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Olbia and Costa Smeralda
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Faith in air baggage check during travel is renewed. My bag arrived this morning from Milan after a day of languishing between Heathrow and Milan. A broken airplane in San Francisco had us leaving one hour late, after which our same fixed-up aircraft waited nearly an hour on the tarmac for a gate. All connections were shot, missing the plane to Europe. United came though however, routing me to American Airlines through London, then British Airways to Milan. My flight from Milan on Allitalia was incredibly four hours late departing, and I made it to Sardinia as planned, mostly.

Incredible wealth was on display this morning at the "aeroporto" when I picked up my luggage. (There was one nervous day waiting.) Parked in the general aviation area was at least thirty private jets, and not just the little kind, but big ones with twenty windows. Beyond that in the commercial cargo area was a mega-yacht that I have seen in the sailing magazines, Azzurra, resting on a cradle. This yacht had been transported by air for racing this week. Unbelievable.



Raining again today, not as hard, but with intermittent showers and occasional bursts. The drainage is poor. Streets, sidewalks, bus stops and some outdoor cafes contain standing water for a day. This second, the bus is backing up on one of these narrow cobbled streets, the driver is yelling and a passenger with much to say is barking and gesturing about apparent imperfections in the transit system and drainage, I think. Each word has a raised right arm to accentuate the point. He just spoke to me emphatically, I agreed with a 'Si' and a head nod. The driver had no warning, just a street sweeper directing traffic with his 'witches' broom. The small boat waterfront had a number of

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boats without care, and yesterdays rain filled some, sending boat and motor to the mud below.



A bus ride between showers. Checking out the basilica San Simplicio, eleventh century, the sky bursts open and I duck once again into a cafe for cappuccino. Locals do the same, also provide correct spelling to the basilica name for me. Virtually one thousand year old structure made of local granite, with tiny, tiny windows. The walls have eroded, the 'fines' between the quartz crystals have exfoliated off, leaving the roughest texture that sheds particles if rubbed. I don't do that. The structure is small by basilica standards, with a mini bell tower, rope attached to bronze gong arm, topped by a thick eroded granite cross.

Olbia is an ancient city. Archeological evidence reveals this port city was first inhabited as long ago as 4000 BC. Nearby fresh water, abundant sea life and safe harbor made Olbia one of the earliest inhabited places in the Mediterranean. Theory has it the Sumerians came first, out of Mesopotamia after the environmental collapse. Likely from Lebanon where prehistoric cedar timber was abundant, this group became seafaring in prehistoric times, perhaps the legendary "sea people" identified in myth and legend.

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That early group transformed to the local Nuragic civilization, which flourished for over two millennia. Nuragh tombs, fortresses and sacred wells exist today. The Etruscans came next, followed by Greeks, then Carthaginians who were conquered by the Romans in 239 BCE. After the fall, barbarian Vandals ruled Sardinia for over a century until Justinian reclaimed the island for the Byzantine empire. Last evening, at the “Museo Arcologica”, this previously researched story was confirmed by narratives and artifacts from each civilization, attesting to the sequence. Stone anchors, bronze tools, amulets, a saffron jewel from North Africa, plus many things Roman attest to the five millennia passage of time and people.



The Sardinian flag shows a profile of a person with a headband. Corsica, to the North, displays the same profile. The story goes that natives were mercenary soldiers specializing with sling. A warrior would carry three slings of various lengths, chosen depending on the distance from their target. The headband sling was for short distance, weapon of last resort.

The major port of Olbia is vast and peppered with ships, yachts and sea traffic. Shallows with exposed granite outcrops dot the bay fringes, while large islets are marked by lights. Shallows have large fenced “gardens” of unused buoys, literally hundreds of unused navigation marks resting, waiting deployment. Two ferry boats

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(ships) are loading; the cruise ships left during afternoon. Parked and waiting in vast staging areas are empty fuel and grocery trucks heading back to fetch another mainland load, various RV's loaded with bikes and windsurfers, while a few big rigs wait to head mainland carrying some strange looking timber. I observed two cruise ships leaving and three ferries loading or disgorging.