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The Stele of Nora: A Phoenician gift that keeps on giving

L'estela de Nora. Un regal fenici que no deixa de donar

In memory of Paul G. Mosca (1945–2022)

This article examines recent studies and contributions on the Phoenician stele of Nora, an artefact that has been the subject of great debate for over two hundred years of scholarship. The aim is to delve into the contents of the recent meticulous study by Roberto Casti, who provides a comprehensive historiography on the stele as well as his own reading and interpretation of its Phoenician inscription (*La Stele di Nora. Scavo di un Testo Archeologico*, 2019). The discussion further includes recent papers and highlights provided by epigraphists and archaeologists alike on the intriguing inscription, with special focus on the recent contributions by Paul G. Mosca and Émile Puech, with the aim of putting these studies into their research framework within Phoenician epigraphy and archaeology, especially at the site of Nora in Sardinia.

Keywords: Phoenician inscription, stele of Nora, Sardinia, epigraphy, archaeology.

Aquest article examina estudis i aportacions recents sobre l'estela fenícia de Nora, un artefacte que ha estat objecte d'un gran debat durant més de dos-cents anys d'erudició. L'objectiu és aprofundir en el contingut del recent i minuciós estudi de Roberto Casti, que ofereix una exhaustiva historiografia sobre l'estela, així com la seva pròpia lectura i interpretació de la inscripció fenícia (*La Stele di Nora. Scavo di un Testo Archeologico*, 2019). La discussió inclou, a més, treballs recents i destacats, tant d'epigrafistes com d'arqueòlegs, sobre la intrigant inscripció, amb una especial atenció en les darreres contribucions de Paul G. Mosca i Émile Puech, tot plegat a fi de situar aquests estudis en el marc de l'epigrafia i l'arqueologia fenícies, sobretot els relatius al jaciment de Nora a Sardenya.

Paraules clau: inscripció fenícia, estela de Nora, Sardenya, epigrafia, arqueologia.

Introduction

The inscribed stele of Nora (CIS I 144 = KAI 46) (fig. 1) is an artefact that has intrigued and perplexed generations of scholars with its forty-four Phoenician letters and the challenging reading of its content. Since 1830 the stele has been conserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Cagliari, in Sardinia (Italy) (No. 5998).

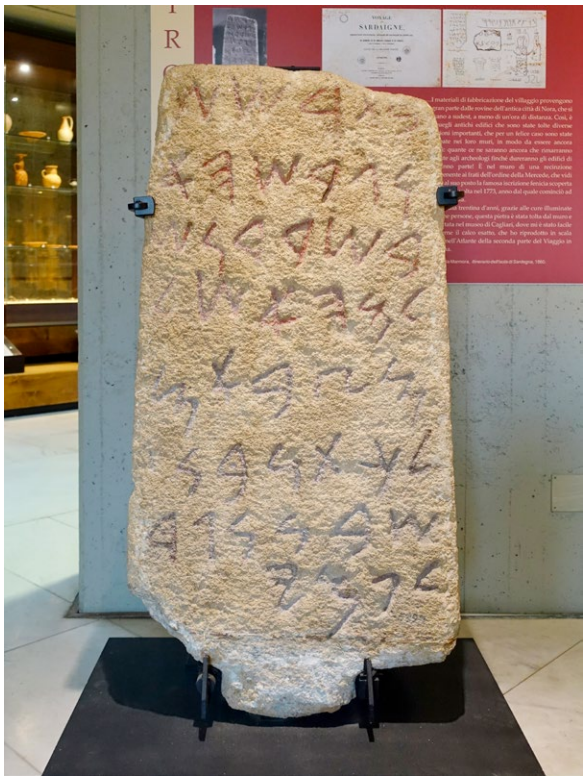

Fig. 1 The Stele of Nora (ca. 1.05m by 0.55m by 0.26m), Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Cagliari, Italy (© Olaf Tausch / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / GFDL).

This article discusses recent studies on the stele, primarily Roberto Casti's detailed monograph published in 2019, entitled *La Stele di Nora. Scavo di un Testo Archeologico*. The discussion will delve into the contents of Casti's book and provide a commentary on his proposed reading and interpretation of the inscription. Indeed, what started off as a critical review of Casti's work has eventually grown into a fully-fledged reappraisal of recent works on the stele of Nora. Aside from Casti's monograph, therefore, this article tackles further contributions that have appeared in recent years, namely a critical analysis by the late Paul G. Mosca (2017) and a recent proposition by Émile Puech (2020), in order to place them in their research framework in relation to Phoenician epigraphy, the ancient site of Nora (near Pula in Sardinia), and any corresponding Phoenician activity at the site.

Casti's Monograph

Let me start by saying that this discussion concerns the hard copy version of Casti's work, whereas the eBook edition, also released in 2019, with a slightly different subtitle (*Storia di un Testo Archeologico*), has been reviewed by Pete Missingham (2019).

In his monograph, dedicated to Paolo Bernardini, Casti compiles a detailed account of the inscribed stele of Nora. In the Preface, penned by archaeologist Roberto Sirigu (Casti 2019: 9-10), the monograph is rightly hailed as "un testo non solo importante, ma addirittura necessario" (Casti 2019: 9), as Casti tackles with methodological rigour one of the most noteworthy Phoenician inscriptions recovered in Sardinia and the western Mediterranean. Casti starts off the monograph with a brief comment (Introduzione) about the intrigue with which the stele of Nora attracted the author since the 24th of July 1993, the inauguration day of the new location for the aforesaid museum in Cagliari. At the time, the stele had been on display in the foyer of the building, resting on a sand bed inside a niche. Since then, Casti was immersed in years of growing interest and research on this Phoenician inscription, resulting in the monograph under discussion.

The exact findspot and circumstances of discovery of the stele were subject to debate, with Casti highlighting this in his historiographic outline (Capitolo I). The discovery is attributed to a Polish Dominican abbot by the name of Giacinto Hintz. The latter had identified the stone in 1773, in the area of the Chiesa di San Raimondo, on the periphery of the town of Pula in Cagliari, which lies not far from the ancient settlement of Nora (Casti 2019: 15) (figs. 2 and 3).

Nothing is known about the stele's original provenance, since it was found embedded in a boundary wall of a garden attached to a convent, which was the property of the monastic order of the Madonna delle Mercede. How the stele ended up incorporated as construction material is anyone's guess, yet Casti argues that it must have been integrated into the garden wall around the time of, or soon after, the completion of the church in 1709, when the convent was constructed (Casti 2019: 16, n.8). While the church still stands today, both the convent and the wall have been demolished (Casti 2019: 16, 19, Fig. 2). Casti presents a number of attestations (both old and modern) of the discovery, and clarifies which of those statements were vague and which ones were misleading or incor-

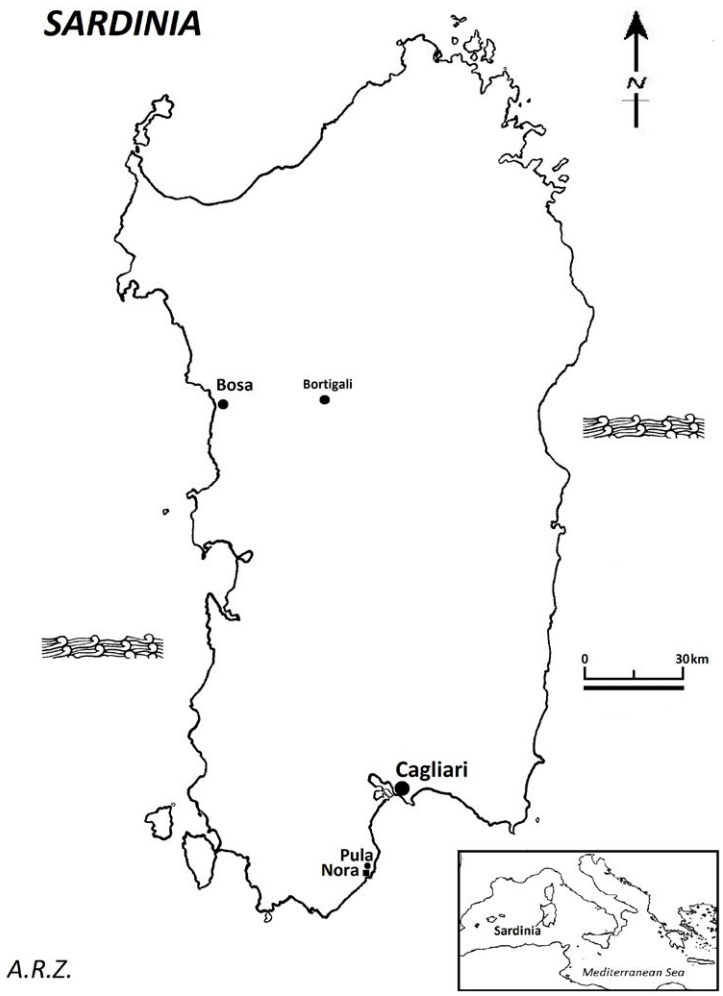

Fig. 2 Map of Sardinia (Italy) showing places mentioned in the text.

rect. Hintz and Alberto Lamarmora (the version of whose surname is currently accepted in Sardinia) (Casti 2019: 15, n.3) were the first to produce drawings of the stele while still embedded in the garden wall. This was a time when knowledge of Phoenician palaeography and epigraphy was still rudimentary, so frequent errors would be expected in such preliminary drawings.

Following this reiteration of initial observations, Casti's discussion focuses on the stele and its inscription (Casti 2019: 24-28). The stone is trapezoidal in form and made of local porous sandstone. It measures 1.05m in height (with a maximum height of 1.19m inclusive of the base tenon), about 0.55m in average width (with around 0.59m at the base and tapering towards the top at a width of around 0.49m), and about 0.26m in average thickness. The author provides a detailed commentary on the long-term debates surrounding the integrity of the inscription. Not only does he confirm the complete state of the stone, but also the presence of a total of forty-four Phoenician letters (which, up to the 1960s, were presumed to be forty-five, until the idea was debunked). The incised letters are more or less evenly distributed in eight lines. The height of the letters varies from a minimum of 5cm to a maximum of about 12.5cm, depending on the identification of certain letters (Casti 2019: 27). The Cagliari Museum's website lists the weight of the stone as 580kg (see MAN Cagliari).

The section discussing the so-called "rubricatura" of the Phoenician letters is significant (Casti 2019: 29-42). Since at least the year 1834, the stele was noted for its red-coloured incised letters. By the time of Frank Moore Cross's second visit to the Cagliari Museum in September 1984, and his publication three years later (cf. his views in Cross 1972 and 1987), it was noted that the first twenty-three letters in lines 1 to 4 have been retraced in red (or rubricated), while the other twenty-one letters from lines 5 to 8 have a darker (seemingly bluish) rubrication, today fading. With regards to the

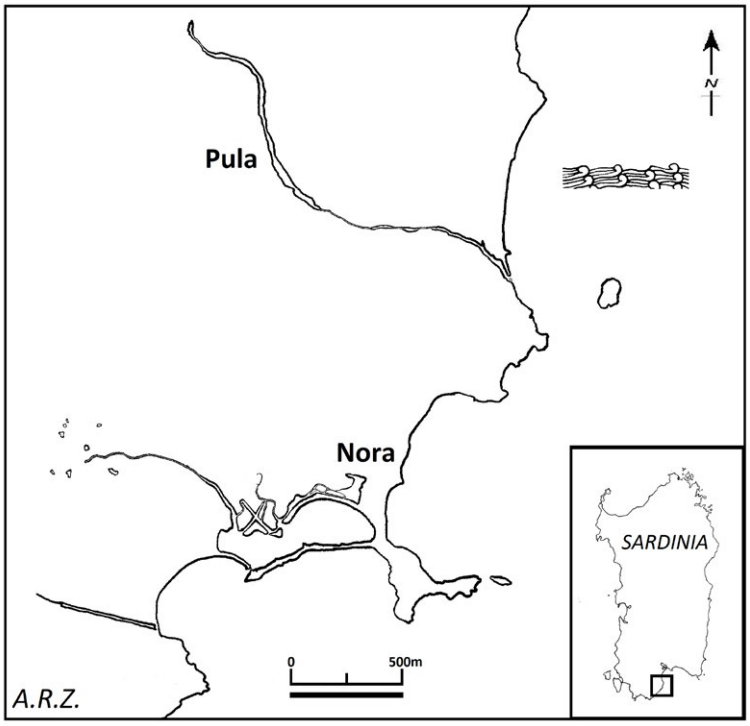

Fig. 3 The site and peninsula of Nora, located on the southern coast of Sardinia.

latter, Casti mentions a total of twenty-two instead of twenty-one letters on p.29, simply because he is including in this part of the discussion the residual rubricated notch of the alleged extra letter at the end of line 6, today dismissed entirely. The issue of rubrication alone has generated scholarly debate, with opinions varying from calling the colouring a modern (at times 'barbarian') intervention to highlight the letters, or else an ancient custom that is observed on other inscribed stelae or monuments. Casti lists an assortment of such opinions, which are laced with his own commentary. A particular issue caused as a result of the rubrication is ostensibly the misidentification of certain letters, or rather of any adjacent (misidentified) notches in the stone's surface. For any future examinations of the stele, therefore, Casti calls for more methodical or technical means to be applied for the appropriate assessment of the inscribed letters rather than the naked eye alone (Casti 2019: 41).

The historiography surrounding the stele of Nora, "oltre due secoli di traduzioni e studi" (Casti 2019: 49), is aptly put together by Casti in a meticulous chronological outline (Capitolo II). The latter starts off from the year 1774, with a letter by Gianbernardo De Rossi, dated 18 August of that year, in which he provided an *editio princeps* of sorts, with a transcription and translation (in Latin) (see De Rossi 1774, with a drawing on p.350). Casti's historiography ends in the year 2012, with excerpts from a catalogue put together by Marco Minoja, Consuelo Cossu, and Michela Migaleddu, for an exhibition held from the 15th of April till the 15th of November, 2011, in the Cagliari Museum, which, of course, included the stele. Casti presents an exhaustive assortment totalling sixty-seven contributions (not counting several other referenced works mentioned in passing or in detailed footnotes). Virtually each scholar's reading and interpretation (where applicable) appear in their original languages and inclusive of any supplementary drawings, apographs, or old photographs of the inscription published over time. All respective contributors' transcriptions are reproduced in the Roman alphabet (as opposed to some of the originals having been published in the square Hebrew script). Not only does this commendable endeavour make even the remotest out-of-print sources readily available for the reader, but Casti also produces his own commentary with each scholarly contribution. At the end of the second chapter is a helpful synoptic table (Casti 2019: 204-207, Tav.III), which summarises the above-mentioned scholarly views in terms of the integrity of the inscription, the nature or genre of the text, and certain readings in lines 2 and 7, amongst other key points.

What follows is Casti's line-by-line analysis of the inscription, complete with colour close-up photographs (or details) of each of the eight lines

(Capitolo III). Here, he summarises the key readings offered by the rich scholarship. The resultant varied readings of most lines are due to the onerous consonantal script that lacks any word dividers. Casti offers comparisons and thoughts on reading combinations in an attempt to make as much sense of the content as possible, and by sticking to the fact that both the stone and the inscription are intact. His own proposed reading and translation are finally provided in Capitolo IV (Casti 2019: 251):

1. BT RŠ Š
2. NGR Š Hʾ
3. BŠRDN Š-
4. LM Hʾ ŠL-
5. M ṢBʾ M-
6. LKT NBN
7. Š BN NGR
8. LPNY

> Il primo / la prima / il principale *BT* di *Nogar* che Lui ha realizzato a *Sherden*. Lui ha realizzato (inoltre) numerose opere di costruzione (di architettura). (Questo è ciò) che ha costruito *Nogar* originario di *Lpn*.

Since Casti treats the stele and its inscription as complete and self-contained, he calls this detail "l'unico punto fermo da cui occorrerà necessariamente ripartire prima di avanzare nuove proposte interpretative" (Casti 2019: 247). He therefore opts to read the text differently than most of the previous interpreters, particularly dismissing the reading BTRŠŠ as "in Tarshish" (or other variants) in line 1, as well as the need of a conjunction <w> at the start of line 2 (claimed to be a <n> with a misleading adjacent notch, following his examinations) (similarly, Mosca 2017: 147-149), and any resultant syntactical modifications to read lines 1-2. He also dismisses the idea of a dedication or mention of the putative Phoenician/Cypriot deity PMY (Pumay/Pummay) in line 8 (with the rubricated <m> shape of the letter claimed to be actually a <n> atop which is a deep indentation in the stone's surface). Overall, his reading and interpretation dismiss any propositions of exiles, storms or shipwrecks, military expeditions, battles against Sardinians, commanders, generals, or Cypriot deities that have been proposed before, and instead talks of a local/Sardinian tradition of a hero builder commemorated in stone in the Phoenician language. The scope and original location of the stele's set-up are lost and unknown to us, so Casti proposes the following:

> Proviamo a immaginare la stele così interpretata eretta su un piedistallo, di fronte a quella prima 'casa' (un nuraghe?), all'ingresso del primo nucleo abitativo sardo-fenicio. Quella scritta su quella pietra monumentale con quelle lettere incise di notevoli dimensioni non poteva di certo passare inosservata a quanti giungevano in quei luoghi per la prima volta...
> ...Tutti dovevano immediatamente sapere e poi riferire che quella era la prima *BT* di *Nogar*, la prima *BT* costruita *BŠRDN* da *Nogar LPNY* (Casti 2019: 248).

And, additionally:

> Un messaggio scritto su pietra, il cui incipit *BT RŠ*, potrebbe essere stato stravolto e interpretato a posteriori 'la prima città' da genti lontane da quel contesto indigeno-fenicio di fine IX-prima metà VIII secolo a.C. dove è certamente presente la stele, ma non la città (Casti 2019: 249).

The monograph closes up with further reflections, divided into four appendices, wherein Casti discusses his proposed interpretation at length. Appendice I tackles parallelisms in Greek and Latin literary tradition for the presumed personage of Nogar (NGR of lines 2 and 7), who, Casti argues, can be equated with the eponymous hero Norax (Νώραξ or Norace). According to literary sources from the second and third centuries CE, Norax came to Sardinia at the helm of the Iberians and founded Nora, presumably the first founded city on the island (cf. Pausanias, *Hellados Periegesis* X.17.5; Solinus, *De Mirabilibus Mundi* IV; for further detailed references see Casti 2019: 255-273; also Edward Lipiński 2004: 234-247, esp. 243-247; see also the remarks by Contu 1985: 45; 2006: 533-540). Therefore, a couple of key points emerge from the literary tradition: Norax is described as founder of the settlement of Nora (the latter name deriving from the name of the hero himself, according to the Roman geographer Solinus); and, the Iberians are responsible for the foundation of Nora, with the Greek geographer Pausanias associating Norax with Iberia, and Solinus explicitly calling him Tartessian.

Casti argues that the Phoenician inscription is essentially centred on this personage NGR and his accomplishments, immortalized as the one responsible for "the first BT that he made in ŠRDN" and "numerous other construction works". This description in the Phoenician text seems to mirror, amongst other passages and sources, the literary tradition and myth of the arrival in Sardinia of the architect Daedalus, for example, as recounted by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus in the first century BCE (*Bibliotheca Historica* IV.30.1). Daedalus is described as having built several great works—supposedly the nuraghi of Sardinia—known as Δαιδάλεια, after their builder (Casti 2019: 260). Amongst other musings, Casti concludes that, through apparent Greek propaganda and related foundation myths and literary traditions, the Iberian Norax, appearing nowhere in the account of Diodorus Siculus, is otherwise reflected in the

image of the Greek counterpart Daedalus, the latter described as architect par excellence who left a building legacy in Sardinia (Casti 2019: 258-265 with references): "a *Nogar costruttore* viene contrapposto *Dedalo costruttore*…Miti e personaggi, per noi palesemente duplicati dalla manipolazione greca" (Casti 2019: 273).

In Appendice II, Casti seeks possible etymological links between his NGR/Nogar, the eponymous hero Norax, the latter's foundation of Nora, and the origins for the name of the famous nuraghi buildings in Sardinia. By the time of the earliest Phoenician presence on the island, at least by the eighth century BCE (see Botto 2007: 118; Zucca 2017: 53), a local indigenous culture had been firmly established, with which the famed nuraghi (singular: nuraghe) are associated. Nuraghi are the main type of prehistoric megalithic buildings (in the form of truncated conical towers) dotting the Sardinian landscape (see Russell 2010: 108-109), with more than seven thousand specimens identified by Lenore J. Gallin and Robert H. Tykot (1993: 335). These constructions were erected over the span of a millennium during the Nuragic Age (roughly between 1800 and 900 BCE or thereabouts, so essentially from the Middle till the Late Bronze Age in Sardinia) and became associated with the Nuragic culture of the time (see Gary S. Webster's typology of structures [Webster 1996: 111-117]; see also, the account by Giovanni Lilliu of 1962 reproduced in a new edition [Lilliu 2005]; further comments are provided by Nathan Pilkington [2012: 47-50 with references]).

The original function of a nuraghe—be it domestic, administrative, military, or cultic, amongst other potential purposes—remains disputed, and so does the etymology of the word 'nuraghe' itself (see further remarks in Contu 1985; 2006: 541-544). Casti therefore proposes hypothetical links between NGR, Norax, the word 'nuraghe', and the toponym Nora. He first outlines the historiographic sequence of statements and publications on the origins of the term 'nuraghe' and on the close link Nogar–Νώραξ–Norace–Nurac–Nuraghe (Casti 2019: 275). According to the outline (spanning over four centuries), the idea of etymologically linking the nuraghi with Norax dates as far back as 1580, with the abbot Giovanni Fara, and proceeds with various propositions throughout the centuries until the year 2005, with the lexical suggestions of Giovanni Ugas (Casti 2019: 275-282 with references). Casti proceeds with his own proposal, that is, the word 'nuraghe' could derive from the anthroponym NGR, an idea essentially conveyed by the inscribed message on the once erected stele in memory of the first BT constructed by NGR (his reading of lines 1-2), who, with the passage of time, became known in collective memory as "'il primo costruttore'" of all megalithic buildings from the past, and therefore, associated with the Nuragic constructions that soared in Sardinia (Casti 2019: 283-286). This description and the alleged eventual adoption of the builder's name for that of the buildings mirror Diodorus Siculus's account on Daedalus and his buildings known as Δαιδάλεια. Casti reflects that Nogar's name possibly changed to Norax through metathesis (Casti 2019: 283). The latter version of the name was preserved throughout the centuries, amongst Greek and Latin authors, as that of a 'hero founder' of the first city (Nora) in Sardinia, who came over from Iberia. On the other hand, the tradition of a 'hero builder' was rather appropriated (through apparent propaganda) for more famous (mythological) figures, and Greek ones at that, such as Daedalus. Casti further explains that a possible transposition GR > RG could have led to the phonetic change of the name *Nogar* into *Norag*, and, through Sardinian dialect, the latter name is easily changed to *Nurag* and any other local variants (such as, *Nuràke*, *Nuràxi*, *Nuràcci*, and so on) until we come to the current Italianised version *Nuraghe*. The same, he says, could be hypothesised for the Latin *Nurac* (attested on the inscribed architrave of the nuraghe Áidu Entos in the town of Bortigali) and for the Greek name of Νώραξ (*Norax*), the founder from the literary tradition, while the toponym *Nora* was attested as *Nura* in ancient maps (see Casti 2019: 283 for further references).

In Appendice III, Casti focuses on the word ŠRDN, a potential ancient toponym of Sardinia. Amongst other toponyms for the island, we know that Classical sources called Sardinia Ἰχνοῦσα/Ichnusa, given the island's shape of a human 'footprint' (cf. Silius Italicus, *Punica* XII.355-359; Pausanias, *Hellados Periegesis* X.17.1), or else Σαρδώ/Sardo, following another eponymous mythological hero by the name of Sardus, son of Hercules, who came over to Sardinia from Libya (cf. Sallust, *Historiae*, II, fr.4; Pausanias, *Hellados Periegesis* X.17.2). Thus, Casti ponders whether the word ŠRDN in the stele (line 3) could stand for the Phoenician version of the ancient toponym, or else the ancient name of Nora and its territory, before it was perhaps attributed to the island as a whole (Casti 2019: 287-294). The word itself could also refer to the island's indigenous population, and Casti does not dismiss an ulterior proposition, that is, the word ŠRDN could stand for the gentilic Sherden, one of the ethnic groups amongst the Sea Peoples (Casti 2019: 293-294). The meaning behind ŠRDN in the stele thus remains open to interpretation.

Finally, in Appendice IV, Casti discusses the eighth (and last) line of the inscription, in which

he reads LPNY. He deems the latter a possible ethnic name for NGR/Nogar's presumed Phoenician place of origin that goes by the name of LPN, perhaps once located in Iberia. Amongst a number of possibilities, Casti proposes the toponym Calpe/Kalpe (modern Peñón de Gibraltar), one of the two pillars of Hercules, as NGR's place of origin, with LPN (Lepen?) having undergone phonetic changes to arrive to Calpe/Kalpe in Greek and Latin, the place or region which was possibly also denominated Tartessos at some point, and with which Solinus associated the founder Norax (Casti 2019: 295-302 with references). Here, too, the matter rests open for debate.

The concluding remarks for the monograph (Conclusioni) sum up Casti's thoughts on his proposed reading, the implied figure of NGR, and the latter's subsequent legacy in Nora and Sardinia in general.

Commentary on Casti's Interpretation and the Personage NGR

I hark back to what Casti wrote on pp.283-286 in his Appendice II, precisely the section subtitled, "Nogar, un mito condiviso". Going by his interpretation, the stele is commemorating a joint tradition of the local indigenous population (the Nuragic culture) and the incoming Phoenicians. He proposes that the Nuragic culture must have had a hailed great architect/builder responsible for the nuraghi, and the figure of NGR immortalised in the stele could reflect such an architect/builder, not to mention any proposed etymological ties with the words NGR and 'nuraghe' that might have been passed down through tradition (Casti 2019: 283). Casti does point out that by the time of the first signs of a Phoenician presence in Sardinia (which, I stress, have been dated to at least the eighth century BCE onwards), the Nuragic tradition had been firmly established, and thousands of nuraghi were constructed throughout the island. He adds that this building tradition, the legacy surrounding it, and the name of the builder behind such megalithic constructions could not have been easily surpassed nor their memory eradicated by the incoming colonisers. In fact, archaeological investigations have determined evidence of integration between the Nuragic and Phoenician cultures in various sites in Sardinia (see exhaustive references in Casti 2019: 284, n.647; also, Webster 1996: 157-159; Attilio Mastino 2017; Zucca 2017). Considering the commonly agreed palaeographic dating of the inscription—late ninth–first half of the eighth centuries BCE—coupled with the earliest archaeological signs of a Phoenician presence on the island already during the eighth century BCE, then contacts and relations between the Nuragic culture and the Phoenicians were already in progress and probably in process of consolidation at the time of the stele's possible set-up.

When considering the literary tradition offered by Pausanias and Solinus (which was compiled around a millennium later than the stele's script), Casti remarks it is difficult to imagine that the indigenous Nuragic culture simply stayed on the back benches while observing the arrival of an Iberian commander (Norax) who allegedly brought over a group of colonizers, took over the island, subjugated the locals, and founded the first city in Sardinia (Casti 2019: 285). Rather, he proposes a more nuanced atmosphere, where Nuragic 'aristocracies' partook in the so-called 'foundation' operation of 'the first BT' (city) of the island (according to the literary sources), or, in Casti's preference, the 'commemoration' of the hero builder NGR "anche se, in assenza di riscontri, non possiamo coglierne pienamente i dettagli e l'esatta dinamica" (Casti 2019: 285). All in all, Casti argues in favour of syncretism of two cohabiting cultures commemorating a joint tradition, inscribed on a stele in the Phoenician language, which is best recounted in his own words (Casti 2019: 285):

> Una stele scritta in lingua fenicia che ricorda l'eroe costruttore di tradizione indigena presuppone una convivenza ormai ben consolidata e un forte legame tra le due etnie che si manifesta in tutta evidenza con l'erezione di una stele commemorativa in ricordo dell'eroe *Nogar*, con tutta probabilità, un eroe patrimonio comune di entrambe le culture.
>
> Quella di tradizione indigena commemora *Nogar* attraverso il ricordo della sua prima *BT* e di molte altre opere di costruzione da lui realizzate in quel territorio (a *Sherden*?); quella di tradizione fenicia ricorda *Nogar* per le sue lontane origini fenicie (*Lpn*), ma anche e soprattutto con la scritta su pietra nella propria lingua. Indigeni e fenici, entrambi presenti quindi nella stele, in perfetta sincronia. Due culture diverse che si incontrano, convivono e ricordano insieme il loro glorioso passato di tradizioni condivise.
>
> La stele, così interpretata, ha tutt'altra valenza, è manifestazione tangibile del sincretismo culturale che sancisce l'integrazione socio-politica ormai pienamente raggiunta, frutto di un'operazione che di fatto assimila il nome del costruttore all'edificio più qualificante dell'isola, il *Nuraghe*.

While Casti's reconstructed picture of the presumed figure of NGR/Nogar and his role played in the stele's inscription might seem blatantly convenient to any scholars out there, I resort to deem his proposition as being another hypothetical interpretation amongst the many others that preceded it. Given my background in ancient Is-

raelite archaeology and epigraphy, I myself fall among the sceptics when it comes to identifying and tying personages from literary traditions with controversial contents of isolated inscriptions, let alone unprovenanced ones such as the stele of Nora. Nevertheless, I still compliment Casti's detailed efforts, as he went to great lengths in keeping his take on this stele particularly grounded in its own 'Sardinian' context and indigenous tradition, without drifting too much from any Phoenician connotations, although it is not without its issues.

Without a doubt, much of the identity of the stele was lost along with its primary context, and the contents of the inscription will remain strenuously teasing and elusive as a result. Casti's narrative, while highly innovative and grounded in Sardinian legacy, still carries potentially contradicting issues to consider:

1. The dating with which Casti agrees for his interpretation of the stele's purpose and set-up is precisely the palaeographic dating assigned to the stele's Phoenician script, "quel contesto indigeno-fenicio di fine IX-prima metà VIII secolo a.C." (Casti 2019: 249).
2. At the same time, his overall interpretation heavily leans, on the one hand, on literary traditions and myths from non-Phoenician sources written several centuries later than the dating of the stele's script, and, on the other hand, on the supposed builder behind the indigenous nuraghi constructions that essentially belong to Sardinia's Middle and Late Bronze Age, rather than the Phoenician period or the above-mentioned "contesto indigeno-fenicio".

The above points raise a chronological query in Casti's propositions, that is, the fact that the nuraghi are essentially a product of the Middle and Late Bronze Age, unless further nuraghi were constructed or erected during that period of syncretism between the Nuragic and Phoenician cultures. To assume that no new nuraghi were constructed during Sardinia's Iron Age, particularly Iron Age I (ca. late tenth–eighth centuries BCE), is far from certain, as remarked by Webster (2015: 143-144 with references, and 146-148 for the chronology). Furthermore, Lilliu (regarded as the 'father of modern Sardinian archaeology') claimed that Nuragic cultural continuity is notably present beyond the Late Bronze Age, in what he called 'Fase nuragica IV', and despite the initial disruptions in cultural expression, society, and politics owing to the salient presence of foreigners on the island, the Nuragic identity was indeed revamped, redefined, and reorganized during the cultural entanglements of the Iron Age (see Lilliu 1982: 131-216; 2004: 116; followed by Webster 2015: 143-221 with further references).

The discussions in Casti's Capitolo IV (Casti 2019: 247-250) and Appendice II (Casti 2019: 283-286), therefore, merited more fleshing out of the archaeological backdrop and a firmer position on the chronological propositions, especially for the suggested point of existence of the hypothetical personage NGR, supposedly the builder/architect behind the nuraghi in Sardinia (or in the territory of Nora), and for his presumed origins from a conjectural (Phoenician) place called LPN. Any engagement with the available archaeological data on the Nuragic-Phoenician relations and the Phoenician presence in Nora (and in Sardinia's southern coast) is only listed in extensive bibliographies provided in long footnotes, especially those on pp.283-285. Without a solid chronological position, his propositions, as speculative as he humbly claims them to be, can appear conjectural and conflicting, if not repetitive at times, especially when speaking of a joint tradition recorded on the stele, where, from the indigenous/Nuragic perspective, the anthroponym NGR is identifying "il primo grande architetto costruttore dei nuraghi" (Casti 2019: 283) and, from the Phoenician side of things, "ricorda *Nogar* per le sue lontane origini fenice (*Lpn*)" (Casti 2019: 285). So, according to Casti's perspective, how far back does this "convivenza ormai ben consolidata" (Casti 2019: 285) go, and to which period do NGR and his building accomplishments belong exactly? These and the following questions beg for clarification in his overall interpretation, so as to fill in any loopholes:

a. Was NGR/Nogar a figure from the Bronze Age, and who supposedly originated from a place called LPN, who remained in collective memory a famed architect/builder of the nuraghi buildings, and was later commemorated by the Phoenicians on a monument inscribed in the Phoenician language?

   Or:

b. Was NGR/Nogar a Phoenician, who came over to Sardinia, presumably from a place called LPN, during the earliest maritime/trade contacts between the established Nuragic culture and the Phoenician newcomers, or else during a time of co-habitation of both cultures during the late ninth–eighth centuries BCE? If so, did he make a name for himself out of a building legacy in the territory of Nora (either for the nuraghi or similar tower-like structures or any other types of buildings), with his people (the Phoenicians) commemorating him and his local accomplishments on a monument inscribed in their language?

Either of the above scenarios could very well have been eventually translated or transformed into a 'foundation' story involving one Norax from Iberia, who came over to Sardinia and founded the first city on the island (Nora), as recounted in the Greek and Roman literary tradition of a much later date, and as Casti himself observes (Casti 2019: 247).

Additional Material on the Stele of Nora

In the Preface, Sirigu remarks that with Casti's monograph "viene così offerta per la prima volta al lettore l'opportunità di avvicinarsi autonomamente e agevolmente all'intero repertorio di traduzioni in una singola raccolta" (Casti 2019: 9). This is true and I cannot say it any better. However, I am to slightly disagree with the words "intero reperterio", because some additional sources (which deal with the stele of Nora and were available at time of the monograph's writing) were left out of the volume. This is entirely understandable, because keeping track of all existing sources and presenting them in a self-contained monograph—as Casti has exceptionally accomplished in his years of building up his research—is painstaking enough, and it remains near-impossible to track down absolutely everything, be it out of oversight, or lack of access to or unawareness of certain material, or simply owing to the overall constraints of such a laborious project. It is the reason why I am including here an extended bibliography to add to what Casti has remarkably offered us, and which is inclusive of further recent material that appeared right after the monograph's publication. By no means is my additional list exhaustive and I am sure I myself am missing out on further items, but hopefully it serves to add to an already rich repertoire of scholarship on the stele of Nora.

Let me start by drawing attention to a few items mentioned by Casti which require further highlights. When it comes to Julius Friedrich Wurm (who reviewed Wilhelm Gesenius's work of 1837), Casti only mentions him in a footnote in his entry for Gesenius (Casti 2019: 67, n.125). After finding some renditions of the inscription puzzling, Wurm had actually proposed two alternative translations in Latin, one which was closer to that of Gesenius and the other closer to that proposed by Giannantonio Arri (see Wurm 1838: 22). For Étienne Marc Quatremère, Casti provides the author's contribution published in French in the year 1842 (Casti 2019: 72-73). To this I add that a German version of Quatremère's work was published two years later (see Quatremère 1844). I should add that, in the latter, Quatremère missed the above-mentioned Wurm's contribution entirely, a detail which was brought up by the German editor of the work in a footnote in Quatremère's paper (Quatremère 1844: 105, n.1).

Two recent reappraisals of the stele of Nora have been proposed by Mosca (2017) and Puech (2020), which I will discuss in detail in the following section. For general comments and observations on the stele from the point of view of archaeologists, epigraphists, and academics, see those offered by Sabatino Moscati (1973: 133, 138, 141, 258, 263), M'hamed Hassine Fantar (1993, Tome 1: 48-51, albeit with an erroneous date of discovery); Enrico Acquaro (2001: 264-265), Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo (2014: 315, nn.4, 6; 2019a: 200; 2019b), Mastino (2017: 25), Brian R. Doak (2020: 178), Carolina López-Ruiz (2021: 123, 184, 303), Vadim S. Jigoulov (2021: 186), and Mark Woolmer (2022: 191-192). Other cursory comments on the stele are provided by Glenn E. Markoe (2000: 177-178), with the German version of the latter translated by Tanja Ohlsen (Markoe 2003: 374-379, albeit with an upside-down image of the stele reproduced on p.375, which, for some reason, has been cropped and malformed into a fake semblance of the contours of the stele as if standing the correct side up!). Further comments were offered by Stephen L. Dyson and Robert J. Rowland Jr. (2007: 103-106 with references), even though they insisted on using the term 'Punic' in relevant places where they actually meant 'Phoenician'.

For further takes on the inscription's first line, especially with the reading TRŠŠ (Tarshish) and the controversial elusive location of ancient Tarshish—whether it was Iberian (Tartessos), Sardinian (Tharros), or Anatolian (Tarsus in Cilicia)—see W. W. Covey-Crump (1916), Ulf Täckholm (1974), José María Blázquez (1975: 21), Javier G. Chamorro (1987), Ana Delgado Hervàs (2008: 368), Eduardo Blasco Ferrer (2010: 37, n.2), Richard Miles (2012: 94), the joint work of Sebastian Celestino and López-Ruiz (2016: 105-106, 114, 119-121), Mosca (2017: 146-147, 153-154, 163-164), Puech (2020: 318, 322-324), and Giuseppe Garbati (2022: 289-290, nn.11,12). For the alternate reading BT RŠ Š in line 1, see Kurt Galling (1972: 148), who followed closely the translation of André Dupont-Sommer (for the latter and further references, see Casti 2019: 119-121). For another alternate reading of line 1, in particular the verb RŠŠ (Piel 'to waste, to destroy, to beat down, to shatter'; Pual 'to be destroyed'), which is attested in the Hebrew Bible twice (Jer. 5:17; Mal. 1:4), see also the one attestation in Ugaritic (with the meanings: 'to be ruined, to be left ruined, to break, to smash') discussed by Issam K. Halayqa (2008: 290). Other mentions of the stele of Nora are found in the accounts of Andrea Roppa (2019: 527) and Madadh Richey (2019a: 230; 2019b: 243, 244, 249). Richey

(2019b: 249) still reads the first letter in line 2 as a hook-headed Phoenician <w> (as also recently proposed by Puech [2020: 318]), a reading that has been challenged by Casti and Mosca (2017: 163), among others, who identify the letter as a Phoenician <n>, following close examination.

For comments on the reading ŠRDN in the inscription's third line, see Miriam S. Balmuth (1992: 690) and again Markoe (2000: 177). For the alternate reading PMY in line 8, presumably rendering the name of the putative Phoenician/Cypriot god Pumay or Pummay (amongst other alternatives, such as Pumayyaton or Pygmalion of Tyre) and which has been proposed several times in past scholarship, see additional comments by Markoe (2000: 177, 178; 2003: 375, 377), Diego Ruiz Mata (2001: 6), Robin Lane Fox (2008: 120-121; 382), Chiara Blasetti Fantauzzi and Salvatore De Vincenzo (2012: 9-10, nn.32, 33), Miles (2012: 94), Sandro Filippo Bondì (2014: 61), Garbati (2014: 213), Mosca (2017: 152, 161-162, 163-164), Puech (2020: 318, 319-320), and again Garbati's latest contribution (2022: 288–291, 293, 294, 299), the one recent work I came across to make reference to Casti's work (see in particular, Garbati 2022: 288–289, nn.7,8,10).

The Contributions of Mosca and Puech

Studies on this highly debated Phoenician inscription are far from over, as Casti himself concludes (Casti 2019: 305). In addition, excavation campaigns in recent years on the Phoenician burial grounds, urban centres, and cultic areas of Nora are providing more data that help enrich our historico-archaeological picture of the period at this Sardinian site and its adjacent territory (see, e.g., the updates by Livia Tirabassi 2016; Bondì 2017; Eliana Bridi and Alessandro Mazzariol 2018; Jacopo Bonetto 2018; Bonetto forthcoming; and, Bonetto *et al.* 2020; I thank Casti himself for bringing me up to date with the rich bibliography published on the archaeology of Nora). Further updates on Phoenician activity at Nora were reported in September 2022 (Cimarosti 2022).

Indeed, the stele of Nora continues to be the subject of intrigue and investigation. Apart from the sixty-seven contributions (and then some) assessed in Casti's painstaking research, and the additional miscellaneous sources I listed above, independent reappraisals of the stele continued to appear in the meantime. As noted already, recent reappraisals (that I am aware of) include those by Mosca (2017) and Puech (2020). Like Casti, both authors physically examined the stele in the Cagliari Museum, with Mosca having done so in 1973 and again in 2009, and Puech in 2013. It is only appropriate that this discussion brings forth their contributions as well, given that, altogether, Casti's, Mosca's, and Puech's efforts constitute the most recent specialised studies on the stele of Nora at the time of writing this article, with the added advantage that all three authors have personally examined the artefact.

In his treatise, fittingly subtitled as "Problems and Proposals", Mosca summed up the major issues surrounding the stele and the reasons why research on this inscription has been fraught with controversy. As seen above, the stele does not come without its fair share of discourse regarding the dating, the genre, the integrity of the stone, and, by extension, that of the text, and disputed readings of the otherwise consonantal text in *scriptio continua*, which ultimately affect the inscription's interpretation.

I am delving briefly into these matters, starting with the dating aspect. Based on palaeographic grounds alone, the inscription has today been dated—virtually unanimously—to sometime between the late ninth and the first half of the eighth centuries BCE, as highlighted above. This dating precisely falls during a pre-colonisation period, that is, before the Phoenicians started to settle down in Sardinia, since archaeological evidence points to a sedentary Phoenician installation at Nora by around 700 BCE onwards (see further comments in Mosca 2017: 135-141, esp. pp.139-141; also, Botto 2007: 110, 118; 2021: 271–277; Zucca 2017, esp. p.53; for a synthesis on the Phoenicians in Sardinia, see Bartoloni 2009: 57-99; also, though older, Hamilton Barnes 1991: 29-55).

The inscription's genre remains elusive, with Mosca (2017: 141-145) highlighting the five distinct genres proposed over the years: funerary; commemorative; a 'functional' text (such as, a decree, as first proposed by William F. Albright [1941: 19; 1961: 346]); a building inscription; or else, a dedication (see also, Amadasi Guzzo 1990: 41). Mosca remarked that only the commemorative and 'functional' categories "allow sufficient flexibility to qualify as potential descriptors" of the stele, especially given certain readings of the text (Mosca 2017: 145). As shown above, Casti precisely goes with the commemorative angle, with his interpretation describing a commemoration of NGR's architectural legacy in ŠRDN. Similarly, Puech follows the commemorative approach, as discussed below. On the other hand, Mosca took the 'functional' route, but unlike Albright's fragmentary 'decree', he proposed to read "an agreement between two parties, the local Sardinian population and the temporary visitors", the latter having erected the stele to tell of their temporary sojourn in (Sardinian) Tarshish. In addition, the reading of <m> (rather than Casti's

<n>) reappears in line 8, spelling the name of the deity Pumay, while the first letter of line 2 is read as a <n>, just like Casti (Mosca 2017: 163):

1.	B-TRŠŠ	1.	In Tarshish
2.	NGR Š-Hʾ	2.	we shall sojourn, that (part) which
3.	B-ŠRDN Š	3.	(is) in Sardinia. It (Sardinia)
4.	LM Hʾ ŠL	4.	has declared peace; has declared
5.	M ṢBʾ M	5.	peace the crew of M-
6.	LKTN BN	6.	LKTN the son of
7.	ŠBN NGD	7.	ŠBN in the presence
8.	LPMY	8.	of Pumay. (or: … ŠBN the commander, to Pumay.)

Mosca's paper further dedicated an appendix to discuss the matter of rubrication, or "red colouring", as he called it (Mosca 2017: 164-167). He suggested that such red colouring was an 'ancient' custom (with 'ancient' not necessarily meaning 'original'), since he personally noticed sporadic traces of red paint on some of the incised letters on the Ur Box (KAI 29) and the seventh–sixth-century Phoenician stele from Malta (CIS I 123 = KAI 61A), as well as on a few of the inscriptions from Carthage (Mosca 2017: 165-166). Furthermore, Amadasi noted ten inscriptions from Motya with preserved traces of such highlighting of letters (Amadasi Guzzo 1986: 13, n.6). For future studies Mosca therefore proposed "one sure way to assess the validity" of the 'ancient' red colouring on the stele of Nora, and that is to conduct chemical composition analysis of small samples taken from the red and bluish/brownish colouring (Mosca 2017: 167).

Above anything else, the disputed integrity of the stone has been a linchpin for all major issues regarding reading and interpreting the inscribed contents. The possible notion of missing text, especially from above the top extant line (line 1), has been frequently brought up over the years (with Ernest Renan seemingly a pioneer; see, CIS I 144), while a few scholars, amongst them, Peckham (1972: 457, n.4, 458, and in his posthumous monograph of 2014: 157), Guy Bunnens (1979: 31), Giovanni Garbini (1996: 202-203; 2006: 90-91), Anthony J. Frendo (1996: 8), who follows Peckham, and Pilkington (2012: 45, 46, 47), opted to take the stone as it is and thus treat the inscription as complete. Needless to say, both Casti and Mosca physically examined the stone and reached a firm conclusion that the original contours of the stele are intact on all sides, except for the damage (the chipped-off corner) at the top right that goes around the back of the stone, which nonetheless does not mar the inscription except for the clearly eroded top right corner (see Casti's observations and further references [2019: 24-28]; also, Mosca 2017: 128-135). Puech, however, states otherwise.

In his contribution, Puech reappraises not just the stele of Nora, but also the large stele fragment inscribed in Phoenician that was also discovered in Nora, again in secondary use (CIS I 145) (for this fragment, see also, e.g., Cross 1974; 1987), as well as another Phoenician inscribed fragment found in Bosa, in the northwestern coastline of Sardinia (CIS I 162), today lost (see also Casti 2013). Puech proposes that these three inscriptions altogether provide testimony of exchanges, at least since the ninth century BCE, between the Phoenician capital Tyre, Sardinia, and Tarsis (Tarshish) (according to him, the latter being the Iberian Tartessos, in the Huelva area in Spain).

Here is where the tables are turned. Unlike Casti, Mosca, and others who defend the integrity of the stele of Nora, Puech remains convinced that the stone is an incomplete monument, which was fixed on a base and is missing four more lines at the top, according to his proposed reconstruction and drawing (Puech 2020: 318, 319, Fig. 2). Below are his reading and translation, with my added transliteration in the Roman alphabet:

a	[*En souvenir*	[*(?)*לסכר]	a	[*lskr(?)*]
b	*de l'expedition du comman-*	[מבא נג]	b	[*mbʾ ng*]
c	dant du royaume	[ד מלכת]	c	[*d mlkt*]
d	*allé(e) combattre*]	[*להלתחם*]	d	[*lhltḥm*]
1	à Tarsis	בתרשש	1	btršš
2	mais il/elle fut refoulé(e).	וגרש הא	2	wgrš hʾ
3	En Sardaigne il	בשרדן ש	3	bšrdn š
4	fut sauf, sauve	לם הא של	4	lm hʾ šl
5	l'armée de *notre* roy-	ם צבא מ	5	m ṣbʾ m
6	aume. Le monument	לכתן בן	6	lktn bn
7	qu'a édifié le commandant	ש בן נגד	7	š bn ngd
8	à Pumaï.	לפמי	8	lpmy

Going by his reading, the stele bears a commemoration recalling an expedition of a royal (unnamed) commander who went to fight in Tarshish, but was turned away in Sardinia, where both he and his army found safe haven. The monument was erected by this unnamed commander in honour of the deity Pumay (since, like Mosca, Puech reads the third letter of line 8 as <m>). The reading of the conjunction <w> at the start of line 2 (which has been dismissed by Casti, Mosca, and others, and claimed to be a <n> with an adjacent notch) appears again with Puech, who deems the reading <w> essential (Puech 2020: 318; see also, the above-mentioned Richey 2019b: 249). Puech's examination and recent reappraisal of the stele has therefore reopened or challenged a few key debates surrounding this stone—particularly, its integrity and certain disputed Phoenician letters—that were otherwise reaching some form of closure or consensus with Casti's and Mosca's recent observations. In his latest contribution, Garbati (2022: 288, n.8) mentions Puech's claim of the stone's alleged incomplete state, yet Garbati himself deems the stone and its inscription complete and acknowledges Casti's demonstration of this via his supplied photographs (cf. Casti 2019: 27, Figs. 6.1 and 6.2).

Pending Issues and the Way Forward

The above differing views sustained by Casti, Mosca, and Puech, all of whom have physically examined the stone and whose works are amongst the latest to date, consolidate my view that a consensus cannot be reached any time soon regarding this inscription of Nora, leaving the matters of interpretation and genre up in the air.

I still have my reservations in expressing confident judgements on the stone and its inscription, given that I have not yet had the opportunity to examine the stele myself. Even so, I place good faith in Casti's and Mosca's thorough examinations of the stele and their steadfast conclusions about its intact state. Additionally, I have shared my deliberations with Amadasi Guzzo (personal communication, 2023), who has examined the stele herself and thinks the stone is complete, save for the erosion sustained on the top right corner. To this end, and for the sake of the following argument, I will treat both the stone and its inscription as intact.

Setting aside the issue of the stone's integrity, therefore, leaves us with the pending issues of content. As the above rich scholarship demonstrated *ad nauseam*, certain letters remain disputed, and the rubrication did not aid in the matter. On the contrary, the coloured retracing of the letters and random notches on the porous sandstone surface has only added to the fray. Two highly disputed letters remain the first one of line 2 (Casti's and Mosca's <n>; Puech's <w>) and the third letter in line 8 (Casti's <n>; Mosca's and Puech's <m>), the latter which is further marred by a deep notch in the surface. What strikes me about this letter is that, whether it is read as a <m> or a <n> (or even a <s>), the letter takes too much space in line 8 and its downstroke takes a long, curving turn to the bottom left, similar to the curving downstroke of the <b> specimens in the stele, though I am not proposing the letter to be so. The deep notch and the coloured retracing therein have made identification of this letter particularly conjectural. Other debates concern the occurrences of the letters <d> and <r>. The Phoenician <r> is distinguished from the Phoenician <d> mainly due to its considerably longer main stroke, but the archaic script of the stele does not provide such a straightforward distinction, thereby leading to numerous oscillating <d>/<r> propositions for lines 2 and 7 especially.

I am hereby proposing neither a translation nor any conjectural division of words. Despite some of Mosca's and Casti's confirmations of otherwise disputed letters in lines 2, 7, and 8 especially, I am still listing such disputed readings in my transliteration, given that other recent miscellaneous works keep mulling over or reopening the matter. To this end, I reiterate what Mosca and Casti respectively proposed for future studies: to apply chemical composition analysis on small samples of the stone's red colouring, and to analyse the stone's incisions with more technical means, so as to minimise human error and subjectivity.

1. BTRŠŠ
2. $^{W}/_{N}$ G $^{D}/_{R}$ ŠHʾ
3. BŠRDNŠ
4. LMHʾŠL
5. MṢBʾM
6. LKTNBN
7. ŠBNNG $^{D}/_{R}$
8. LP $^{M}/_{N}$ Y

A further issue tackled by scholars before me concerns structure. If we deem the inscription complete, we are still left with the onerous text in *scriptio continua*. The stele carries an archaic Phoenician inscription with seemingly unprecedented vocabulary, and some of the content proves challenging owing precisely to the lack of

any similar epigraphic comparisons in the Mediterranean in terms of vernacular, grammar, and overall formulaic structure (Amadasi Guzzo 1990: 41). In fact, Peckham described the text as "literary, original, and unique" and, while deeming it a dedication from a captain and his crew to the deity Pumay after finding safe haven in Sardinia, he added: "it is laconic, as if from the ship's log, and poetic; formal but with the immediacy of direct discourse, and unique among Phoenician display or dedicatory inscriptions" (Peckham 2014: 157). Although conjectural, Peckham singled out two balanced clauses in the first few lines, involving locations preceded by the preposition B- (the controversial BTRŠŠ in line 1 and BŠRDN in line 3) and the pronoun 'he' (*hû*ʾ) (Peckham 1972; 2014: 157-158; in a similar vein, see also the parallelisms proposed by William H. Shea 1991, followed by Frendo 1996; all three read the first letter of line 2 as <w> rather than <n>). Peckham's reading of these first few clauses is as follows (Peckham 2014: 157):

*btršš wgrš h*ʾ	From Tarshish, when he was driven
*bšrdn šlm h*ʾ	in Sardinia, he made thank offerings

Alternatively, like Casti and others have hypothesised, BT in line 1 can be taken separately to mean an edifice of sorts (including a house, a temple, or a sanctuary). Undoubtedly, Casti's more 'locally rooted' take on the inscription introduces novel angles with which to approach its content, contrary to others that have been proposed repeatedly in the past, most of which keep suggesting ship crews finding refuge in ŠRDN, with some including thanksgiving to the deity PMY, like Peckham above, Mosca, and Puech. Still, some of Casti's grammatical takes on the archaic text pose issues, especially in the very first line. For example, his use of Š as a relative marker for the genitive use—hence, possession ("of")—is a later (Punic and Late Punic) phenomenon (*contra* the CIS claims on their supposed comparative examples, which Casti reiterates, that is, the Sardinia inscription CIS I 139 and the Palermo inscription CIS I 133, both of the third-second centuries BCE, and where Casti, in fact, acknowledges Bruce Zuckerman's remark on the highly unusual presence in early Phoenician of the relative pronoun to mark the genitive [cf. Casti 2019: 214, n.474, 215 with references]). For further comments on the use of the relative Š, see also John C. L. Gibson (1982: 27) and the updated work of Johannes Friedrich *et al.* (1999: 72–73, §§121–122). Moreover, Casti's treatment of RŠ (full spelling RʾŠ) as the ordinal 'first' or else 'chief/principal' remains debated, as one would expect RʾŠT (or in defective spelling RŠT, at best), carrying the meaning of 'first, early, beginning, chief' (see Zellig Harris 1936: 145; Stanislav Segert 1976: 301), whereas the defective RŠ of the stele could more appropriately stand for 'promontory, headland', as has been occasionally proposed. Whatever word division follows—whichever verbs, proper names, and relative pronouns—it certainly explains the two hundred years of invested scholarship on this particular inscription.

Many contributors have addressed the sheer size of the stone and that of its prominent inscribed letters, which are similar in size to those of the other fragmentary inscriptions from Nora and Bosa. The stele of Nora was undoubtedly meant for display, with its base tenon once fitting the stone in place in the ground or some other structure. Was the stele assigned to a particular edifice or did it function as a standalone monument of sorts? Be it funerary, 'functional', dedicatory, edificial, or commemorative, the stele and its large letters were meant to be seen. Who was the intended audience, though? Phoenician-speakers alone or anyone passing through? And for the readings (including that proposed by Casti) omitting any sort of divine names from the text, would such a sizeable monument, once set up for something memorable, warrant an inscription without the mention of or invoking any deities?

With such pending deliberations, and without secure epigraphic comparisons at our disposal, I can only hope for future archaeological findings of Phoenician date, especially in the ongoing excavations at Nora and its surrounding territory, and the continuous progress in Phoenician philology to help shed further light on the stele. Until then, I agree with Missingham's remark: "it has to be said that the correct reading of the stone remains enigmatic, and perhaps this will always be the case" (Missingham 2019). It goes without saying that the recent studies offered by Casti, Mosca, and Puech serve to highlight issues surrounding unprovenanced inscriptions, which are preciously thought-provoking in the fields of archaeology, epigraphy, and archival research.

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back-and-forth conversations on the book itself. I extend my sincere gratitude to Émile Puech and his shared latest contribution on this highly discussed Phoenician inscription. Last but not least, my thankfulness goes to the late Paul G. Mosca, a much esteemed colleague in the field, always quick to generously dispense resources along with his keen insight. To his memory I dedicate this article.

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