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Title: **The Location of the Garden of the Hesperides at Fruttidoro di** Capoterra

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**Abstract:** The present study proposes a new hypothesis on the location of the mythical Garden of the Hesperides, traditionally located in Greek mythology in a distant and difficult-to-reach region. Through an interdisciplinary analysis that includes elements of historical geography, toponymy and archaeology, it is suggested that the Garden of the Hesperides can be identified with the locality of Fruttidoro, in the municipality of Capoterra, Sardinia. This hypothesis is based on the reinterpretation of ancient sources and comparison with geographical and cultural characteristics of Sardinia; it is suggested that the known boundaries were the Pillars of Hercules located in Carloforte and not Gibraltar, as officially established in general culture. It is also suggested that Capoterra indicated precisely the extreme end of the earth never reached by the Greeks, who left a settlement in Selargius in Sardinia: proof of their passage and of the fact that they knew at least Selargius, and probably many of the surrounding areas, including the Nuraghe Antigori in Sarroch where scientific artefacts have been found testifying to the passage of the Mycenaeans. It is possible that the Mycenaeans who later returned to Greece brought back memories of their experiences on Sardinian soil by talking about a Garden of the Hesperides, which for millennia was not clearly understood and was thought to be an imaginary place.

**1. Introduction**

The Garden of the Hesperides is one of the most fascinating locations in Greek mythology, known for housing the famous golden-apple tree, watched over by a dragon and guarded by the Hesperides. Traditionally, its location has been the subject of much speculation, with positions ranging from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula. This study proposes to reconsider this location in light of new evidence suggesting that the Garden may be located in Fruttidoro, a locality in the municipality of Capoterra, Sardinia.

**2. Toponymy analysis**

The name 'Fruttidoro' could be a deformation or a linguistic and toponymic evolution that refers to the 'golden fruits' of myth. Sardinia, known since antiquity for its wealth of natural resources and luxuriant vegetation, has a strong mythological tradition linked to gardens and orchards: for instance, there are towns famous for their extraordinary peaches. The name 'Fruttidoro' therefore seems particularly evocative, suggesting a direct connection with the myth of the Hesperides and their golden fruits. It is also possible that there were actually fruits made of gold or other materials that were actually hung from trees, in a sort of religious, magical or propitiatory rite that we cannot understand today. In addition to the name Fruttidoro, which recalls the famous golden fruits of the tale believed to be mythological until today, we have the presence of the toponym Capoterra. Capuderra in the Sardinian language can be translated into Latin as Caput Terrae, 'the head of the earth': even today, it is still used to say 'the extreme head of the earth' to define a place at the edge of the world, or at least of the world known at the time of the Greeks. If this toponymic definition were proven to be true, it would be absurd to consider America as a potential Atlantis, because if the end of the earth known to the Greeks was Capoterra in Sardinia, this would mean that they knew absolutely nothing about what lay beyond, not even the Balearic Islands. This would also explain the toponymy of the *Non Plus Ultra* of the Pillars of Hercules at the Faraglione Antiche Colonne, as proposed by Giorgio Saba in his work Scusi, dov'è l'Ade?: the Greeks could not go beyond it, because they believed that that was the Limen Orbis Terrarus, i.e. the edge of the known world.

This information opens the way to another important consideration: the Sardinians certainly knew what lay beyond Carloforte; therefore it is possible to think that the Sardinians mocked the Greeks, mocking them and taking them for ignorant and stupid: it is possible to verify whether trade existed between the Sardinian populations and those beyond Gibraltar well before those dates: it is therefore necessary to investigate this further for a better understanding.

**3. Geography and Environment**

Fruttidoro is located at the foot of the Capoterra mountain massif, a region that, due to its conformation, could easily be associated with the description of a remote and hard-to-reach place, as reported in myths. The climatic and geographical conditions of the area, with the presence of lush green areas, abundant waters and lush flora, could have inspired the creation of the myth of the Garden of the Hesperides. We have seen that the toponymy is perfectly congruent with the myth, but it is not the only one. In fact, in Herodotus' Histories in Chapter IV, it is stated that the Garden of the Hesperides was located between the Atlas Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. Other research has shown that the Atlas Mountains for Herodotus are the Sulcis Mountains, and the Atlantic Ocean was the sea that surrounded the Sardinian Corsican geological block, according to the Sardinian Corsican Atlantean Paradigm (PSCA). Thus, the Garden of the Hesperides was located between the Sulcis Mountains and the present-day Western Mediterranean Sea: and in fact, the place described by Herodotus is exactly where Fruttidoro and Capoterra are located. We therefore have four congruent toponyms: Capoterra, Fruttidoro, Monti del Sulcis and Western Mediterranean Sea. But this is not all: we have seen in other works (Usai, 2024) that Atlantis is the Corsican Sardinian block. And in Atlantis there was the legendary Tritonid Lake, in which the island of Hespera was located. Hesperides, therefore, could mean the inhabitants of the island of Lake Tritonides. Curiously, we can see that the whole area and environment around Capoterra is still a lagoon/lake area.

The lake area near Cagliari, which includes the areas of Assemini, Quartu Sant'Elena, and Capoterra, is characterised by a series of ponds and coastal lagoons that form a complex ecosystem of great environmental and landscape value. Here is a description of the main features of this area:

**Cagliari Pond**

The Cagliari Pond, also known as the Santa Gilla Pond, is one of the main brackish lagoons in Sardinia. It extends between the municipalities of Cagliari, Assemini and Elmas. With a surface area of around 13,200 hectares, it represents one of the largest and most important wetland environments on the island. The lagoon is fed by several freshwater courses, such as the Rio Cixerri and the Flumini Mannu, but is also connected to the sea through a series of canals that regulate the water level and salinity.

**Molentargius Pond**

Located between Cagliari, Quartu Sant'Elena and Selargius, the Molentargius Pond is another important wetland in Sardinia, particularly known for its rich bird life. The natural park surrounding the pond is a protected area and is home to one of the largest colonies of pink flamingos in Europe, which breed there regularly. The area consists of freshwater and saltwater basins that create a diverse habitat ideal for many animal species.

**Capoterra Pond**

The Capoterra Pond, also known as 'Peschiera di Capoterra', is a smaller wetland area than the other ponds, but just as significant. It is located between the municipality of Capoterra and the coast, and has a strong fishing vocation, with fishing representing one of the traditional local activities. This pond is fed by fresh water coming from the surrounding hills, mixing with brackish water from the sea.

**Flora and Fauna**

The entire lake area is characterised by marsh vegetation typical of Mediterranean lagoons, with species such as bulrush, marsh reed, and other halophilous plants. The fauna is particularly rich and varied, with numerous species of water birds, including pink flamingos, herons, cormorants, and several species of ducks. Brackish and freshwater fish inhabit the waters of the ponds, making these areas also economically important for fishing.

**Ecological Importance**

These lake areas play a crucial role in maintaining local biodiversity, providing essential habitats for many species of flora and fauna. In addition, they act as natural reservoirs for water regulation, preventing flooding and maintaining the water balance of the region. They are also important for the natural purification of water, contributing to the environmental quality of the area.

**Human Impacts**

Over time, human activity has had a significant impact on these areas. Urbanisation, industrialisation, and intensive agriculture have led to pollution problems and habitat loss. However, in recent decades, efforts have been made to conserve and restore the environment, with the creation of nature parks and protected reserves.

In summary, the lake area near Cagliari, Assemini, Quartu Sant'Elena and Capoterra represents an important natural heritage, with a delicate balance between ecosystem conservation and the sustainable use of resources.

In addition to the ponds and lagoons mentioned, the lake area near Cagliari also includes the Assemini salt pans, which are part of this vast ecological and environmental structure.

**The Salt Pans of Assemini**

The Assemini salt pans represent a historical and significant part of the local economy, linked to the production of sea salt. Located close to the Santa Gilla pond, the salt pans exploit the brackish waters coming from the lagoon, using the traditional method of solar evaporation. This process consists of channelling the sea water into a series of tanks, where, thanks to the sun and wind, the water evaporates and the salt crystallises.

**Integration with the Lagoon Ecosystem**

The salt pans not only play an economic role, but are also integrated into the area's ecosystem. The salt pans provide habitats for many species of migratory birds, such as pink flamingos, which use these areas to feed and breed. This symbiosis between productive activity and the natural environment makes the salt pans an example of ecological sustainability.

**Historical and Cultural Value**

The Assemini salt pans have a long tradition, dating back several centuries. They have not only contributed to the economic development of the region, but also represent a cultural heritage, with techniques and knowledge handed down from generation to generation. Today, the salt pans continue to operate, albeit with a reduced production compared to the past, and are recognised for their environmental and landscape value.

In summary, the Assemini salt pans are an important component of the lake and lagoon structure that extends between Cagliari, Assemini, Quartu Sant'Elena and Capoterra. In addition to being an element of economic production, they are closely linked to the surrounding ecosystem, contributing to biodiversity and maintaining the environmental balance of the area.

**4. Archaeological and Mythological Evidence**

Sardinia has a long tradition of legends related to mythical gardens and sacred places such as the famous sacred wells in the Nuragic period; and wells could have been used precisely to create gardens. Archaeological excavations in the Capoterra region are needed to investigate the possible presence of the legendary Garden of the Hesperides under the sediments. These cults, combined with the richness of the local vegetation, may have contributed to the birth of the Hesperides myth. Moreover, the island itself is associated with mythological figures and legendary places such as Atlantis, as already demonstrated in other works (Usai, 2024), which makes the association with the Garden of the Hesperides plausible.

**5. Comparison with Ancient Sources**

Ancient sources such as Hesiod and Apollonius Rhodius place the Garden of the Hesperides in a distant and mysterious region, associated with western lands: in this paper, we state that that region is exactly what we now call Fruttidoro di Capoterra, between the Sulcis mountains and the present-day Mediterranean. Considering the trade routes and cultural contacts between Greece and Sardinia during the Bronze Age, it is possible that Sardinia was seen as an exotic western land. The description of the garden as a place of abundance and fertility aligns well with the environmental characteristics of Fruttidoro. The scientific method of research used will be described in a separate paper that clarifies the puzzle effect: once the existence of Atlantis had been proven, a domino effect was created when reading the ancient texts: having repositioned the land of Atlas, son of Poseidon, in Sulcis, it was possible to search for the location of the Garden of the Hesperides between the Sulcis Mountains and Herodotus' Atlantic Ocean, which today turns out to be the Western Mediterranean. Having relocated the Garden of the Hesperides, it was possible to search for the Island of Hespera of the myths, which was located in Lake Tritonides. Consequently, Lake Tritonide must have been present in the present-day Province of Cagliari. But since about three thousand years have passed, an evaporation of at least half of this lake has been imagined. Assuming that Lake Tritonide had indeed partially evaporated, only parts of it would remain today, which in Sardinia have taken the names of: Lago di Capoterra, Lago di Assemini, Lago di Elmas, Is Molentargius, Saline di Assemini... all these lakes and lagoons could therefore be the vestiges of the mythological Tritonide Lake of Greek myth.

**6. Implications of Theory**

If the Garden of the Hesperides were indeed located at Fruttidoro di Capoterra, this would open up new perspectives on the study of Greek myths and their connection to Sardinia. Moreover, this theory could contribute to a greater cultural and tourist valorisation of the Capoterra region by promoting further archaeological and historical research.

**7. Conclusions**

The proposal to identify Fruttidoro di Capoterra as the Garden of the Hesperides is still being explored, but offers a fascinating and innovative perspective on the link between Sardinia and the myths of antiquity. Further research and excavations could provide new evidence to support this theory, enriching our understanding of the connections between myth, geography and history.

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