

*Islandscapes under question: the Maltese Archipelago, Pantelleria  
and Marettimo and their contexts in classical Antiquity.*

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*“Malta, my dear sir, is in my thoughts, sleeping and waking”  
(Sir Horatio Nelson)*

During the last two decades, three new concepts were introduced in the field of maritime archaeology, and in maritime history as a whole. The first was that of “Maritime Cultural Landscape” defined as the “whole network of sailing routes, old as well as new, with ports and harbours along the coast, and its related constructions and remains of human activity, underwater as well as terrestrial” (Westerdhal 1992: 6). It opposed Natural Landscape (i.e. geo-biological determinisms) and Cultural Landscape (human impact) and reached a fair success in the following years among many scholars (Parker 1999). It quickly led to the specialization of the notion of Landscape as to indicate natural landscape, as opposed to other particular, mainly cultural, landscapes (Gosden & Head 1994). The concept of “Seascape” (Gosden & Pavlides 1994) was thus applied to islands considered as lands partially determined by the sea, in a balanced view of the complementary impacts of Man and Nature. Increased interest in Island Archaeology, especially among prehistorians, led many to consider islands as a world *per se* and insularity as a sufficient common feature. In other words, the implicit premise of island archaeology was “that insular human societies show intrinsic characteristics essentially dissimilar from those on mainlands” (Boomert & Bright 2007: 3). In 1996, a dissertation about Archaeology of the Early Cyclades, published four years later (Broodbank 2000) introduced the notion of “Islandscape”, which focused on the Islands, especially under the cultural aspect of maritime connectivity, a concept made essential by recent research in the history of the classical Mediterranean as a whole (Horden & Purcell 2000). Despite a good reception, contained in the first reviews of the book, the concept of “Islandscape” encountered scepticism and was put under discussion (Tartaron 2001). More recently, Island Archaeology as a pertinent field has been much discussed, together with the notion of Islandscape

(Fitzpatrick 2004: passim; esp. Curet 2004 and Renfrew 2004; Rainbird 2007; Boomert & Bright 2007), leading to the convincing conclusion that “The primary postulate of island archaeology – namely that the manifestations of human behaviour on islands show persuasive structural similarities and are essentially divergent from those of mainlands – can be taken to be incorrect” (Boomert & Bright 2007: 17).

With this in mind, we must reconsider the way we must analyze any singular island, not only balancing natural determinisms and social human behaviour, but also its contexts. A. Boomert and A. J. Bright state: “Clearly, instead of seeing each island as a distinct unit of study, a balance should be found between understanding its individual cultural development and that of its sphere of regional, often archipelagic, social interaction (Curet 2004). Both fields of analysis are to be considered as mutually influencing since, as we have seen, distinctly single-island cultural manifestations often originated as a means of creating insular distinction and identity within the regional interaction sphere” (Boomert & Bright 2007: 14).

The sea is both a boundary or a highway (Broodbank 1993). Sailing directions depend mainly on wind directions and seasonal changes. The importance of seasonality and environment in ancient sailing has long been pointed out and still must be stressed (Casson 1995; Pryor 1987; Duncan-Jones 1990; Horden & Purcell 2000; Morton 2001; Mc Cormick 2001; Arnaud 2005). Long and short-term tendencies, depending both on global and regional political, social, technological and economic contexts may strongly impact sailing patterns and an island’s economy, society and landscape. Long-term processes have been much stressed on since Braudel’s times; they are still worth considering, but must be balanced with short-term changes. Although there appear to be strong permanencies, one must also pay attention to possible changes, as recently stressed by several scholars (Mc Cormick 2001: 83-119; Arnaud 2005). How much the rise and fall of Punic Sea-Power and the making of the Roman Peace may have impacted the Islands between Malta and Marittimo is a small, but significant, part of the more general problem of the changes in sailing-routes and patterns of the Ancient Mediterranean.

### **Natural features and their presentation.**

Ancient writers, especially geographers, do mention above what seems to be normal three islands as a starting point for sea-measurements or as noteworthy blue sea islands. I mean, clockwise, Malta (*Melite*), sometimes, but not always, associated with Gozo (*Caudos/Gaulos*), Pantelleria (*Cossouros/Cossura*) and Marittimo (*Hiera/Maritima*). Some added to these Lampedusa (*Lampadusa*) and Kerkennah (*Cercinna*).

### The Islands:

**Malta and Gozo:** distant 52 nm from Sicily, these two islands are just acceptable landmarks: Malta's highest point above sea level is 253 m., whereas that of Gozo is 201 m. Both are quite flat when seen from the high sea. Both have good harbours and were considered as very good shelters (DS V. 12) or wintering places (Cic., *Verr.* ii, 4.103-4; *Act. Apost.*, 28.11). They could be a convenient call on the east-west routes and on the route from Lesser Syrtis to the Tyrrhenian. Gozo (8 x 4 nm, or 67 kmL) is much smaller than Malta (15x7 nm, or 246 kmL), and arable land is present on both islands. This may explain why the islands were considered *fertilis* by Ovid (*Fast.* III. 567). However, well known exported resources from Malta were actually artifacts, especially a kind of fine linen, well appreciated at Rome (DS V.12.2), and little dogs<sup>1</sup>. The high standard of life of Malta was supposed to be dependant upon imports (*Ibid.* 12.3).

Though very close to each other, as early as the ps.-Skylax, both islands had distinct cities (such as Rhenea and Delos within the Aegean), which were situated inland. Each island was thus considered a special entity, more than part of an archipelago.

**Pantelleria:** situated 46 nm ESE from Cape Bon, it is rather small in size (7 x 4.5 nm, 83 kmL), and *wasparua* as compared with other islands, especially Malta and Gozo (Sil. It., XIV. 272). Its height (836 m) makes it an excellent landmark. It has small but good shelters from the prevailing North-West winds, which were larger in ancient times. It had at least three harbours in ancient times (Baldassari & Fontana 2002; Abelli *et al.* 2006). Its soil is potentially fertile, but the lack of water make it dry (Monti 2003: 1155). In Roman times, it was considered *sterilis* by Ovid (*Fast.* III. 567), to whom Malta appeared *fertilis*, but in Punic times, the settlement pattern of the island was characterized by small farms that probably suggest an element of self-subsistence. By the first years of the second Punic war (Plb, III. 96.13), it had only "something like a city" (*polismation*), which was located on the so-called "acropolis", above the present harbour.

**Marettimo:** the westernmost of the Aegades; 637 m high, it is an excellent landmark west of Sicily. It had good shelters, but no permanent harbours, and had little permanent human settlement (a castle and a village).

### Weather and Sea

Ancient Sicily is the boundary mark between the eastern and central Mediterranean. This boundary is not, however, a meteorological one, for, all round Sic-

<sup>1</sup> Strab., VI.2.11, C. 277; but according to Pliny, HN, III. 152, following Callimachus, these dogs came from the homonymous island, now Meleda, between Corfu and the Illyrian coast.

ily, winds generally blow from the west, becoming more and more regular during the sailing season, and blowing from west to northwest or even north between Sicily and Crete, from spring to late August. The real meteorological frontiers are in fact Sardinia and the Balearic archipelagos.

Nevertheless, Sicily determines two straits: the strait of Messina and the Channel between Africa and Sicily, the latter being itself divided into 3 channels :

- Malta Channel, north of a line drawn between Malta and Pantelleria,
- Sicily Channel, between Pantelleria and Sicily
- Pantelleria Channel between Pantelleria and Cape Bon

The strait of Messina is a very complex zone (Flesca 2002) : violent, sudden and turbulent winds, along with strong, alternate tidal streams, whose directions change every six hours, make it not only a very complex and dangerous zone, but also an area whose crossing may need several stops in order to wait for better conditions. The myth of Charybdis and Scylla reminds us the fears it inspired. In fact, journeys bound both southwards and northward along the strait could hardly be sailed in a straight line, given the capricious character of winds and the change of direction of tidal streams. It could take several days to go from the so-called “Adriatic” (the sea south Messina) to the Tyrrhenian basin and vice-versa. Several calls were necessary, as shown by the end of Paul’s travel when the Apostle sailed, not on a small coaster, but on a grain-ship from Alexandria, which had wintered at Malta. Having left Malta it stopped first at Syracuse, then at Rhegium, before entering the Tyrrhenian, proceeding straight to Puteoli. Travelers often preferred to go by land between Syracuse and some port on the northern shores of Sicily. So did Apollonius of Tyana (Philostr. VA, V. 11; VIII. 15).

Though situated almost 40 nm east the direct line between Cape Bon and Cape Lilibeo, Pantelleria divides the Channel between Cape Bon and Cape Feto in two almost equal parts. In the main, this channel has the same orientation as the northwest prevailing winds, generating a reasonable current of half a knot to one knot, running eastwards, and getting stronger in Malta’s channel. This undoubtedly made the direct route fast and easy for ships sailing eastwards, but longer and more difficult for those sailing in the opposite direction, especially for ancient sailing ships. This was also true for oared vessels, whose ability for tacking was scarce. One can imagine how difficult a westward journey must have been when a ship whose speed, under good conditions could hardly reach 3 knots, had to face a 1 kn. current from the opposite direction. This plight is especially accentuated when one considers that the best angle one could achieve was about 60° from the wind (and actually much less given the drift). Furthermore, the square sail, even when trans-

formed into a triangular one, made tacking a long and fastidious operation as the ship had to wear. The best solution would have been to sail southwards in order to reach the sheltered zones between Lesser Syrtis and Cape Bon, characterized by smooth summer sea-breezes blowing from the East.

### **Subjective geography and sea-routes**

The way ancient writers used to describe those islands or how they inserted them in a series of sea-measurements gives a clear idea of some changes in their place in sea-routes, and in political sea-power. Islands, even those considered by ancient writers as “pelagic” ones (i.e. those situated one day far or more from the mainland), such as Pantelleria, Malta and Gozo, were generally described apart from the mainland. However, after a certain stretch of land islands were supposed to fit with. The way they are described thus shows the subjective perception of their links with continents. Pantelleria, Malta, Gozo and Lampedusa are described by ps.-Skylax (111) with regard to Cape Bon, which is quite surprising as far as Malta, Gozo and Lampedusa are concerned, but is quite normal to who considers them as Punic islands, as ps.-Skylax did in the IV<sup>th</sup> century.

Diodorus Siculus (V. 12) chose to associate not only Malta and Gozo, but also Kerhennah, with Sicily, instead of Africa. This point of view is clearly an Italic one, and reflects the fall of these islands into Roman hands. On the other hand, Strabo, who uses at least three different sources, mentions the islands alternately as part of Sicily - the latter being considered as part of Italy (VI.2.11) -, or Africa (XVII.3.16). Later authors, writing after the Roman conquest, when these islands were made part of *prouincia Sicilia*, described them entirely with Sicily. In his overview of the Mediterranean, Strabo names Pantelleria, together with *Aegimuros*, as one of the islands “in front of Sicily and Libya” (II.5.19, C 123), but omits Malta, which found no place with respect to another land or the division of seas inherited from Eratosthenes. It seems that, by later times, Malta had no substantial existence in the Greek framework of the Mediterranean. According to Mela (II.7.120) and Pliny (III. 92), depending on the same lost unknown author, *Gaulos*, *Melita* and *Cossura* were *circa Siciliam*, but *Africam uersus* or *in Africam uersae* thus closer to Sicily, but on the way to Africa. Orosius (IV.8.5) names *Lipara* and *Melita* as *insulae Siciliae nobiles*. Some scholars (Silbermann) consider that according to Mela (II.7.120), Pliny (III.92), and Martianus Capella (VI. 648), all three islands were parts of the *fretum Siculum*. This is clearly true of Martianus Capella, but he probably misunderstood Mela, Pliny and their common source. According to Procopius (*BV* 1.14) Gaulus and Melita “marked the boundary between the Adriatic and Tuscan Seas”. For classical writers down to Pliny, “Adriatic” meant the whole sea between Peloponnesus and Sicily. The Maltese Archipelago had later reached the status of boundary-marker between the central Mediterranean

system, and the west-Italian one, which then included Sicily.

Subjective geography thus shows that bridging one island with one continent or another relied much upon geopolitical considerations rather than upon Natural Landscape. It also reflects the reality of sea-routes. Pantelleria is almost always situated in respect of both Cape Bon or Kelybia (*Aspis/ Clupea*) and *Lilybaeum*.

Malta and Gozo were not considered by ancient writers as part of an archipelago. This is by no mean surprising: the same situation may be observed on other neighbouring city-islands such as Rhenea and Delos in the Cyclades. It is however of major interest to note that they belonged to a group of islands including Pantelleria, Gozo, Malta, Lampedusa and Kerkennah. In *Silius Italicus*, Malta appears before *Cossyra*, whose name, in contrast, occurs together with Gozo's (XI. 272-274). A natural link between Pantelleria and Malta is also suggested by the naming of Malta immediately after *Cossyrus*, as situated further East away from Cape Bon, and by Strabo's measurement (XVII.3.16) there was a very short distance between the two islands, that of 500 *stadia*. Editors have generally considered that the number is erroneous (it was probably closer to 1,500, equal to two days and one night at sea). This mistake may be traced to Strabo's source, who considered, like Silius Italicus, that Pantelleria and the Maltese archipelago were close together. In turn this perception was probably due to the speed of the eastward route between the two points.

On the contrary, the three Islands mentioned by Diodorus (Malta, Gozo and Kerkennah) mark the westwards sea-route between Sicily and Africa through the so-called *isole Pelagie*. This is the exact route followed by Belisarius' fleet<sup>2</sup> (Procop., *BV* 1.14), from Syracuse to Malta and Gozo, and thence, after a one day sail, on to *Caput-Vada* (Ras Kapudia), about 75° from the prevailing winds. Thence, ships sailing to Carthage had to follow the coastline and make for Cape Bon. This explains why Agathocles' fleet needed 6 days (DS XX.6.3) (after leaving from Syracuse) before sighting Africa and landing, maybe at Cape Bon (Casson 1971: 295, n.108), but possibly at any other point along the eastern shores of modern Tunisia. It was already familiar to an Athenian such as Thucydides, who was able to estimate its normal duration. The abnormally high freight-rate from Carthage to Sicily in the Diocletian's Prices Edict probably refers to the same route and to the same direction (Arnaud 2007), and shows that it was probably the normal route

2 "And setting sail quickly they touched at the islands of Gaulus and Melita,[47] which mark the boundary between the Adriatic and Tuscan Seas. There a strong east wind arose for them, and on the following day it carried the ships to the point of Libya, at the place which the Romans call in their own tongue "Shoal's Head." For its name is "Caputvada," and it is five days' journey from Carthage for an unencumbered traveller".

westwards (fig. 1).

A journey from Syracuse to Carthage may thus have lasted more than thrice the normal duration of the same journey in the reverse direction. The coasting part of the same route was probably followed by the Peloponnesian, sent off in the spring from Peloponnese in the merchantman, who arrived from *Neapolis*, in Libya, at Selinus in August. Thucydides considered *Neapolis* (= Nabeul) as “the nearest point to Sicily, which is only two days' and a night's voyage” to Selinus (Thc., VII.50.2). Pantelleria was just in the middle of this route and visible from Nabeul. Although *Aspis/Clupea* is geographically closer to Sicily, *Neapolis* is actually closer for a ship sailing from Lesser Syrtis.

By the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Pantelleria was reaching a noteworthy place in trade-routes, as shown by the importance of the so-called “Pantellerian ware” ceramics (Massa 2002), the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* lists Sicily (66), *Cos-sora* (67) and Sardinia (68), suggesting that they were part of a same route, maybe in a broader context characterised by the increasing importance of coasting, making Pantelleria a convenient relay.

It is thus clear that the islands organized, at least as landmarks, and possibly as commercial calls, relays or destinations, were the major sea-routes round Sicily. The unusual importance of Marettimo in the maritime itinerary within the *Itinerarium Antonini* as compared with Pantelleria suggests that it reflects the “direct” route between Carthage and Pozzuoli/Rome (Arnaud 2004).

It is otherwise noteworthy that, according to the Ancients, as early as Dicaearch, Rhodes, the southernmost capes of Peloponnesus, the Strait of Messina (*fretum Siculum* or, in Greek, simply “*Porthmos*”, “the Strait” par excellence), South of Sardinia, the Pillars of Herakles and Gades were distributed along the same parallel. The shape of Sicily was supposed to be roughly that of an equilateral triangle whose horizontal base was made of the shores between Cape Lilybaeum and Cape Pachynum, so that, for the Ancients, the shortest way from East to West did not run through the Sicily-Malta Channel, but through the Strait of Messina. This misconception is a direct consequence of the opinion held by the Greeks that the Straits of Messina provided a more convenient sailing route (fig. 2-3).

Changes in subjective geography indicate changes in perception of the importance of islands which reflect actual changes of their role and integration in maritime trade-routes: the emergence of Malta and Gozo as the boundary-mark between two systems, is probably the clearest sign of such changes that was impacted by Roman domination (Arnaud 2004).

### **Isandscape: changes and permanencies in their historical contexts. The making of maritime frontiers and Trade Patterns**

It seems difficult to study Islands without reference to their political and economic contexts. When one considers Malta, it is necessary to recall Horatio Nelson's perception of its geo-strategical role as a sea-fortress, as well as its role during the first years of World War II. But in general the place of the islands in ancient geo-strategic perceptions was actually very different to that of Nelson.

As remote places, they appear as the place *par excellence* for piracy, until a naval power would secure the sea from that plague (Thc., I.8.1-2). Islands have no consistency unless they were part of regional or global thalassocracies. In about 400 BC, an old Athenian oligarch (ps.- Xén., *Const. Ath.*, II.2) wrote: "subject peoples on land can combine small cities and fight collectively, but subject peoples at sea, by virtue of being islanders, cannot join their cities together into the same unit. For the sea is in the way, and those now in power are thalassocrats. If it is possible for islanders to combine unnoticed on a single island, they will die of starvation". Islands are markets. This induced islands to a high level of specialisation in production, in order to furnish the *emporoi* with items on their way back. This is precisely the scheme Diodorus Siculus still had in mind when he described Malta's economy (V.12.3).

The same seems to consider the history of the Western Mediterranean as a succession of thalassocracies. What is in fact having power at sea? Thalassocracy relies on the making of maritime borders. This meant :

- firstly the control of the sea itself within these frontiers, thanks to an unchallenged navy based in naval stations (*naustathmoi*), which in turn were located in strategic places;
- securing the sea-shore through a network of garrisons (*phrouria*) settled in towers (*pyrgoi*) and strongholds (*phrouria*, *epiteichismata*, *coloniae maritimae*);
- Treaties of friendship, stipulating the conditions of sailing and trade within the space under control.

### **Naval Stations and strongholds**

Making the maritime frontiers hermetic and the sea someone's lake was actually almost an impossible task: even under Athenian blockage, 12 warships could elude the ships on guard and enter the harbour of Syracuse (Thc., VII.7), and the Athenian oligarch tells us how easily "the rulers of the sea can just do what rulers of the land sometimes do: ravage the territory of the stronger. For, wherever there is no enemy (or wherever enemies are few) it is possible to put along the coast." Many such raids and attacks are known of through ancient sources.

There is no proof that any of these islands was ever a naval station, but they should have become naval stations (App., *BC*, V. 97.405). The main control pattern was installing either a stronghold and garrisons (*praesidia, phouria*). Such is the case of Malta, where a Punic garrison of 2,000 men, but apparently no fleet, was captured by Ti. Sempronius in 218 (Liv. XXI. 51), or in *Cossyra*, apparently left undefended by the Carthaginians and captured in 217 by Gn. Servilius, who left there a garrison. These could be housed in two or three towers (ps. –Skyl., 111), such as in Lampedusa. It seems that the standard Hellenistic island-garrison pattern was the city-fortress, and that it did not differ than the usual shore-patterns, but was much weaker. It was probably enough to provide good fiscal control, but was clearly unable to resist an entire fleet, mainly because an island is naturally besieged by sea, and unable to call for help. There is no proof that there was a Punic naval station.

### **Trade and Treaties**

Until the Roman conquest, the main pattern of ancient maritime intercourse is to be found in treaties. These established unchallenged leaderships on certain zones and thence a conventionally based state of peace, and the conditions of its permanency, whose violation induced a state of war. Polybius (III.22-25) had made a copy of the text of three treaties between Rome and Carthage as represented on the then still extant bronze tablets in the *aerarium* of the *aediles* near the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. The date of these and exact prescriptions have been much disputed and shall not be discussed here. Furthermore, the text may not be neither wholly nor exactly quoted by Polybius. The first one is allegedly dated to 509, the second seem to go back to the late fourth century. The third one has generally been related to the context of Pyrrhus' wars.

Whatever may be the exact location of the “Fair Promontory”, and *Mastia Tarseiôn* (or *Mastia* and *Tarseion*), the main dispositions organized the Leaderships, around regulations that can be summarized as an interdiction to maraud, trade, or found a city in specified areas:

- Sailing was forbidden beyond specified points, “unless driven by stress of weather or the fear of enemies”. In such areas, technical calls for provisions, ship-repairs or the worship of gods were tolerated, as long as the sojourn did not exceed five days;
- Trade was prohibited in these areas;
- Marauding and founding cities in the other's leadership area was forbidden;
- Trade was allowed only in certain places under the control of local officials “Men landing for trade shall strike no bargain save in the presence of a herald or town-clerk. Whatever is sold in the presence of these, let the price be secured to the seller on the credit of the state”;

- Later clauses established the competency of local jurisdictions to settle conflicts and avoid private vengeance. The model is probably that of the Athenian *dikai emporikai*.

This reflects the global trade pattern of the classical and Hellenistic period down to the Roman Empire, based upon the *emporion* feature. The exact meaning of *emporion* has been much discussed, but it seems possible to consider an acceptable definition that *emporion* was a trade-harbour placed under the control of local authorities, where merchants could traffic legally under the conditions stipulated by the treaties, with the necessary warranties and protection. It is very probable that trade outside *emporion* was to be considered smuggling (Bresson 2008: 98-118), and that trade operations were possible only after the cargo to be sold had been unloaded and registered by authorities, making it a heavy operation.

The trade patterns of the pre-Roman imperial period were drawn by the converging interests of city-State (supplies, taxes), systems of production (specialized economies organized for exportation) and ancient traders, whose goal was making big enough benefits in buying a cargo at a certain point and selling it another place (including the costs of taxes and ship-rental) to maintain himself.

Emporion undoubtedly framed trade, organizing it around a limited number of trade-harbours. But trade-harbour in itself probably does not mean a single invariant model. The distinction between dock-harbour receiving and exporting goods from remote places, and ports primarily exporting local productions is undoubtedly too rigid. The availability of local exportable production, such as Malta's textiles and Pantellerian ware, could drive traders to such places either as primary destinations, or as secondary places. It is noteworthy that either textiles or plates are light items that could be loaded without any detriment to primary cargoes.

That said, let us now consider at least two kinds of emporia (as international trade-places), aside with just "technical calls":

- the "port-entrepôt", where goods from several origins converged and whence they were re-exported
- the specialized harbour, exporting goods produced in the hinterland, having special commercial activity in remote countries

We may imagine that illegal parallel systems did exist, even if quantities were nowhere near those involved in the official market.

According to Polybius' paraphrase, in the first two treaties the Carthaginians forbade the Romans to sail beyond the Fair Promontory, because "they did not wish them to be acquainted with the coast near Byzacium, or the lesser Syrtis, which places they call *Emporia*, owing to the productiveness of the district". This leaves one with no doubt at all that the Fair Promontory coincides with Cape Bon (Petzold 1972; Desanges 1990; Moret 2002). During the same period, these *emporia* were familiar to the Greeks of Cyrene and to those of Athens and Sicily (Th., 7.50.2). This clearly indicates that, until Rhegium fell into Roman hands, there existed two distinct trade-areas.

The classical trade pattern was based on exclusion as well as integration, and on strong navy fleets to protect the exclusion clauses of the treaties. There is no limit to the circulation of goods, which may be considered as global, but trade operations were very rigid and entirely controlled by the city for its own benefit.

We may wonder how far the Roman peace may have changed these patterns: fiscal barriers still did exist, but freedom now existed in sailing, allowing more frequent calls, and a major possibility of buying "secondary", light cargoes. The main limit to this freedom probably consisted in maritime loan contracts themselves who could forbid such calls (*Dig.*, 45.1.122 = Scaevola, *Dig.*, 28).

### **The Islands on sea-routes : Calls, ports of Trade, landmarks or forgotten places?**

Islands may have been calls en route to other places or final commercial destinations. Their role may have been as principal or secondary "warehouse harbours", or as transshipment harbours.

Pantelleria is a well documented sample and according to recent studies, may have been one of such harbours. First, it must be noted that the island is not on the direct route from Carthage to Lilybaeum.

Recent articles have pointed out the importance of Pantelleria in ancient traffic (Baldassari & Fontana 2002; Chilà 2002; Massa 2002; Monti 2002; Quercia 2006). It has even been said that, after the second Punic war, "l'isola divenne un luogo di stoccaggio delle merci e un emporio dove si potevano acquistare prodotti italici" (Baldassari & Fontana 2002: 987), but the five wrecks, dated between the late III<sup>rd</sup> century and the mid-II<sup>d</sup> century AD, which are supposed to prove this assertion, actually do not provide enough evidence to sustain such definitive conclusions. Although these represent about 50% of known wrecks around the island, their mixed cargo of graeco-italic and African amphorae produced in Carthage (or the homogeneous cargo of African amphorae) does not in itself provide enough

proof that these ships were wrecked while unloading. The lack of wrecks with Pantellerian ware exports and imports from the rest of the Roman world reached their peak by the II<sup>d</sup> century AD. The extreme banality of the cargoes of these wrecks (only one of which has been studied with acceptable level of accuracy) within Punic contemporary contexts makes it more likely to think of ships diverted from their original route by one or more north-west gales. This can be inferred from their location on the north-east shores of the island.

It is nevertheless clear that there was a real boom of imports during the III<sup>d</sup> century BC; at the same time the so-called Pantellerian ware started to be exported in noteworthy quantities (Massa 2002). It is also clear that the ceramic and amphora imports follow synchronic evolutions down to the III<sup>d</sup> century AD.

Under the Roman Empire, when the island reached the highest level of ceramic exports, a huge underwater dump at Scauri (south west coast of the island) demonstrates that there used to be a harbour or a mooring place where hulls were cleaned from all the broken material. It seems highly probable that Pantelleria, which along the main commercial routes was then a commercial destination in itself, as a centre of consumption and whose survival was dependent upon importations, especially wine and salt-fish. In all likelihood, grain was also imported but archaeological traces of this consumable are unfortunately not visible.

Such contexts allow one to consider two possible commercial patterns:

- a specialized redistribution pattern: the exportation to Pantelleria of mixed cargoes of vital goods, and importing from it a very special item : Pantellerian ware. A ballast, or ballast cargo, was then necessary.
- A secondary redistribution pattern. Ships on the way to another far away destination, stopped en route at Pantelleria in order to buy a secondary cargo of ceramics, and possibly unloading part of their main cargo.

The Scauri wreck, dated VI-VIIIth century, loaded with a mixed, but specialized, cargo of ceramics, including Pantellerian ware, may have unloaded amphorae at Pantelleria. This is however not certain at all as we have no clear information about how the cargo was organized within the vessel.

It has been demonstrated that redistribution patterns became more local and specialized long-range commerce, with homogeneous cargoes became a characteristic of Late Antique and Early medieval trade-patterns (Reynolds 1995). Mixed cargoes, together with specialized ones were a major pattern of the Roman period and their exact meaning as to whether these originated from redistribution at “warehouse harbours” or tramping, is still a matter of discussion. The same can

also be said with regard to the exact meaning of “primary” and “secondary cargoes” (Houston 1988; Nieto 1988; Parker 1992; Nieto 1997; Horden & Purcell 2000). The archaeological evidence to sustain these arguments remain very ambiguous. It is anyway highly probable that segmented sailing on small or medium-size ships made islands attractive as possible convenient calls on a main route, not only for technical but also for commercial purposes. That was especially the case when very specialized items were available there. This is the case with Malta’s linen and Pantellerian ware.

Permanent trade-activities were then possible for ships loading secondary cargoes, without selling anything, for ships making those islands special commercial destinations, and for tramping, especially on ships whose *naucerus* was partially or entirely the one chartering the vessel. The latter situation does not appear to be exceptional.

Any change in global trade patterns and sea-routes may thus have had a strong impact not only on the role of the island in the broader cultural maritime landscape, but also the economic system and specialized productions of any single island: Malta’s textile production probably did not make sense outside the global route-system and trade-patterns of the classical world. It is also noteworthy that textiles, the only known exportation from Malta, is a light produce. This may have been a primary load in terms of value, but a secondary one in terms of weight and volumes within the vessel. The way in which Diodorus Siculus (V.12.3) insists on the role of *emporoi* in the development of a high quality standard of living in Malta suggests commercial sources of wealth and availability of goods which cannot be reduced to textiles. We should therefore consider that harbour facilities, wintering opportunities and the place of Malta at the articulation of several routes, in the vicinity of complex sailing zones made it also, although not only, a possible transshipment harbour. Marettimo doesn’t seem to have been more than a landmark or possible mooring place along blue sea routes.

The short space allowed for this paper did not permit more than a broad survey. This is enough to show that every island seems to be singular during each period of history. Nothing such as *islandscapes* appears to be a common feature to all three islands. The globalization of Mediterranean Trade and their position along busy sailing routes made them undoubtedly more and more dependant upon imports in an integrated production and trade-pattern. Their evolution seems to be significantly more linked with their position along certain sea-routes rather than with them being islands. It is unfortunately very difficult to drive firm conclusions about their exact role in actual trade and sailing patterns from existing evidence.

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List of Figures (see on line version)

Figure 1: Sailing routes round Sicily.

Figure 2: Italy, Sicily and surrounding island according to Strabon (after Lasserre).

Figure 3: The Mediterranean after Strabo.