and high sovereignty of Aragon, while retaining in any case a complete autonomy in its own *Giudicato*". Tangheroni, Marco. "Il feudalesimo in Sardegna in età aragonese", *Sardegna mediterranea*. Rome: Il Centro di Ricerca, 1983: 40.

48. "(...) It seems that the enterprising judge aimed at a twofold objective of freeing himself from the intrusiveness of Pisa, and obtaining from negotiations with the king the achievement of the "full and integral enjoyment of his sovereign prerogatives". Anatra, Bruno. "Dall'unificazione aragonese ai Savoia", *La Sardegna medioevale e moderna*, John Day, Bruno Anatra, Lucetta Scaraffia, eds. Turin: Utet, 1997: 202-203.



Crown in 1323. In the same year, the judge and his successors were granted the power to confer titles (count, viscount, marquis) on their children and to freely choose the heir to the *Giudicato* among them. These were formal concessions that increased the prestige and jurisdiction of the House of Arborea, and confirmed what had been promised at the time of the investiture of the Sardinian polity.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, according to Anatra, it was on the ground of frustrated aspirations for territorial expansion, even before that of defending one's own authority, that Mariano IV reached the breaking with the King of Aragon, although the two aspects were closely intertwined.

The arrest of John of Arborea by Mariano IV would have been *la prima, perentoria, risposta del nuovo giudice ad un tale disegno, tanto più vibrante in quanto ai molti favori per l'uno erano corrisposte altrettante ripulse per l'altro* ("the first, peremptory, response of the new judge to such a design [of the King], all the more vibrant since the many favours for one [of the two brothers] were corresponded as many repulses for the other").⁵⁰

Subsequent events seem to confirm that King Peter IV, by favouring John of Arborea wanted to undermine the internal compactness of the *Giudicato*, to reduce its wide jurisdictional autonomy guaranteed by the Bull of Infeudation.

4. Some examples of the most recent historiography of the 21st century

Even in recent times new publications continue to propose some interpretative hypotheses really interesting for the aims of this work.

Some of them still suggest stereotypes of isolation and remoteness of Sardinia.⁵¹ In others, instead, the authors fill the gaps of the sources with theories that are not sufficiently supported from primary documents, but that make a hold on other scholars.

These interpretative hypotheses are linked to what we said before on the reconstruction of memory, according to choices that respond to the purpose—conscious and unconscious—of those who rebuild it: to demonstrate that Sardinian judges were sovereign autonomous from authorities outside the island, and that the polities ruled by them were real Kingdoms; and to show how Sardinian society was aligned with contemporary Mediterranean society, revealing that, for them, this was not the case neither in that historical period nor today.⁵²

49. Anatra, Bruno. "Dall'unificazione aragonese...": 225.

50. Anatra, Bruno. "Dall'unificazione aragonese...": 240.

51. Martin, Jean-Marie. "Les actes sardes (XI^e-XII^e siècle)", *L'héritage Byzantin en Italie (VIIIe-XIIIe siècle). I La fabrique documentaire*, Jean-Marie Martin, Annick Peters-Custot, Vivien Prigent, eds. Rome: École Française de Rome, 2011: 191 and 194, who still supports the idea of the island's geographical isolation.

52. See some observations also on the historiography of early medieval Sardinia in Gallinari, Luciano. "Reflections on Byzantine Sardinia...": 83-107.



Once again, it surfaces the belief, very widespread in Sardinia —sometimes even unconsciously, as it emerges in the texts' authors— that the island must always be “special”, detached from the “normal” course of the surrounding events, despite their statements in the opposite direction.⁵³

4.1. The Isolation of Sardinia

In recent publications some scholars have reaffirmed the survival of topics that one thought had already been overcome, such as the isolation of Sardinia.

In 2005 Gian Giacomo Ortu speaks of Sardinia's Byzantine Age as *a mondo misterioso* (“a mysterious world”), foreign to the Western world until the eve of the Gregorian Reform. Moreover, he entitled *I Giudicati alla ribalta della storia* (“The *Giudicati* in the limelight of History”) the part of his book devoted to the origin of Sardinian *Giudicati*, as if the judges had not existed before being cited in the Western sources of the 11th century.⁵⁴

In an essay published the following year Giuseppe Meloni developed the idea of a *progressivo isolamento della Sardegna, che era destinato a divenire presto pressoché totale* (“a progressive isolation of Sardinia, which was destined to soon become almost total”). This statement must have seemed excessive to the author himself who, a few lines later, maintained that, however, the Muslim presence in the Mediterranean may not have led to an immediate and definitive break in relations between Sardinia and Byzantium and the autonomous evolution of the institutions present on the island: *non va radicalizzata, quindi, l'osservazione secondo la quale alla presenza araba nei mari centro-mediterranei seguì l'immediata e totale rottura con Bisanzio e l'evoluzione autonoma delle istituzioni locali*.⁵⁵

The texts of these Sardinian historians are similar to others written by scholars from outside the island, who also recently insist on this topic as in the case of Vivien Prigent, according to which Sardinia was *pauvre, isolée et peu ou mal hellénisée* (“poor, isolated, and little and poorly Hellenised”).⁵⁶

53. According to Cossu, Tatiana. “Dell'identità al passato: il caso della preistoria”, *Sardegna. Seminario sull'identità*, Giulio Angioni, Francesco Bachis, Benedetto Caltagirone, Tatiana Cossu, eds. Cagliari: Cuec, 2007: 124-125 this kind of affirmation reveals *il non sentirsi parte della 'grande storia' [...] il non percepirsi centro ma periferia, il non pensarsi fra coloro che costruiscono la storia, ma fra coloro che l'hanno subita [... per alcuni] 'il complesso del nanismo'* (“the feeling that one is not part of the ‘great history’ [...] the perception of not to be centre but periphery, the thinking of not to be among those who make History, but among those who have suffered it [... for someone] ‘the complex of dwarfism’”).

54. Ortu, Gian Giacomo. *La Sardegna dei giudici*. Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2005: 39-75.

55. “Therefore, we should not radicalise the observation that Arab presence in the Central-Mediterranean seas was followed by an immediate and total break with Byzantium and the autonomous evolution of local institutions”. Meloni, Giuseppe. “L'origine dei Giudicati”, *Storia della Sardegna. 1 Dalle origini al Settecento*, Manlio Brigaglia, Antonio Mastino, Gian Giacomo Ortu, eds. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006: 76-77.

56. Prigent, Vivien. “L'usage du sceau de plomb dans les régions italiennes de tradition byzantine au Haut Moyen-Âge”, *L'héritage Byzantin en Italie (VIIIe-XIIe siècle)*. I *La fabrique documentaire*, Jean-Marie Martin, Annick Peters-Custot, Vivien Prigent, eds. Rome: École Française de Rome, 2011: 223-224.



In some ways, a few years ago two archaeologists put forward a historiographic proposal that was moving towards similar levels of interpretation of the early medieval history of Sardinia, and especially of a topic that fuelled the historiographic debate on Sardinia with regard to the real extent of the Muslim presence on the island and its role in the island's history.

We are referring to the debate —much more interesting for the exegetical methodology than for the few sources cited— on the possible Islamic presence in Sardinia in the early Middle Ages.

This hypothesis, even though did not speak openly of isolation, nevertheless envisaged a certain and considerable presence of Muslims in parts of the island between the 8th and the 10th century, which would confirm the opening of the Island to the Mediterranean with its capital, Carales, endowed with a multicultural, perhaps even a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. “which is the perfect image of the Mediterranean world of those centuries”. These statements were based on two inscriptions and one graffiti of the 10th-11th centuries.⁵⁷

Realising that perhaps they had advanced a quite audacious interpretation, the two scholars in the final conclusions of their essay deny what they have written in the previous pages, stating that: “It is important that (...) we do not feel authorised to think of Sardinia and Cagliari in particular, as a place of peaceful coexistence between different cultural groups”.⁵⁸ Maybe also in this case the historiographic problem lies in the adherence of events to the “perfect” model consciously or otherwise shaped on current scholars' parameters.

In even more recent years, other scholars have insisted on the topic of the isolation of Sardinia. In 2017 Gian Giacomo Ortu re-proposed twelve years later his historiographic interpretation of an alleged isolation and alienity of Sardinia from the western world until Gregory VII's age, as if in the meantime many works that dismantled such a historical interpretation had not been published. He went even further by talking of “written documents [that] began to dispel the pitch darkness that had enveloped the island in Byzantine times”.⁵⁹

Affirmations not far from those of Laura Galoppini, according to whom

57. The Findings in the St. Saturnino complex of Cagliari were: 1 inscription in Arabic dated at the beginning of the 10th century: “it is an indication of the presence (...) of funerary areas where some Arab-Muslim elements of the insular society were buried”. Its legend says: (...) *sanat arna'at wa-tis'in wa-mâ'tîn* (“[Of the / In the / The] year two hundred and ninety-four”). It has been related to an inscription found in 1887 during excavations in the Viceroy palace of Cagliari; 1 Graffiti, found in an internal wall of the left aisle of the eastern arm of the Basilica, 4 lines of text in a poor state of preservation, in which we read only the name Muḥammad, perhaps the Prophet. It has been dated between the first half of the 9th and the second half of the 10th century, for stylistic reasons.

58. Salvi, Donatella; Fois, Piero. “San Saturnino: uno specchio di una società multiculturale fra IX e X secolo”, *Settecento-Millemcento. Storia, archeologia e arte nei “secoli bui” del Mediterraneo. Dalle fonti scritte, archeologiche ed artistiche alla ricostruzione della vicenda storica. La Sardegna laboratorio di esperienze culturali*, Rossana Martorelli, ed. Cagliari: Scuola Sarda Editrice, 2013: II, 866-867.

59. Ortu, Gian Giacomo. “Establishing Power and Law in Medieval and Modern Sardinia”, *A companion to Sardinian History*, Michelle Hobart, ed. Boston: Brill, 2017: 229.



During the centuries of the 'long Byzantine age', (...) the island was still not completely excluded from maritime traffic and Mediterranean events (...). After the Arab expansion into the African coastal countries (...) Sardinia was isolated and distant from Byzantine influence.⁶⁰

For all these scholars be an Imperial province, have diplomatic relations with the Byzantine Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Apostolic See and the Caliphate of Cordoba —all circumstances proved by several textual, epigraphic, archaeological and architectonic sources— were not sufficient elements to believe that Sardinia was integrated into the political and cultural Euro-Mediterranean landscape.

Another very recent book is extremely interesting and rich in stimuli for historiographic and methodological reflection starting from its own title, which shows the principle of another interpretative short circuit. By reading it —*Il Giudicato di Cagliari. Storia, società, evoluzione e crisi di un regno sardo* ("The *Giudicato* of Cagliari. History, society, evolution and crisis of a Sardinian kingdom")— the reader gets the impression that the *Giudicato* was actually equivalent to a kingdom. It's a shame that starting from page 10, the author himself takes the trouble to deny his title when, talking about the judges, he says that: *Nonostante le evidenti ambizioni di alcuni di loro, i giudici non erano mai stati re e per i pontefici romani non fu né opportuno né utile riconoscerli o promuoverli come tali (...)* ("Despite the clear ambitions of some of them, the judges had never been kings, and it was neither appropriate nor useful for the Roman pontiffs to recognise or promote them as such"). Since the contrast between the title and the content of these first pages of his work appeared to be insufficient, the author also added that we are in front of:

*un potere pubblico non di natura regale, esercitato però come se il giudice fosse un vero e proprio re, da qui la convinzione e l'aspirazione di diversi signori sardi, a partire dall'XI secolo, di poter acquisire una vera e propria dignità regale perorando la loro causa presso la Chiesa o l'Impero, autorità legittimanti nel mondo medioevale, alle quali la Sardegna guardava e faceva riferimento.*⁶¹

Also in this author there is a re-proposal of a kind of interpretation of the figure of Sardinian judges that recalls those elaborated decades before by Solmi, Loddo Canepa, Putzulu, Carta Raspi..., when they spoke of the contrast between the Aragonese's vision and the judges of Arborea's one in the fourteenth century. In the

60. Galoppini, Laura. "Overview of Sardinian History (500-1500)", *A companion to Sardinian History*, Michelle Hobart, ed. Boston: Brill, 2017: 90-91. The explanation for such statements also consists in the bibliography mentioned in these texts: insufficient and outdated.

61. "a public power of a non-royal nature, but exercised as if the judge was a real king, hence the conviction and the aspiration of several Sardinian rulers, from the eleventh century, that they could acquire a real royal dignity by pleading their case with the Church or the Empire, the legitimating authorities in the medieval world, to which Sardinia looked and referred to". Zedda, Corrado. *Il Giudicato di Cagliari. Storia, società, evoluzione e crisi di un regno sardo*. Cagliari: Arkadia, 2017: 10, 25.



entire passage mentioned above, the most important words are *come se* (“as if”) that put on the same level the prerogatives of a king and those of a judge.

A self-consideration —that of the Judges of Arborea— which according to this historiographic hypothesis led in the generation of Mariano IV to an open clash between the *Giudicato* of Arborea and the *Regnum Sardiniae et Corsicae*.

The interpretative short circuit continues a few pages later, when the historian, who had spoken of the non-royal nature of Sardinian Judges’ power, states that they *furono capaci di operare una matura politica internazionale utile alla stabilità dei loro regni, concedendo sì porzioni del loro potere ma senza mai subire quel colonialismo che è stato a lungo riconosciuto da una storiografia (...)* (“were able to operate a mature international policy useful for the stability of their kingdoms, granting portions of their power but without ever suffering that colonialism that has long been recognised by a certain historiography”).⁶²

If we analyse this passage in detail, a question immediately arises: if their power was non-royal in nature, why did they rule over kingdoms? Not to mention the reference to the positive defense by the judges against colonialism from outside the island, specifically from the Communes of Genoa and Pisa. It is all too well known that it was the politics of the two “Italian” cities, at the level of institutions and prominent families, which caused the disappearance of three out of four *Giudicati* in the second half of the thirteenth century. Without forgetting the acts of vassalage signed by Sardinian judges against the two aforementioned Communes and, finally, the increasing interference especially of Pisa in the Arborea’s political life also on the occasion of Hugh II’s ascent to the *Giudicato* throne (1321).

And if what we just said was not enough, already in the thirteenth century a legal *Summa* of European level —the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X *el Sabio* of Castile— dedicated a paragraph to the Sardinian judges and their power, extremely clear in the title itself. The second *Partida*, dedicated to emperors and kings, their powers and origins, confirmed the lack of royal status for the Sardinian *giudici*, with a precise reference to them. In Title I, Law XI, it was clarified and made explicit: *Quales son los otros grandes, e honrados Señores que non son Emperadores, nin reyes* (“Who are the other great and honourable lords who are not emperors or kings”).⁶³ The text recounts: *E jube tanto quiere dezir como judgador e non acostumbraron llamar este nome a ningund Señor, fueras ende, a los quatro Señores que judgan, e señorean en Sardenña* (“And judge means as judger (a person who judges) and they are not used to give this name to any lord except the four Lords who judge and rule in Sardinia”).

Similarly clear is the account under Title I, Law XII: *Que poder han los señores sobredichos, que han el señorío de las tierras por heredamiento* (“What power have these Lords, who rule over their lands for inheritance”):

E ha poderio cada uno dellos en su tierra en fazer justicia, e en todas las otras cosas que han ramo de señorío segund dizen los privilegios que ellos han de los emperadores e de los

62. Zedda, Corrado. *Il Giudicato di Cagliari...*: 11-12.

63. Gallinari, Luciano. *Les Judicats sardes: Un modèle de souveraineté médiévale?* Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (PhD Dissertation), 2009: 208.



*reyes (...), o segund la antigua costumbre que usaron de luengo tiempo, fueras ende que non pueden legitimar, nin fazer ley nin fuero nuevo sin otorgamiento del pueblo.*⁶⁴

We believe that most of the statements we have commented on so far are historians' *desiderata*, which in many cases automatically shower on their texts.

5. Conclusions

In order to draw some conclusions, it seems that the selection of historiographic cases we have analysed could provide some stimuli for a further and more in-depth investigation of the historiographic picture concerning medieval Sardinia. The island, given its geographically limited nature, is a very stimulating case study, especially to research on topics such as Identity, Otherness, Specialty, Isolation and Peripherality. As well as, for the contemporary use that is made of such concepts, and the possibility of analysing their contemporary application through the heuristic and exegetic tools of different Social Sciences.

A further consideration concerns the role of the historian in relation to the subject of her/his study. From the examples analysed and from many others that could be examined, it emerges forcefully the need to increase the multidisciplinary reading of historical sources. This is in order to refine the analytical tools better and better, and to avoid deviations from the essence of the examined documentation in order to respond to personal needs of various kinds, in many cases unknown even to the historians themselves.

In our opinion, this is a priority in a historical period dominated by a sort of "presentification" of the historical past, which facilitates its manipulation and underestimation as an instrument of analysis and decipherment of the present.

64. "And each of them has the power to impart justice in his own country, and in all the other things in which they exercise their own lordship, according to that which is affirmed by privileges they have from emperors and kings (...) or, according to the ancient customs that they used for a long time, except that they cannot legitimise, nor give any new code of laws, without the people's consent". Alfonso X, *Las Siete Partidas*. Salamanca: Andrea de Portonariis, 1555: f. 7v (Ley XI and Ley XII).

