RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Archaeology of the Subalterns' Disaggregated History: Interpreting Burial Manipulations of Roman-Period Sardinia through Gramsci's Theory

Mauro Puddu
University of Cambridge, GB
mauro483@hotmail.it

The untold history of the subalterns — those not in power, the humble salaried workers — is made of episodes of social breakages caused by the actions of dominant classes. Finding the traces of such breakages on the ground is a challenge that archaeology should take on. This approach will contribute to a different account of well-known historical periods, as are the Roman times, exploring local identities through the materialization of power relationships.

   Pursuing this aim, this paper adopts the theory developed by Antonio Gramsci on the history of the subalterns (1929–1935) as a tool to recognise the archaeological traces of their actions. It presents a case-study from Roman-period Sardinia. This paper sets-up a working hypothesis. It interprets the idiosyncratic funerary practices held at Masullas in the fourth century AD as an initiative of Sardinia's subalterns to overcome the breakage of social relationships caused by the Roman government's economic strategies reported by official sources.

Introduction: Reasons for this Paper

> '*Quis enim ferat, liberos a parentibus, a fratribus sorores, a viris coniuges segregari?*'[1]
> Imp. Constantinus A. Caerulo Rationali trium provinciarum
> Teodosius, *Codex Theodosianus*, Codicis Liber III. Titulus XXXVIII. 11.

> '*La storia delle classi subalterne è necessariamente disgregata ed episodica […] ogni traccia di inizia-tiva autonoma è perciò di inestimabile valore.*'[2]
> *Quaderni Dal Carcere*, 25
> Gramsci 1977: 2283, 2284

The archaeological and historical evidences examined here date back to the Roman period. This paper urges archaeologists to increase the awareness that the knowledge of the past to which archaeology contributes still largely coincides with a history of the elites. This is not only due to a lack of scholarly attempts but also to the structure of history itself. History has always tended to exclude from its account the largest portions of society: those not in power. Elites owned, displayed and shaped both history, the material world, and the deriving narratives of the past to a much higher extent than the non-elites. This is still true today, an example being the difficulties with which the survivors of the Grenfell Fire are trying to keep together in their area — Latimer Court, West Kensington — and keep telling their story rather than accepting to be relocated in different areas of London. It was all the truer in any ancient society with a strong centralised power like in empires. This framework applies especially to the Roman world, where the central apparatus was strongly organised, and local elites were fundamental to keep the administrative and military machine going (i.e. see Millett 1990).

The foci of this paper are the subaltern classes and their material efforts to overcome division, to keep their social structures strong, and their relationships visible when under threat. The initial trigger of this paper is a group of graves (**Figures 1** and **2**) from fourth century AD centre-west Sardinia whose evidence of bones-manipulation has been a struggle to interpret since their excavation in 1994.

This paper looks at three sources: an archaeological one, a historical one, and a theoretical one. The latter is a critical excursus around the theory of the history of subalterns designed by philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci. The historical sources refer to an imperial note, promulgated by Emperor Constantine in
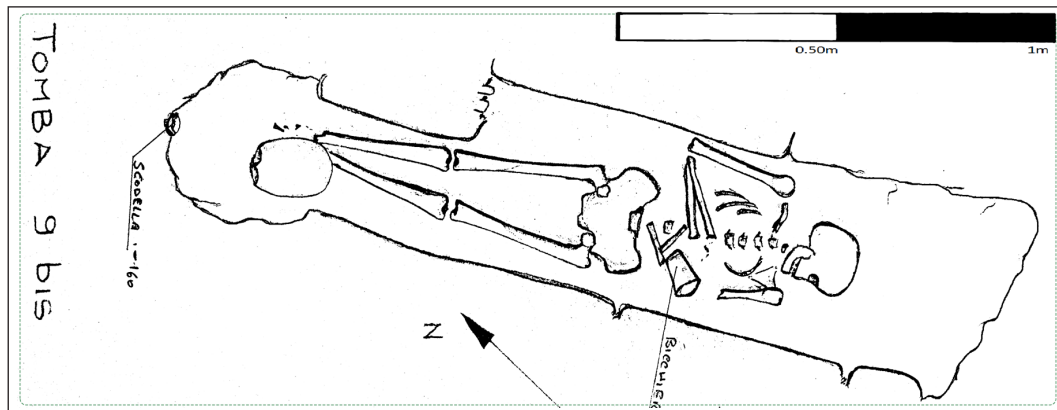
Figure 1: Plan of Grave 9bis, from the site of Sa Mitza Salida, Masullas (Source: Archive of the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).


Figure 2: Photograph of grave 43B at the moment of its opening, prior to excavation (Source: S. Unida, Dissertation, Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Scienze Naturali. Reproduction permitted).

325 AD, stating that peasant and slaves working in the fields of Sardinia endured a strong social division. The archaeological sources, contemporary to the historical ones, come from a necropolis of west-central Sardinia, Masullas. There, after three centuries of holding uniform funerary rituals, the local community held new practices that involved the manipulation of old graves by putting in physical contact the bones of new and ancient dead.

While embodying the conclusions that emerged from recent interpretations of those burial manipulations as an attempt by the local community to reconnect with their past (Puddu 2018a; 2018b), this paper pushes such conclusions further. The three sources will intertwine with each other in a working hypothesis. They will be used to expose what seem to be the archaeological signs of an initiative of Sardinia's subalterns to overcome the divisions they endured in the fourth century AD due to economic strategies dictated onto them by the Empire's dominant class. But who are the subalterns? Who were they in the Roman Empire?

We will see below in detail that for Gramsci, all subalterns beyond their specific social rank, positions, wage, ethnicity, are defined by their historical condition. They do not own any direct relationship with history (see the second opening epigraph). This definition is applicable to most people in the Roman world who had to earn a living, and whose existence roughly coincided with their work. Among them surely were peasants and slaves, but also soldiers, craftsmen, and merchants. Whittaker (2008: 299–333) reminds us of the general picture of subalterns that the Roman elites had in mind looking at Plotinus and Cicero. For Cicero, the salaried work is dirty, and it does not go well with an honest man (Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.150). For Plotinus, the multitude of manual workers – the labourers – did not have any other reason to exist if not to provide the virtuous men with the goods they need (Plotinus, *Enneades* II.99.1). A world-known example can help to visualize the subalterns: Italian Neorealist cinema.

After the Second World War, Neorelism brought to the attention of the public the lives of those human groups forgotten by history, caught during ordinary life episodes and accidents, struggling to keep united. Relationships between mothers and sons (**Figure 3**), brothers, sisters, lovers, friends are explored through
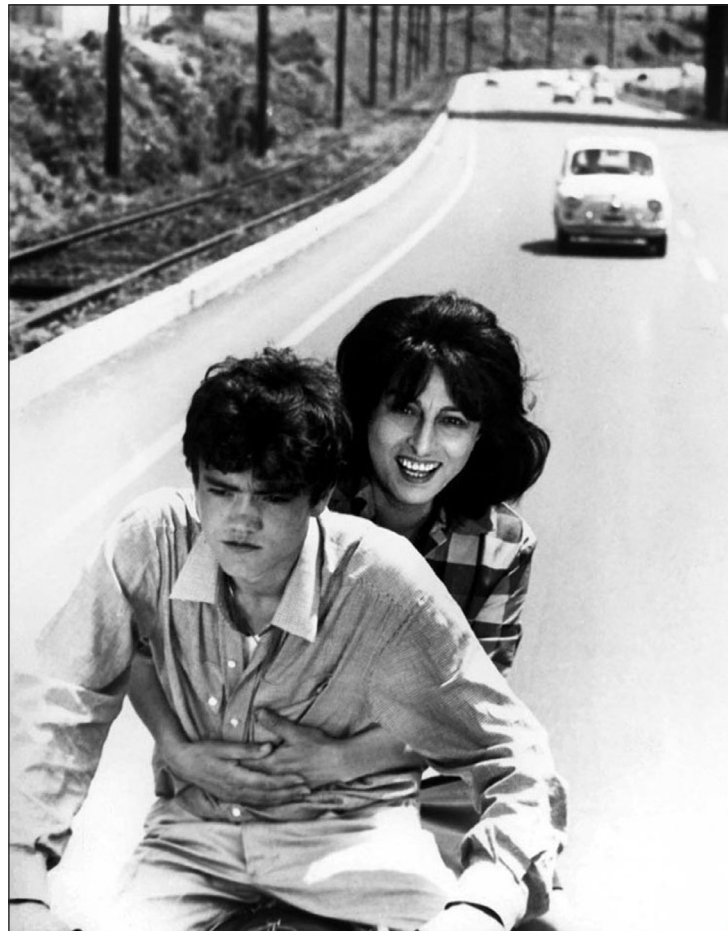
Figure 3: A scene from Pasolini's movie, Mamma Roma, with Anna Magnani and Ettore Garofolo interpreting a mother struggling in 1950s Lazio to avoid separation from her son (Copyright Arco Film. Reproduction permitted).

work, life and death while attempting to overcome the daily threats of social divisions they endured due to socio-economic hardship. Neorealism exposed the social crisis of a historical period — a picture in fact often rejected by those in power (i.e. see Andreotti 1952 against director Vittorio De Sica) — whether with documentarist aims or with critical ones (Lussana 2002: 1083). Social separations, so well portrayed by Neorealist cinema, are central to Gramsci's history of the subalterns. Separation is also the key topic of emperor Constantine's historical document around which this paper spins. Through an official edict, Constantine asked, rhetorically, who would be able amongst humans to bear the divisions from their families that slaves and workers suffered: sisters separated from brothers, wives from husbands. Constantine required that all the slaves and workers separated from their original community due to the reformation of the land be let again together immediately (Davidson and Pharr 1952: Book 2, Title 25, 56–57).

Using its own effective tools voted to the study of the material remains of the past, archaeology has a high potential to expose better the structure of the social world (Freeman 1993: 442). This paper supports the idea that archaeology can succeed even further in creating an alternative knowledge of the past by exploring the theoretical possibilities offered by Gramsci's framework. Archaeology has a predisposition to take into account historical sources, as its research questions often spring from them while integrating — and not rarely overcoming — them, due to the nature of the material dimension of the past, that escapes the control of official history.

Why Masullas? The Bioarchaeological Data and Funerary Evidence

The excavations of the necropolis of *Sa Mitza Salida*, Masullas, located in the fertile area of Marmilla, central-west Sardinia (Italy), yielded 54 tombs containing 75 individuals.[3] An outline of the necropolis will be given later. For the sake of this section will suffice to expose the patterns that emerged by the bio-archaeological analysis carried out by Manos and Floris (2005), Department of Biology, University of Cagliari. First, the average age of the buried population: 33.5 for males and 27 for females. Second, and foremost, the palaeo-pathologies affecting the buried people:

· Diffused severe forms of hypoplasia of dental enamel, tartar, caries: these are caused by poor and poorly varied diet, infections, and some other untreated diseases (Manos and Floris 2005: 67).
· Widespread signs on the long bones, particularly upper limbs: visible protruding marks on humerus and phalanges, caused by the remarkable development of the muscular insertions at the level of biceps (Manos and Floris 2005: 67). Such marks are connected to the involvement of the body in heavy works: in the case of the population buried in Masullas, the causes can be labours as cultivation, ploughing, harvesting, carrying heavy loads (i.e. sacks of grain), weaving, and spinning the wool.

People involved in these activities were not amongst the dominant groups, as the absence of both special grave goods and inscriptions confirm. This absence, coupled with the bone analysis carried out so far, are convincing arguments that the people buried in Masullas — whether they were peasants or militaries — were likely at the service of the Imperial structure and sustainment. In Gramsci's word, they spent their life as subalterns. These elements make the necropolis of Masullas an ideal case study to investigate the community's social identities in relation to the history of the subalterns' framework.

Why Gramsci? Introducing Subalterns: the Materialism of History

The Roman world, one of the most studied of antiquity, has historically been interpreted through two main frameworks: Romanization (i.e. Millett 1990; Torelli 1995; MacMullen 2000; Keay and Terrenato 2001), framed by Theodor Mommsen in the 19th century, and reactionary views to it (Van Dommelen 1998a; Alcock 1994; Webster and Cooper 1996; Hingley 2000; Webster 2001; Gosden 2004; Mattingly 2007; 2011) fed by the postcolonial ideas from the 1970s (Spivak 1988; 1999; Bhabha 1994). Despite both Romanization and its postcolonial critique have succeeded to gradually focus more on the locals than on the Roman colonisers (i.e. see the local elites in *Britannia* by Millett 1990), they have left almost intact an elite perspective of the narrative, failing to explore more consistently the lower classes (Cecconi 2006: 89). This is where Roman archaeology can reinforce its agenda — inspired to postcolonial principles (i.e. Said 1978) — of representing a diversified society that escapes monolithic and immutable ethnic accounts (i.e. Gosden 2004). And this is where Gramsci's framework on subalterns can become decisive.

The reader of this paper might wonder why it is worth facing an archaeological problem through Gramsci's ideas. Referring to Gramsci is, yes, a choice, but it is one driven by necessity. This need comes directly from the intellectual tools used in the last decades by international scholars in archaeology. When I first joined UCL in 2010 for my MA, I discovered that Postcolonialism was one of the most applied approaches to Roman

archaeology in the UK, unlike the environment where I came from then, the University of Cagliari. Hence, I had to fill the gap studying the roots and the evolution of a new interpretive paradigm. Even at first glance, the influence of Gramsci's thought on the foundational postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak was blatant. Even if not all Gramsci's original writings were fully available yet in the 70s and 80s (Said 2003 [1978]: 25, 355–356, note 16), his ideas were quoted with confidence. For these reasons, I deemed it necessary to engage with Gramsci's writings and to expand on subjects of his thought that have found a marginal application to archaeology so far.

World-known scholar, journalist, and politician, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) is the author of a vast number of political and philosophical writings. The two intertwine in his *Prison Notebooks* (**Figure 4**), written between 1929 and 1935 when detained in the Italian Fascist prisons. Re-edited only twice since then, the *Notebooks'* original handwritten copies have travelled Italy and Europe to many successful exhibitions,[4] and their content meet ever-growing favour amongst both intellectuals and members of the public as a tool to assess today's global challenges. Always in contact with the lower classes, Gramsci was amongst the founders of the Italian Communist Party in 1921 and embraced a view of the world that owns much, amongst many philosophers, to Karl Marx. This is all the truer for Gramsci's theory of the subalterns, founded on the concept of relationship of Marx's historical materialism.

Marx's historical materialism implies that all human relationships are determined by the material conditions of life to which the members of a society are bound. In Chapter 23 of Part 7 of *The Capital − Simple Reproduction*, Marx analyses the way in which the labour force is maintained by the capitalist. The capitalist 'profits, not only by what he receives from but by what he gives to, the labourer.' (Marx 2013 [1867]: 401). The reinvestment of part of the capital in labour-power is itself feeding and boosting the capital. The necessaries that the labourer will buy with the salary provided to him by the capitalist is soon reinvested in further labour that will generate more profit for the capitalist. The material conditions imposed to the labourer correspond to the salary that the labourer is given 'within the limits of what is strictly necessary' (Marx 2013 [1867]: 401). Marx puts it in more graphic terms, stating that part of the capital is partially reconverted into 'the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing labourers' (Marx 2013 [1867]: 401) to be maintained and to reproduce. These thoughts, so close to Plotinus and Cicero's remarks on salaried workers seen above, had an important impact on Gramsci. From Marx, Gramsci inherited the concept that the ability and inability to control the material relationships that flow into the social bonds divide the world between people-in-power and people-that-endure-such-power: between the dominant class and the subalterns.
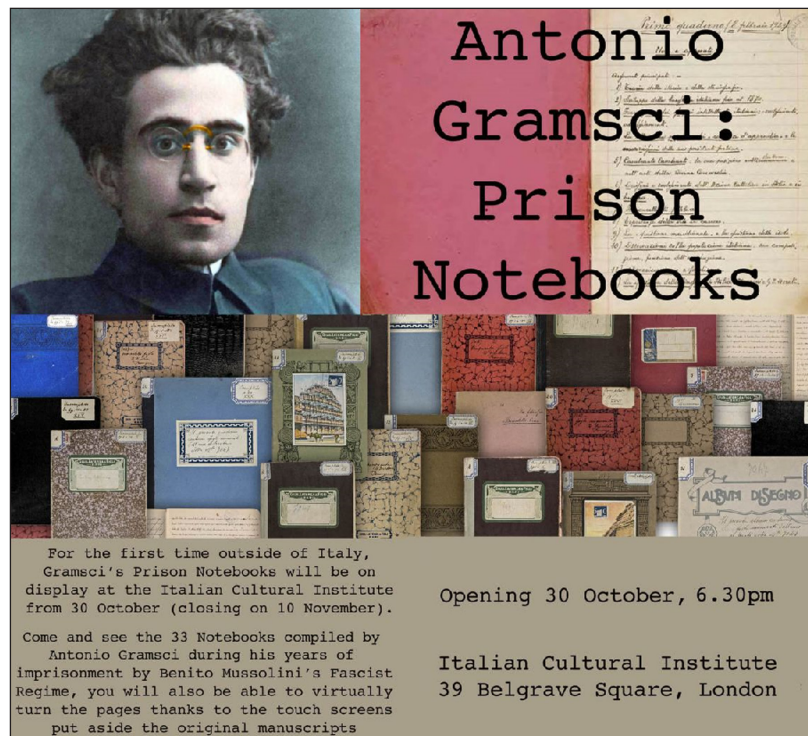
Figure 4: Flyer advertising the exhibition of the original notebooks written by Antonio Gramsci at the Italian Cultural Institute of London. (Copyright Italian Cultural Institute of London. Reproduction permitted).

Evolution of a Concept: from the Military Jargon to the 'Integral Historian'

Many have focused on Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Few scholars have gone deep into his theory of subalterns (Smith 2010: 39). The concept underwent a long evolutionary process from the 1910s to the 1930s. The term appears in Gramsci's texts as an adjective, referring to a group of people (Gramsci 1977: *Quaderno* 3), to a class unable to act autonomously (Gramsci 1977: *Quaderno* 5, Quaderno 8), as a substantive, and also referred to individuals lacking agency (*Lettere dal Carcere* 31.08.1931).

Gramsci used the word 'subaltern' first in 1919, referring, with a military metaphor, to the political and social structure of the State (Liguori 2016: 90): the subalterns were those who executed the administrative orders given by the State. The expression changed meaning radically in the *Prison Notebooks*. In the first *Notebook*, it refers to the Church's involution within the ideological world's power framework: for Gramsci (1975: 127), in the 20th century, the Church represented just a subaltern force lacking decisional autonomy. From *Quaderno 3* onwards, Gramsci referred consistently to 'subaltern classes' as those who endure someone else's initiative, adopting a defensive attitude (Liguori 2016: 94). *Quaderno 3* develops multiple aspects that were only introduced in *Quaderno 1* (Frosini and Zara 2012). Amongst them is *'Storia delle Classi Subalterne'*, (Gramsci 1975: 281) that anticipated the methodological criteria that appeared later in Section 2, *Quaderno 25*. There, the study acquires a mature shape in a passage worth reporting here in its integrity both in English and in its original Italian version:

> 'The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves (a truth which can be demonstrated by the history of the French Revolution at least up to 1830). Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should, therefore, be of incalculable value for the integral historian. Consequently, this kind of history can only be dealt with monographically, and each monograph requires an immense quantity of material which is often hard to collect. [1934–35]' (Gramsci, Hoare and Smith 1999: 207)[5]

This passage reveals the methodology to study the subalterns and the key object of their struggle: the relationships between themselves and with history. The picture given by Gramsci shows that the subalterns do not just struggle during life to reach a position of integrity that allows them to act autonomously. They also struggle to gain a coherent place in history. Fragmentation and struggle for unification are the key concepts of Gramsci's mature theory of the history of the subalterns. The passage from the *Codex Theodosianus* that will be analysed in this paper fits this model.

The sociological issue, for Gramsci, was that there was not, by then in 1934, a history that had taken into account nothing but the initiatives of the ruling class (Gramsci 1975: Section 90, *Quaderno 3*)*: since the ruling classes correspond to the State, the only history we know is that of single States and groups of States. This observation fits well the concept of history taught at school. Gramsci denounces the existence of a biased history — of Italy, of the other states, and also of antiquity — from which the large majority of its protagonists, the masses of subalterns, are excluded. A similar observation fed the 1960s and 1970s History Workshops held at Ruskin College, Oxford, made by 'a fluid coalition of worker-students […] and other socialist historians' (Editorial Collective 1976: 1). The workshops produced the first issue of the '*History Workshop Journal*', published in 1976. The publication promoted a 'history from below', a social history of everyday life, 'with the aim of making it relevant to ordinary people' (Editorial Collective 1976: 1). The Annales School acted similarly, with Febvre's (1962) studies on the popular religious beliefs, Braudel's (1979) research on capitalism's effects on history, and Le Roy Ladurie's (1966) work on lives of peasants in France. The two schools detached from the elites and looked at history as a long-term economic, environmental and social process involving a much wider population. These positions were inspired by Gramsci's (1923) awareness that there will not be a realistic knowledge of Italy — and of any State — until there is not a history of the working class, peasants, and employees (Liguori 2016: 97).

Due to subalterns' inevitable fragmentariness, Gramsci valued every small trace of their autonomous initiative as the most precious. The main task of what Gramsci calls the integral historian (*lo Storico Integrale*) is to find each fragment of those subalterns' activities to reconstruct their history. Archaeology holds a high potential for yielding the material traces of subalterns' actions that escaped history's accounts.

In Section 4 of *Quaderno 25*, Gramsci (1975: 2284–2287) looks at the subaltern classes in antiquity. He highlights that, particularly in the Roman times, dominant classes and subaltern classes not only had their own histories; their existence was also represented by their respective institutions, as were the tribunes of the plebs for the subalterns. Nevertheless, the power of initiative of the subalterns' institutions was simple, limited, and never offered laws of historical necessity that would have challenged the dominant class (Gramsci 1975: 2286).

How about the place of subalterns in the Roman world? Probably due to its overwhelming presence in popular culture, some interpretations of the Roman world have altogether made it 'seem perhaps a bit too easily comprehensible' (Gardner 2007: 15) and 'falsely familiar to the scholarly community' (Bang 2008: 1). These observations have inspired an advancement in the social debate within Roman Archaeology. This progression is driven mainly by the use in archaeology of two ways of interpreting the contemporary world: postcolonial and globalisation theories (see Gardner 2013). The former has been by large the most popular approach for the last 30 years. The latter has been recently adopted and theorised (see Versluys 2014). Both frameworks are underpinned by a different theoretical understanding of agency. Traditionally defined in association to the actions of humankind as 'a capacity for acting in a particular, self-conscious way' (Giddens 1984: 9), agency is today more looked at as a property of objects too (Van Oyen 2018: 1). Applying the theory of subalterns to these two main theoretical routes can shed some light on the role of those people invested by the materiality of globalisation and by material agency too, revealing the role of human agency in the attempts of subalterns to resist their fragmentation imposed by the material world.

Archaeology and the History of the Subalterns: A Methodological Note

Finding archaeological remains of the subalterns' initiatives is a complicated task. The risk behind this aim is forcing a reactionary meaning onto any element of the archaeological record just because different features from the norms attested emerge in specific ages and regions. A similar attitude has characterised some post-colonial archaeology that has identified conscious resistance through traditional cults and material culture used in the Roman Provinces (Cecconi 2006: 90).

Though it seems obvious, the premise to a methodology of an archaeology of the subalterns is that a history of the subaltern does not exist yet. Nevertheless, accounts of the history of the dominant class can — sometimes have to — mention actions that had an effect on subalterns. The note of Emperor Constantine that will be analysed in this paper is one of that kind. There is no doubt that subalterns tend to unify, but their initiative is constantly 'snapped'[6] — broken, rived — by the dominant class (Gramsci 1975: Q25, 2284).

An archaeology of the subalterns seeks two elements:

1) The evidence of successful disruptive actions performed by the dominant class on subalterns;
2) the attempts of the subalterns to overcome that burden by seeking (re-)unification.

Dealing with the first point is easier. However, finding evidence of the latter is much harder, unless the initiatives of the subalterns are of a military nature recorded as historical events (i.e. Ampsicora's rebellion in Sardinia, 215 BC). If that is not the case, it will be easier to look for such traces on the ground. Archaeology has all the methodological competencies to question some specific finds in relation to subalterns' attempts to overcome separation. These can be efforts either to re-establish their integrity in a specific agricultural/pastoral area taken off them; to state — in a materially visible way — their rights in the workplace; or to reconnect family/community members that were separated by the events.

Subalterns' traces are 'very rare, and as such even more precious, […] hence work on the subject requires an immense quantity of material which is often hard to collect' (Gramsci 1999: 207). Working on the subject is a long and laborious task. However, archaeology is by nature already on the right path. Archaeologists are used to dealing with history as a discipline (i.e. Trigger 2006: 77–79; Johnson 2010: 185–186), and they often do so by considering the chance to compensate history's biases. Not rarely, this can end up with archaeology constructively integrating — or challenging — historians' conclusions.

The Introduction of *enfiteusis* in fourth century Sardinia: Land Reformation and Social Division

The tendency to unify is the key concept of Gramsci's account on the subalterns. Separation, imposed by the dominant class, is the necessary premise of unification. It was one of the main topics of Neorealism, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper. It is at the core of the historic sources analysed here, referring to what Mastino (2005: 176) defined 'the poor economy of Roman Sardinia'.

Since its annexation as a Roman Province, Sardinia became one of the 'three cereal supplying sources for Rome' (Cicero, *De Imperio Cnaei Pompeii* 12.34), together with *Africa* and *Sicilia.* The cereal monoculture — wheat — inherited from the Punic period (Rowland 1994) defined Sardinia's economy for the whole of classical antiquity (Marasco 1992). To it is imputed Sardinia's economic underdevelopment (Mastino 2005: 176). This was due to two reasons: first, the imposition to the peasants of a fixed *stipendium* to pay to Rome (Cicero, *Pro Lucio Cornelio Oratio* 41) independently from the harvest's abundance; second, a variable taxation, the *Decima* — one-tenth of the annual crops — imposed to Sardinia and Sicily after becoming provinces. The Sardinian economy improved during the imperial period, due to the robust arrival of migrants that developed the intensive usage of the countryside (Colavitti 1996). The development of a slavery-based economy (Sirago 1992), though, triggered many social conflicts. It was not rare for the people of Sardinia to rebel against these impositions, as in 215 BC, when they revolted against Rome because of 'an unjust requisition of grain' (Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita* XXIII.32.7). Similar accusations were expressed later to the governor of Sardinia, *M. Aemilius Scaurus*, charged for *crimen frumentarium* (Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* V.469.164) for collecting a higher quantity of wheat than the *Decima* set by law. In the fifth century, the *Codex Theodosianus* quotes a precious imperial edict hinting to Sardinia's workers discontent:

> *'Imp. Constantinus a. Gerulo rationali trium provinciarum. In Sardinia fundis patrimonialibus vel emphyteuticariis per diversos nunc dominos distributis, oportuit sic possessionum fieri divisiones, ut integra apud possessorem unumquemque servorum agnatio permaneret. Quis enim ferat, liberos a parentibus, a fratribus sorores, a viris coniuges segregari? Igitur qui dissociata in ius diversum mancipia traxerunt, in unum redigere eadem cogantur: ac si cui propter redintegrationem necessitudinum servi cesserunt, vicaria per eum, qui eosdem susceperit, mancipia reddantur. Et invigilandum, ne per provinciam aliqua posthac querela super divisis mancipiorum affectibus perseveret. Dat. iii. kal. mai. Proculo et Paulino coss.'* (Codex Theodosianus II.25.1)[7]

This fragment of the *Codex Theodosianus* (408–450) reports Constantine's edict – issued in 325 or 334 AD (Meloni 1990: 211) – expressing his worries for the families of slaves who had been forcibly separated because of the agricultural land's redistribution and urged that they be reunited (Mastino 2005: 178–179; Colavitti 1996: 643). For Constantine, slaves and peasants needed to be '*unum*' — united — again with their relatives, restoring their relationships with their brothers, sisters, wives, husbands. The new economic structure created numerous divisions of resources and, most of all, caused the expropriation of lands from the peasants to increase the productivity by adopting extensive cultivation (Colavitti 1996: 643; Mastino 2005: 178–179). The following complaints of slaves and workers (Sirago 1992: 239–247) created the conditions for Constantine to take measures about the reconstitution of their families. For Meloni (1990: 212), with such an edict, Constantine felt compelled to withdraw the land reformation that was adopted likely just a few decades earlier. What was this land reformation about? The cultivated land had to pass from being directly administered in vast units to being divided into smaller portions assigned to *conductores*: these were temporary land administrators who were given the parcels of land in exchange of a fixed annual rent (Meloni 1990: 212). The obligation to pay an annual rent — as opposed to a variable taxation dependent on the productivity like the *Decima* — put pressure on the tenants who needed to increase productivity if they wanted to have any revenue from their land administration. This administration is known with the name of *enfiteusis* (Vera 1986: 267) and was extended to Sardinia following *Africa* and *Sicilia.*

The discontent and manifestations of dissent following the introduction of *enfiteusis* and its consequent separations must have been visible, and to some extent effective if, few years after its introduction, Constantine withdrew the legislation. The interests of the emperor, beyond the personal ones, were motivated by the fear that tensions in the agricultural land in Sardinia would have undermined the productivity in the island, similarly to what registered in Gaul and Africa (Dossey 2010: 173).

The fragment of the *Codex Theodosianus* just analysed testifies that slaves and workers of Sardinia faced a strong social stress, having to endure the Empire's economic purposes. It shows the interaction of two classes that could exist, in Roman times like today, only in a dialogic relationship. It displays, on the one hand, the priorities of the central government: increasing agricultural productivity; on the other, those of the persons employed in the fields: keeping their social relationships, and their communities' integrity. The two aims contrasted to the point that a clash was inevitable. The strategy to implement the productivity by the Roman government provoked such a disruption in the social structure of the communities of peasants and slaves that the Emperor had to change its priorities in order not to compromise the productivity even further.

The historic sources take us as far as here. However, no written document tells us how Sardinia's subalterns dealt with that crisis. What actions, gestures and materials accompanied their dissent? How did they react to the separations? What traces did these reactions leave on the ground? Archaeology can fill the gaps left by history, finding on the ground any signs that hint to subalterns' attempts to reunify its members.

The fourth century Graves Manipulations at Masullas, Sardinia
Outline of the necropolis of Sa Mitza Salida

The graves presented at the beginning of this paper (**Figures 1** and **2**) have the potential to be interpreted as the result of communal practices whose scope was to unify Sardinia's subalterns that had been separated by the land redistribution in Masullas.

Before getting to the taphonomic details of those graves, it is obligatory to refer to the new conceptions on the body raising in Late-Antique Mediterranean. The reports from the Synods of Auxerre, 568,[8] and Macon, 585[9] (Can. 15: 267), treated the custom of re-opening burials as a problem, inviting Christian communities to reject such illegal practice. They show that the reuse of burials was common in the sixth century and had been so for a long time. Sardinia does not differ from this perspective. The inscription found at San Giorgio del Sinis, Cabras, is a curse against those who would have dared to open the grave, whom are wished to end up in hell with Judah and to contract leprosy: ABEAT PARTEM CUM JUDA ET LEBRAM GIEZI (Corda 1999: 181). At least three types of grave-reuse have been highlighted on the island (see Puddu forthcoming):

· the reduction of the remains of the original inhumed;
· the presence of scattered human remains inside and outside collective greaves, so-called Byzantine burials (i.e. see Salvi and Fonzo 2016: 447, 448);
· the manipulation of old graves whose remains placed willingly in contact with new inhumations.

When looking at graves 9bis and 43B, two options can be ruled out. First, the collective graves, as Masullas has only single depositions. Second, reductions: many reductions are found at Masullas (see Puddu 2019a: 73, 74, and Figure 4.5) characterised by the collection a variety of bones (generally long ones) and grave goods from the previous burial, and by their tidy positioning to one side of the grave where the new deceased was laid (Duday 2009). As we will see below, these features do not apply to the graves taken into account here. Conversely, grave 9bis and 43B, at the centre of this paper, represent instances of a deliberate choice to put in physical contact buried individuals of different periods.

Sa Mitza Salida is located in Masullas, Marmilla, west-central Sardinia, a few km from the main north-south road *A Tibula Carales* (Mastino 2005: 355). Marmilla (**Figure 5**) is a fertile area consisting of gentle slopes of marly hills (**Figure 6**), in continuity with the fecund Campidano plain, to the south. Rural settlements in Marmilla were abundant both during Punic and Roman periods (Van Dommelen 1998b: 598–601). In Roman times, the territory was organised in large agricultural estates — *latifundum* (Bondi 1987: 79–82; Meloni 1990: 120–123) — with the coexistence of small farms of Punic origin (Van Dommelen 1998b: 591). As *Sa Mitza Salida* was located in an area strongly marked by agriculture, it is plausible that its community had been affected by the dismemberment of the *latifundi* following the introduction of *enfiteusis* in the island. We can imagine that numerous of those peasants and slaves once employed in the agricultural estates around Masullas were buried at *Sa Mitza Salida*.

The burials contained inhumations only, dug on the tuff surface (Manos and Floris 2005: 65). Excavated in 1994 and 1996–1997, the site revealed 54 graves aligned in direction northwest0-southeast (**Figure 7**), containing 74 individuals (Puddu 2019a: 68–72).

The site was used between the first (i.e. see Tronchetti 2014) and the sixth century AD. The communities in control of the site used uniform depositional practices, both regarding the bodies' treatment, grave good distribution-patterns (Puddu 2019a: 74), and grave types: rectangular pits either covered by redeposited earth and stones or surrounded by sandstone slabs forming a cist-grave (**Figure 8**). The same funerary gestures were repeatedly performed with precision throughout its history of this cemetery: the dead bodies were laid on their back, with either both hands along the sides or one folded on the chest, head facing on the side or looking ahead. Grave goods, usually around 6, always included certain forms recurring in association with specific body parts (**Figure 13**):

– one coarse ware pan, irregular in shape, usually deposited by the feet;
– one or two coarse ware jugs by the head or shoulder;
– one to three dishes and cups by the hips, feet, or, rarely, head;

Figure 5: Map of the inner regions of Sardinia showing the area of Marmilla (in red), where the necropolis of Sa Mitza SAlida is located. (Source: Regione Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).

Figure 6: View on the gentle and fertile slopes of the Marmilla area, Sardinia (Source: Anna Tatti Photographer, on Flickr. Reproduction permitted on a Creative Commons Licence).
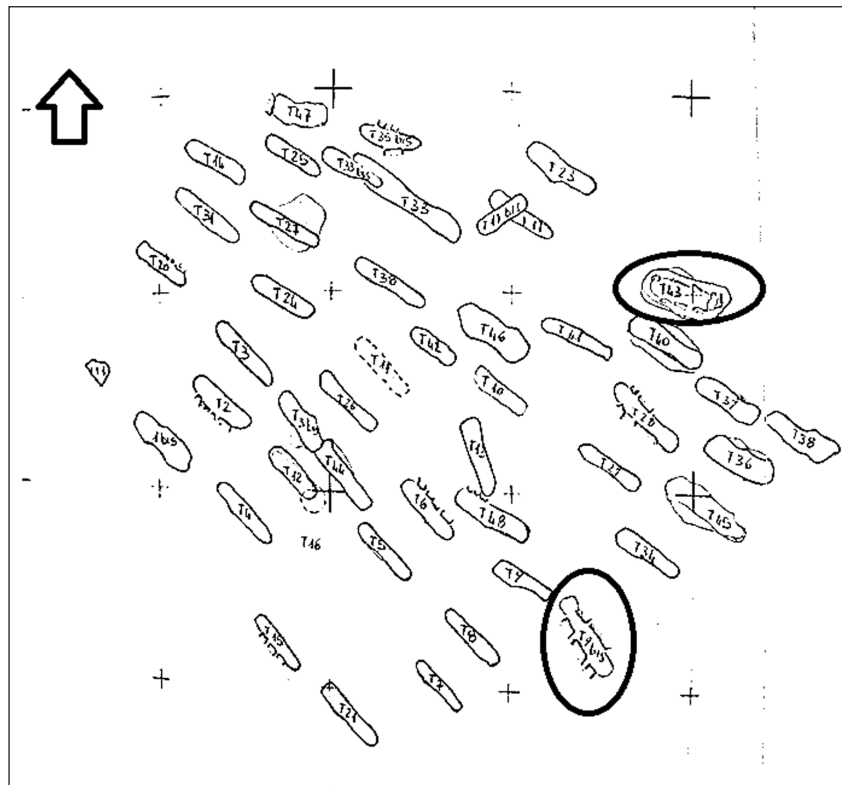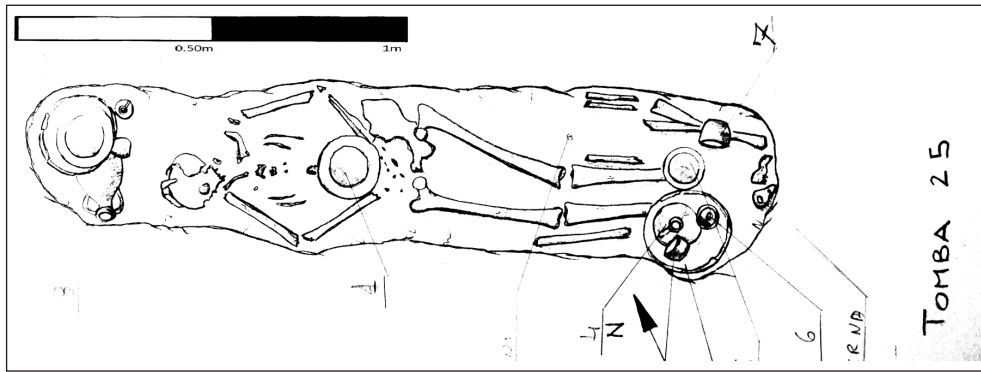
Figure 7: Plan of the necropolis of Masullas (Source: Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).
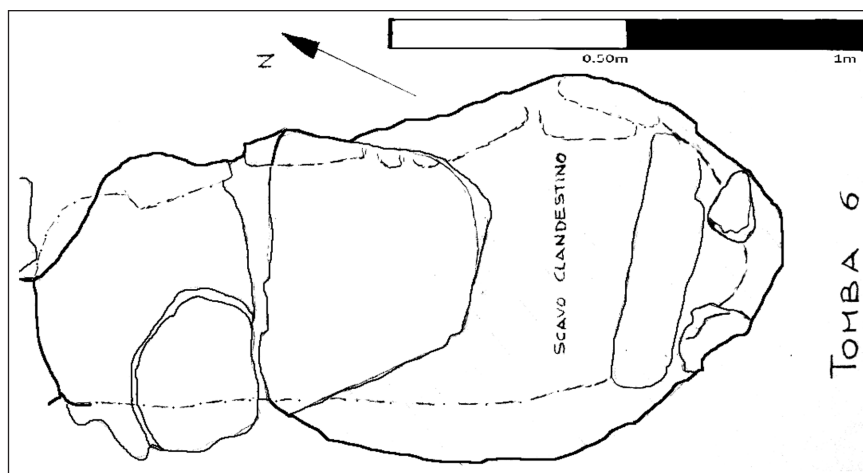

Figure 8: Plan of the slabs covering one cist grave from Masullas (Source: Soprintendenza Archeological della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).

– one coin either over the chest or by the hips, or held in one hand of the deceased;
– glass or ceramic beaker by the feet or by the shoulders (Puddu 2019a: 81, 82).

The community took good care of their deceased, deposing them carefully, surrounding them with offerings of foods and drinks contained in ceramic or glass objects, rarely leaving personal objects. Along with these patterns, the excavations have also yielded evidence that the community of Masullas used to reuse burials. The remains of the previous deceased presented the characteristics of bone reductions (**Figure 9**): bones set aside from the new inhumation, incompleteness of the skeleton, variety of bones, remains of objects laid in the previous burial (Duday 2009). Though, in the fourth century AD, something changed: although most depositional patterns from the past were still used, the bones manipulations occurred in a new fashion.

Figure 9: Plan of Grave 25, with the reduced bones of previous burials visible in the southeast corner (Source: Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).
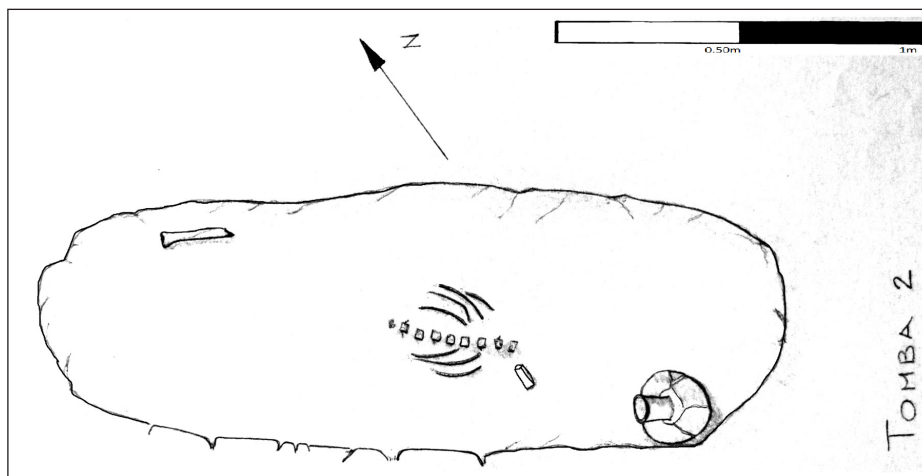
Figure 10: Plan of what was left of the content of the looted grave 2, Masullas (Source: Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).

The Burials' Chronological Data

The excavation of *Sa Mitza Salida* yielded evidence that, on the one hand, two graves were set up in the fourthcentury AD laying some crania in contact with the bodies of the main inhumed. On the other, several burials whose primary depositions date back to different periods, show signs of reopening and of removal of the cranium.

The graves where the head is missing are:

- Grave 4, 5, 8, 10, and 40: completely empty, due to the recent activity of looters;
- Grave 2 (**Figure 10**), 29 and 29bis: highly disturbed burials, partially looted; not only the cranium but also other large bones and grave goods were missing;
- Grave 33: all bones were in anatomical connection except the head, missing; the presence of local imitations of *Sigillata Italica* vessels provide a *terminus post quem* to date the burial to whole first– beginning of second century AD;
- Grave 36: all bones in anatomical position except the head, missing; *Sigillata Africana* A vessels allowed to date this to the second – third century AD;
- Grave 42: head and inferior parts of the lower limbs are missing; imitations of local *Sigillata Italica* are present;
- Grave 44: the best preserved of the group, where only the cranium was absent, but the mandible was still in place, dating to the first century AD.

The last four graves satisfy all the elements requested to be considered as possible sources of the crania present in the two fourth century graves.

Grave 9 bis

Grave 9bis (**Figure 1**) is a cist grave, covered in sandstone slabs. The deposition of the single inhumed followed the patterns established in Masullas throughout the previous 400 years. It was supine, with the head at southeast turned to the left, arms towards the chest holding a glass cup form Isings 34 (Isings 1957: 48, n. 34) with out-turned rim, a vertical wall decorated by applied green glass beads and flat base, dating to the whole fourthcentury AD. The buried individual — an adult of which sex and precise age are still unknown — was accompanied by a second, less common grave-good: a cranium deposited by the feet. The excavation journals inform us that, after starting to remove the soft fill covered by the slabs, the two first bones to emerge were the two crania, at a higher level than the rest of the body. The cranium, with no mandible, was right on top of the feet of the inhumed, with no layers in between. This means that the deposition of the extra cranium in grave 9bis happened during the funeral of the main inhumed person, rather than being part of a later ritual.

The funerary practice held at Masullas for the set-up of grave 9bis presented a cranium as a new ritual element. This must have been blatantly visible to those taking part in the funeral. And it must have driven a completely new narrative compared to the past. The presence of the cranium cannot just be dismissed as part of an inexplicable ritual. This burial offers to us, and offered to the community of Masullas, the visible signs of an intention to set a material connection between individuals, likely belonging to the community, buried at different times (Puddu 2018a: 255).

Grave 43 B

This was a cist grave (**Figure 2**) found underneath a superficial inhumation, 43A, containing a grave good that provides a *terminus ante quem* for grave 43B. This is a *Sigillata Africana* D cup form Hayes 69 (Hayes 1972: 117–119, figure 20, form 69, n.1) dating around 425–500 AD. Right underneath the cover slabs was a soft dark-brown fill which, after starting to be removed, revealed, at the highest level, four crania. Only one of them, at the southeast, was facing up, and hence the first part to emerge were the eye orbits, whereas the first part to emerge of the three other crania were the skullcaps. At the western extremity of the grave appeared an old reduction, set apart from the last of the three extra heads, and not in connection with the principal inhumed.

The grave apparatus is similar but wealthier than that of grave 9bis: by the head (uniformly with the depositional patterns of Masullas in the previous centuries) was one local coarse ware jug — so-called *Campidanese* class (see Salvi 2010) from the name of the area of production, the Campidano plain (Tronchetti 1996: 120–121) — dated to third-fourth century AD; nearby was one coarse ware pan with out-turned rim and flat base, common at *Sa Mitza Salida*. On the right side were three *Sigillata Africana* pots: one undecorated cup Hayes3C (Hayes 1972: 21, figure 2, form3B/C, n.88), coming from domestic contexts of mid-second – late third century AD; one cup Hayes 50 (Hayes 1972: 68, figure 12, form50A/B, n.55), with wide rim, oblique wall, and small ring foot. When decorated, this form comes from fourth-fifth century domestic contexts (Tronchetti 1996: 74–75). When undecorated, as here, it is dated between the beginning and the end of the fourth century AD only (Hayes 1972: 68). One coin (**Figure 11**) found by the head gives us important

Figure 11: Obverse (left) and reverse (right) of the bronze coin from Grave 43B (Source: Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).

chronological references. The obverse has in the field an Emperor with laureate head looking left, in military clothing. The portrait's details recall the style popular during Constantine's empire: big size of the eyes, protruding eyebrow and cheekbone, and ribbon at the back of the head. The visible part of the legend reads '*SVPLICI*'. The reverse shows a female figure with sceptre, riding a hawk and the legend '*IOVI CONSERVATORI AVGUSTI*'. Legends and images are not found together in other coins. Nevertheless, the chronological elements provided by this coin are many and coherent amongst themselves. The legends are frequently associated with coins circulating during the empire of Constantius II (353–361) (Guido 2000: 144, n. 506).

   The other grave goods were two miniature bottles, poorly preserved bronze fragments, and a small lead spiral. The *Sigillata Africana* cups and the coin allow to date the grave around the mid-fourth century AD.

   As in the case of grave 9bis, grave 43B was not set up following exclusively new ritual rules. The significant novelty is the presence of three extra crania laid on top of the body: a visible element that reiterated physical bonds that must have struck the people of Masullas' community who took part at the funeral.

The Intra-Burials' Material Relations

The previous sections showed that two graves with extra crania from *Sa Mitza Salida* are roughly contemporary. Both of them date to the fourth century, although grave 43B is datable with more precision after the mid-fourth century. Both graves are in tune with the depositional patterns characterising the whole necropolis. This demonstrates that graves 43B and 9bis were set-up by community members who were familiar with the funerary ritual practised at Masullas, to which they added new, evident, and meaningful details. Continuity with the past characterises these graves as much as innovation. The two graves can be attributed to the same community that used *Sa Mitza Salida* for the previous centuries. This community, though, might have come to terms with a social change and identity variations in the fourth century AD. The newly introduced gestures must have been visible, and to some extent, dramatic. The active community members laid one cranium at the feet of the person buried in grave 9bis (**Figure 1**), and three crania on top of the body interred in grave 43b (**Figure 2**). Those gestures cannot be isolated from the necessary previous ones. Beforehand, other gestures must have been performed before the eyes of the community: in particular, the reopening of older graves that became the sources for the extra crania. In a way, the community of Masullas was invited to look back at the materiality of its past.

   The extra crania can come from: the reduction of older graves, as registered for the previous 300 years in Masullas; other contexts outside the necropolis; other graves from the necropolis itself. The first explanation is challenged by taphonomic evidence. The signs of reduction — bones left aside, and bone variety remains from previous grave goods — are not present in graves 9bis and 43B. As for the second explanation, there is not one single available element to make it into a working hypothesis at the moment. The third is testable by crossing the taphonomic details from graves 43B and 9bis with graves 44, 33, 36, and 42. This hypothesis relies on the idea that the manipulated graves where the extra crania were found were meant to establish a physical bond between the present and the past of the community (Puddu 2018a: 255–256). In order to test such a hypothesis, one needs to study the taphonomic evidence and check the anatomical details concerning the post-mortem behaviour of the ligaments. Were the extra crania obtained before or after the decomposition of the body? In order to understand this, noticing the absence/presence of the mandible amongst the cranial bones removed from their original grave and buried elsewhere is crucial. This piece of evidence will reveal when, roughly, they had been removed from their original place. The mandibular ligament is one of the last to decay of the human body. Depending on both cultural — i.e. the presence of coffin, materials used, depth of burial — and environmental conditions — nature of the ground, humidity, and temperature (see Pinheiro 2006: 87) — the mandibular ligament can start perishing around 12 months from the death (Di Maio and Di Maio 2001: 21–41).

   The cranium laid in an upright position on the feet of grave 9bis was without mandible. In grave 43B, two crania were without mandible, whereas the one laid over the feet of the principal inhumed had the mandible still in place. This means that the latter was removed from a relatively recent burial (possibly less than one-year-old) before the mandibular ligament decayed. Preliminary skeletal analysis (Unida 2005) have shown that this skull and the reduced femurs at the bottom of the burial belong to one woman in her mid-twenties. This was likely an earlier deposition that was reduced when the grave was reopened and the new deceased buried. However, her cranium was not left together with the reduced long bones but was laid along the body of the main inhumation, following consistently the set-up of the other two extra crania. The same study (Unida 2005) shows that the main inhumed person has marked male characters of an adult individual, whereas the other two crania belong one to a possible young woman, and one to a possible young man. Notwithstanding these details, what matters for the sake of the argument discussed in this paper, is

that cranial bones coming from more ancient graves where moved from their original grave, collected, and placed on top of the new inhumed.

The study on the mandibular ligament showed that two crania in grave 43B and the one in 9bis had been removed from their body after such ligament decayed, whereas the third one in grave 43B was removed before the process was complete, having the mandible still attached. Said that the latter belongs very likely to the reduced bones present in grave 43B, we still need to hypothesise the provenience of the remaining three. The main sign we need to look at in the other graves where the inhumed was found without cranium is the presence or absence of the mandible. Out of the list provided above, graves 44 (**Figure 12**), 33, and 36 — respectively from first, second and third centuries AD — offer the clearer evidence: they show neither further signs of disturbance nor the removal of other bones (i.e. **Figure 12**).

It is likely that the three graves, once reopened, were manipulated so carefully that nothing else but the cranium was lifted from the skeleton to which they biologically belonged. Otherwise, the remaining bones of the burials left without cranium would have been reduced with no problem or moved accidentally, and their graves reused with much more evident signs of disturbance (see Brent 2017: 47).

The taphonomic analysis of the burials allows hypothesising that the crania introduced in graves 43B and 9bis are likely to come from graves 44 (**Figure 12**), 33, and 36. Nevertheless, these results are susceptible
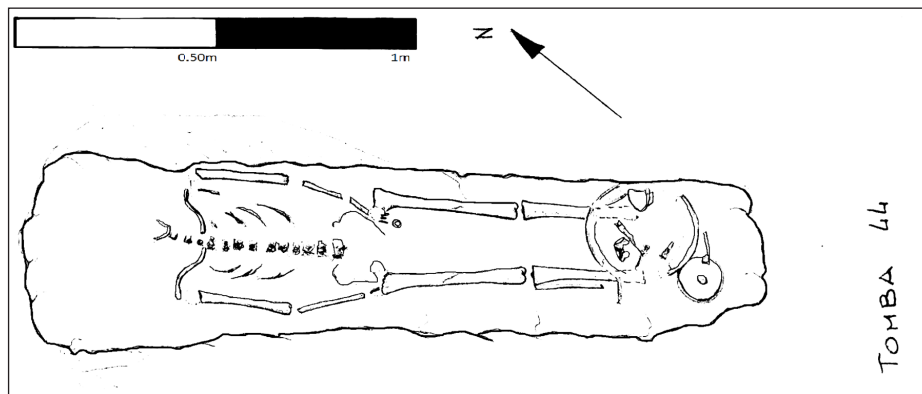
Figure 12: Plan of Grave 44 from Masullas. It is relevant to note that, despite the cranium being absent, the mandible is still in place and in anatomical connection (Source: Soprintendenza Archeologica dell Sardegna. Reproduction permitted).
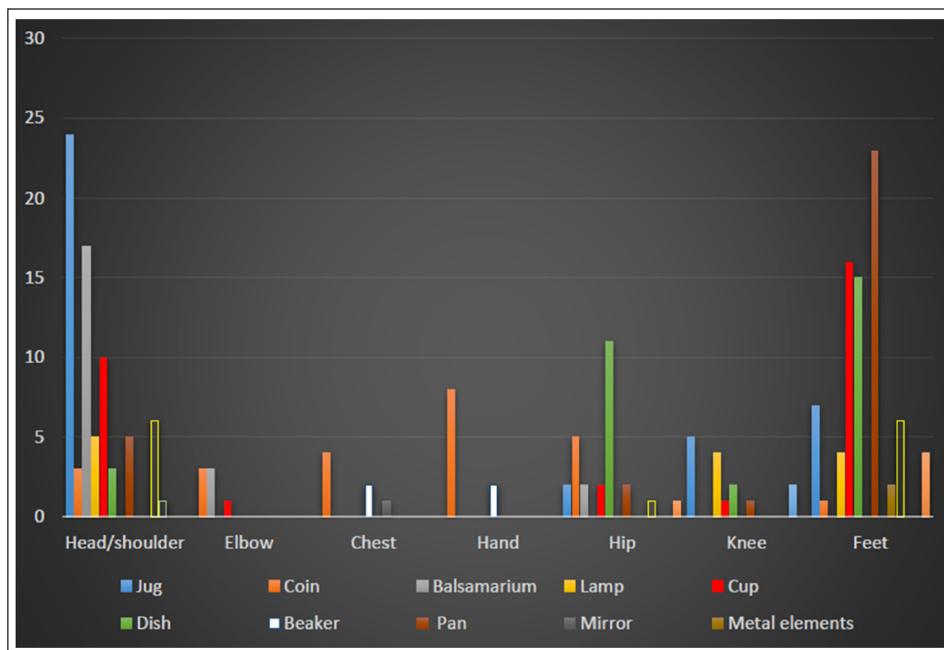
Figure 13: Associational patterns of grave goods and body parts at Sa Mitza Salida (Source: Puddu 2019a: Fig. 4.11. Reproduction permitted).

to change — or confirmation — when the bones will undergo further instrumental analysis during the next research phase.

Despite the fact that one specific interpretive line is followed in this paper, other ritualistic explanations can be pursued. If until recently most funerary approaches did not take into account post-depositional practices (Brent 2017: 39), the recent intensification of burial reopening studies, primarily related to late antiquity (Aspöck 2011), makes multiple interpretive scenarios possible, despite most of them focussing only on sarcophagi (Gleize 2007). Bolla (2015: 363–364) has recently collected a wide array of reasons for Roman-period graves' reopening. These range from the legitimization of power (i.e. Retief 2005) to the search of Christian relics (i.e. Lai, 2010), from the reuse of grave goods and bones in magical rites (Bailliot 2004: 75) to building activities in funerary areas (i.e. Bodel 2008: 178), and the accidental hitting of graves to their reuse for space or identity-related reasons. Though all possibilities have to be taken into account, the material evidence presented here does not fit them all. There are no elements in this case study that imply the power-related rituals at imperial or provincial level; though search of Christian relics cannot be excluded, there are no other elements in favour of this interpretation, such as inscriptions or explicit Christian decorative motives on grave goods; magic rites cannot be excluded a priori either, though the explanation would be very generic, leaving the interpretation at a standstill. There are no signs of building activities or of more recent cuts intercepting pre-existing graves. Identity-related reasons are a useful line of investigation for this case study, as the practical reasons linked to saving space, accountable for other graves of the same necropolis (Puddu 2019a: 73, Figure 4.5), have been ruled out at the outset of this paper in the section 'Outline of the necropolis of Sa Mitaz Salida' above. For this case of burial re-openings, it is possible to apply what Klevnäs (2013: 131–134) defines the missing components of an otherwise well-preserved skeleton, accompanied by the presence of extra components on an otherwise undisturbed burial. One close — chronologically and geographically — comparison comes from Vagnari, Puglia, where the cappuccina burial 308 was the object of a double reuse that did not provoke any significant disturbance to the remains of the previous inhumed, interpreted biologically as potential siblings (Brent 2017: 45). The argument followed by Brent for grave 308 at Vagnari is particularly fitting because 'if the goal of disturbance had been to reuse the space without consideration of the previous occupant, then there probably would have been greater disturbance of individual A' (Brent 2017: 47). Likewise, the graves analysed in this paper, both those missing bone components and those with additions, do not present other signs of disturbance beyond the in-and-out movement of specific bones.

Hence, despite the exact relationship between the individuals introduced in the same burial remaining unknown until further specialised osteological analyses (i.e. genetic or paleopathology ones) are carried out — as it is planned for the next phases of this research — one aspect can be taken on board: the practices held around graves 9bis and 43B at Masullas centre on the physical relationship between multiple individuals, multiple graves, and between past and present. The archaeological evidence invites to take into account a strong will by members of the community of Masullas to make a physical union visible. Such a decision could have possibly been taken to make it up for a social division. For this reason, for this specific case study, I deemed it necessary to integrate other sources that hinted at the evidence of separation in fourth century Sardinia. The interpretation proposed here below results from an interdisciplinary approach that integrates archaeological, historical, and theoretical sources looked at so far.

From the analysis provided above it emerges that the death of two people at Masullas in the fourth century AD became, for the community, a chance to face its identity: this moment of regular social crisis — the loss of a member — merged with a more significant social and exceptional crisis. The former was used to solve the second by recurring to a third element, the past of the community, represented by the human remains of old burials (Puddu 2018a: 255). To this narrative, this paper adds a further interpretive element. Here, the community of Masullas is interpreted as made of subalterns, salaried workers and slaves. Stating so is allowed by the nature of the grave goods, and by the visible marks on the bones and teeth signalling that the people buried at Masullas lived a life characterised by a heavy physical activity and a poor diet (Manos and Floris, 2005: 67). We are dealing with a community of hard workers who faced hard conditions of life, not having the best resources available to sustain themselves. Notwithstanding those conditions, they cared very much about their funerary ritual, which was composed of articulated and lengthy gestures (Puddu 2019a: 70–85). The nature of the banquet and offers, the small but even and consistent quantity of goods, the attention for their aesthetics (local imitations of imports) has been interpreted here as an index of a poor rural community that engaged systematically with the care of their dead despite the small means available to its members. The community of Masullas likely took the collective moment of the funerary practice as a long-awaited chance for breaking from the hardship of their hard-working life. During the funeral, the community could finally represent itself in its unity, and try to creatively solve its moments of social crisis before its members.

Investigating what circumstances brought the community of Masullas to open older graves and to merge their human remains with the new inhumed is paramount. It can be hypothesised that the economic and social conditions of the community of Masullas changed around the beginning of the fourth century AD. If its sense of social identity was maintained until the fourth century by repeating the same funerary gestures throughout the centuries, by setting up grave 9bis and 43B Masullas' community reinforced that bond by establishing a materially visible link with the past. Few years — or decades — before graves 9bis and 43B were set-up, a new system of administration of the agricultural land was introduced in Sardinia, in the early fourth century AD. Adopted by the central government with the intent of improving the agricultural productivity, *enfitheusis* caused the division of the slaves and workers from members of their families, provoking a massive general discontent, as reported by the *Codex Theodosianus*.

Towards an Archaeology of the Subalterns

This article has exposed an interpretive framework, a historical problem, and an archaeological case-study. The three elements have been investigated and gradually linked together throughout the paper. The application of Gramsci's theory of the subalterns can be a key step along the path towards disclosing social identities in a fully dynamic way. The theory of subalterns allows to look at how hegemonic power created divisions within the Roman world. Such divisions and the way local communities reacted to them have an important role in defining their identities and in creating an alternative history. The application of the theory of subalterns to archaeology will help to pinpoint the material traces of such divisions at a local level. Moreover, an archaeology of the subalterns can also benefit the most recently studied concepts within Roman archaeology, agency and globalization, by making explicit the material ways through which subalterns engaged locally with the material manifestations of power by the Empire (i.e. traded commodities). The paper applied Gramsci's framework referring to both historical and archaeological sources, seen their contingent availability and chronological consistency.

The historical sources used here, from the *Codex Theodosianus*, helped to reveal that the actions taken by the dominant class of the Empire to enhance the economic productivity in Sardinia (after Sicily and Africa) hit sensibly the social structures of the subalterns employed in Sardinia's field, forcing them to scatter around the island. This created the division of people from their families and communities. The archaeological sources from the necropolis of *Sa Mitza Salida*, Sardinia. were used here to hypothesise that, around the same period, burial manipulations were performed likely by the same subalterns who endured the actions of the dominant class to overcome their effects: the social separation. The effects of such social crisis triggered by the economic changes were endured by the subalterns of Sardinia for a period that could range from a few years to a few decades. Such interpretive chain implies that the actors of those burial manipulations visible in graves 9bis and 43B were among those workers and slaves mentioned by the *Codex Theodosianus*. The signs used to support this interpretation are at least of two groups: first, the area of Marmilla, where the necropolis of Masullas lays, was vastly managed in large estates (Meloni 1990: 120–123) — *latifunda* — that were in the fourth century affected by the introduction of the *enfiteusis* and consequent division of workers; second, the bones of the people buried in Masullas show evident signs of hard physical activities and of poor diet (Manos and Floris 2005: 67), elements compatible with the hard life of agricultural workers.

The interpretive narrative followed in this paper associates the introduction of new ritual behaviours in the necropolis of Masullas to the mutated economic circumstances that proved socially stressful at a local level. The interpretation highlighted the dialogic relationship — and contrast — between the subalterns' social needs and Empire's economic strategies. The first address the community's social wellness and unity; the latter aim at the Empire's productivity. Often, the two clash. The clash, though, is not always reported by historical written sources in such explicit terms as is by the *Codex Theodosianus* on Sardinia. This grey area can and should become a domain of archaeology. As written sources are present, they have to be taken into account by archaeologists, as in this case. Conversely, being textual references not available, it is still possible to find signs of subalterns archaeologically only (the repeated marks of tendons on bones registered in Masullas are certainly one of those and should be given a deserved relevance). Archaeology can access not the clash – between elites and subalterns – itself, but both the (physical) consequences of such clash and the attempts to deal with them. However, this needs the development of a consistent methodology that this paper has only introduced by envisaging the future of an archaeology of the subalterns.

The signs of the fragmented history of subalterns, of their attempts to fight the divisions imposed onto them, are rarely visible, but they are out there for an interpreter to identify them. This paper would hopefully represent an effort to give a high value to those rare fragments. With this paper, I embarked in the task of what Gramsci calls the integral historian by focusing on the material aspects of the initiatives of the subalterns. This research has reminded the existence, within one province of the Roman Empire, Sardinia, of

people who were very far from the attention of the historical sources. Nevertheless, their human reactions, resilience, agency, and social initiatives were so paramount to them to force the Roman Empire to put the integrity of their social relationships ahead of any economic priority.

Notes

[1] 'For who could tolerate that children should be separated from parents, sisters from brothers, and wives from husbands?' (Davidson and Pharr 1952: Book 2, Title 25, 57).

[2] The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic [...] Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should therefore be of incalculable value for the integral historian (Gramsci 1999: 207).

[3] The archaeological excavations were directed by Donatella Mureddu for the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Sardegna in two seasons: 1994, and 1996–1997.

[4] They were exposed in London at the Institute of Italian Culture, between October and December 2017, then extended further due to the great request. The same Notebooks are now exhibited at the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena until the end of March 2019.

[5] Storia della classe dominante e storia delle classi subalterne. La storia delle classi subalterne è necessariamente disgregata ed episodica: c'è nell'attività di queste classi una tendenza all'unificazione sia pure su piani provvisori, ma essa è la parte meno appariscente e che si dimostra solo a vittoria ottenuta. Le classi subalterne subiscono l'iniziativa della classe dominante, anche quando si ribellano; sono in istato di difesa allarmata. Ogni traccia di iniziativa autonoma è perciò di inestimabile valore. In ogni modo la monografia è la forma più adatta di questa storia, che domanda un cumulo molto grande di materiali parziali. (Gramsci 1975: 2283, 2284).

[6] Hoare and Smith, in Gramsci 1999 translate 'spezzato' into interrupted. Though, using the expression 'spezzare', Gramsci wants to drive a much more dramatic effect than just an interruption.

[7] Emperor Constantine Augustus to Gerulus, Fiscal Representative of Three Provinces. In the case of Our patrimonial and emphyteutic estates in Sardinia which were recently redistributed among different proprietors, the division of the landholdings ought to have been made in such a way that each entire family of slaves would have remained in the possession of one land-holder. For who could tolerate that children should be separated from parents, sisters from brothers, and wives from husbands? Therefore, if any person has separated such slaves and dragged them off to serve under different ownerships, he shall be forced to reunite them under a single ownership. If any person should lack the due number of slaves on account of the restoration of family ties, substitute slaves shall be given in return by the person who has received the aforesaid slaves. Be vigilant, in order that no complaint hereafter may persist throughout the province about the separation of the loved ones of the families of slaves. Given on the third day before the kalends of May in the year of the consulship of Proculus and Paulinus. April 29, 334; 325. (Davidson and Pharr 1952: Book 2, Title 25, 56–57).

[8] De Clercq (1963) *Can.* 17: 246.

[9] De Clercq (1963) *Can.* 15: 267.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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