



UNIONE EUROPEA



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Archaeological area of Tharros

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Location of the site

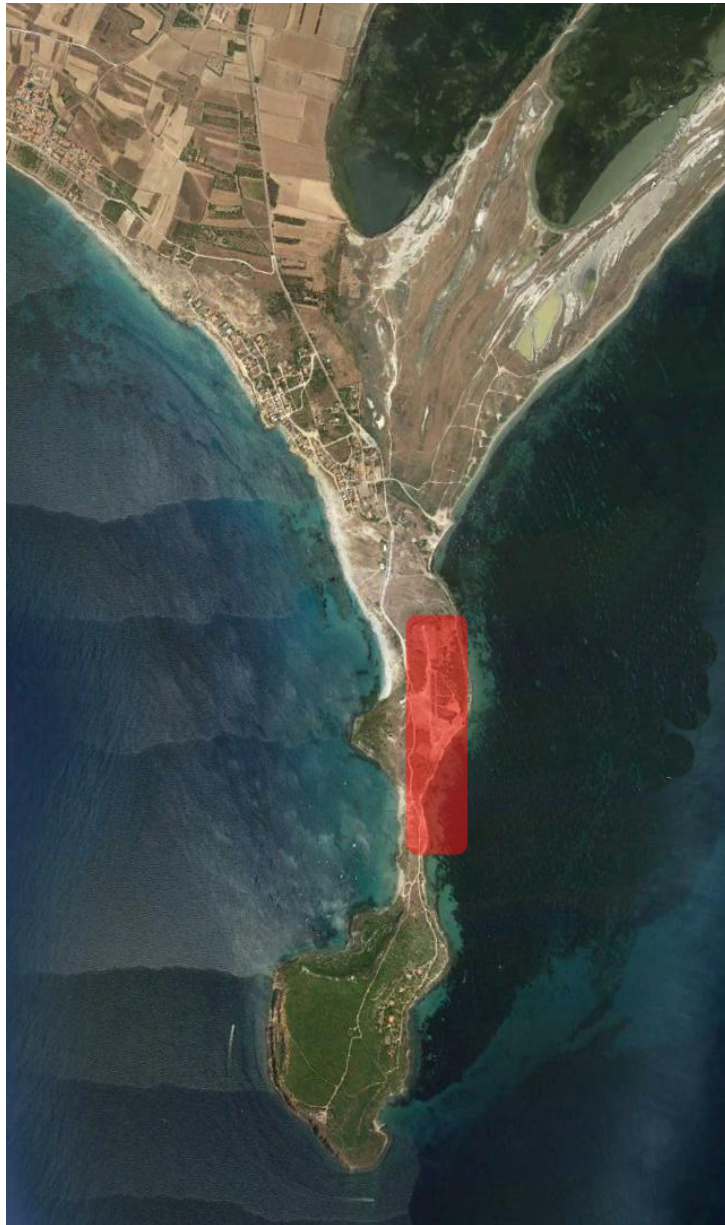


Fig. 1 - The Capo San Marco peninsula with the area where Tharros stood highlighted
(from Google Earth – Review by C. Tronchetti)

Tharros stands on the Capo San Marco peninsula, immediately after the village of San Giovanni di Sinis.

The site is well signposted and easy to reach. Travel to Oristano on the State Highway SS 131; then take the Via Cagliari/SP 54. Carry straight on, turning onto the SP 56, until you reach a roundabout where you will find signs for Torre Grande/Tharros. Following the



direction and continuing along the road, you reach a roundabout where you must take the first exit and carry on. At the next roundabout take the third exit and continue straight on, until you reach San Giovanni di Sinis, where you will find car parks for the archaeological area of Tharros just a few hundred metres away, which can be reached using the little passenger train.

■ History of the site and studies

The history of the Tharros excavation site is a rather long one. The city was abandoned in the 9th century A.D but its ruins were visible for a long time and were therefore robbed continuously, as the 17th century proverb stated 1: *de sa cittadi de Tharros portant sa perda a carros*, i.e. They take cartloads of stones from the city of Tharros.

The first dig on the site that we know of, in search of ancient, precious items, took place in the 17th century; searches increased considerably in the latter part of the following century, thanks to the intervention of Sardinian aristocrats, such as the Marquis of Arcais, who managed to create collection of archaeological items that over the centuries have become part of public collections.

The 19th century saw a boom in a different type of search. Most of the digs were still carried out by private subjects in search of items of art or ancient pieces. Alongside these digs,

public excavations finally took place, carried out by archaeologists and under the auspices of King Charles Albert. In 1838 and 1842, the latter year with the presence of the monarch on site, Punic and Roman tombs were excavated, and selected items were sent to the capital city, Turin.

The news of these findings brought several famous people to the site in search of treasures, including the writer Honorè de Balzac and the English Lord Vernon in 1851, who discovered about twenty Punic and Roman tombs and whose relics were sent partly to the British Museum in London and partly spread throughout Europe. The necropolises were well and truly sacked in this period, partly by local inhabitants, but not just by them. The Director of the Cagliari Museum, Gaetano Cara, and his archaeologist son excavated a

number of tombs and a short time later, a so-called Captain Barbetti, again with his son, sold a number of items to the British Museum, accompanied by an accurate dig dossier. The fact that there are no artefacts at the Cagliari Museum that were retrieved by Mr Cara during his digs lends weight to the hypothesis that it was Cara himself who removed the items; in fact, in 1858, he was dismissed from his position at the museum.

Other limited searches were carried out by Giovanni Spano (fig. 1) and by La Marmora.

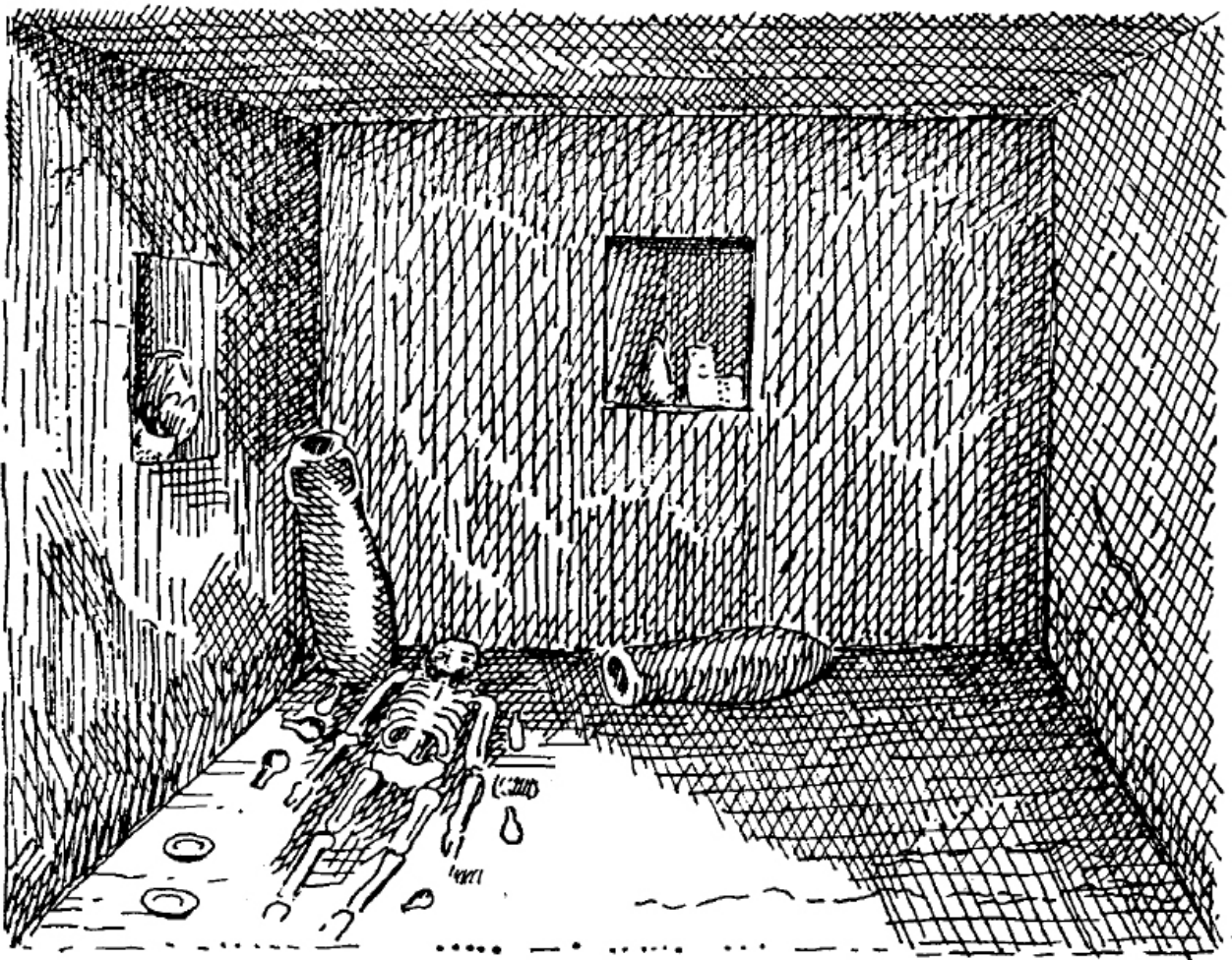


Fig. 2 - The inside of a Punic chamber tomb excavated by Spano (by E. ACQUARO, C.FINZI, 1986)

In the period 1884 to 1886, Filippo Nissardi carried out a number of inspections and reconnaissance trips to the site, together with some test digs, finding Roman and Punic tombs.

The sacking of the Tharros necropolis calmed down after this period, also due to the fact that public institutions were now more present. In 1929, Antonio Taramelli⁶ published the Archaeological Map of area, while in the period 1926-1932, Edoardo Busachi carried out some research on the water supply in Roman Tharros, after which he formed a private collection of archaeological items, which were then sent to the *Antiquarium Arborensense* in Oristano.

The dig of the actual settlement of Tharros began in 1956 thanks to the site Superintendent Gennaro Pesce. The digs continued until 1964, bringing to light the lower part of the city (fig. 3), south of the hill named Su Muru Mannu, a name given due to the presence of the walls that surrounded the Punic city. Pesce wrote extensively about these excavations in his report.



Fig. 3 - The city of Tharros after the dig by Gennaro Pesce (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Superintendency)

At the same time, Ferruccio Barreca, Archaeological Inspector at the Cagliari Archaeological Superintendency, carried out a dig on Capo San Marco, the far southern tip of the peninsula, and discovered a structure that he identified as a small Punic temple but which actually seems to be a small house from the Roman Republic era (3rd-3rd century B.C.).

There was a new flux of digs in Tharros between 1969 and 1973, under the Superintendent Ferruccio Barreca, this time aimed at the slopes of Su Murru Mannu, and involving the removal of earth until the remains of buildings were found, but the search went no further.

The Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Superintendency began its collaboration with the Rome CNR Institute for Phoenician and Punic Civilisation in 1974. The area chosen for the search was the tophet, on the top of the Su Muru Mannu hill (figs. 4-6).



Fig. 4 - The tophet dig (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Authority)



Fig. 5 - The tophet urns during the dig (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Authority)

The mission continued until 1998, resulting in a number of truly important, large studies.



Fig. 6 - Tophet: base of a Roman building made of fragments of Punic stones
(from E. ACQUARO, C.FINZI, 1986)

Other digs took place at the same time: in the Nuragic village below the Punic tophet by Vincenzo Santoni in 1977 and 1982 (fig. 7) and by Carlo Tronchetti in the fortress moat, regarding the restoration of the fortress counterscarp (figs 8-9), in 1981 and 1982.



Fig. 7 - The excavation of the Nuragic huts below the tophet (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Authority)



Fig. 8 - A blocked postern in the Tharros moat (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Authority)



Fig. 9 - The postern entrance from inside the fortress (Cagliari and Oristano Archaeological Authority)

In 1981, the Superintendency archaeologists Emerenziana Usai and Raimondo Zucca carried out some tests in the southern necropolis area and in the same year, Zucca identified some tombs in the northern necropolis.

In more recent years (1993-1994) the University of Cagliari carried out a survey on the cardo maximus sewer (fig. 10), also spending time on the necropolis again.

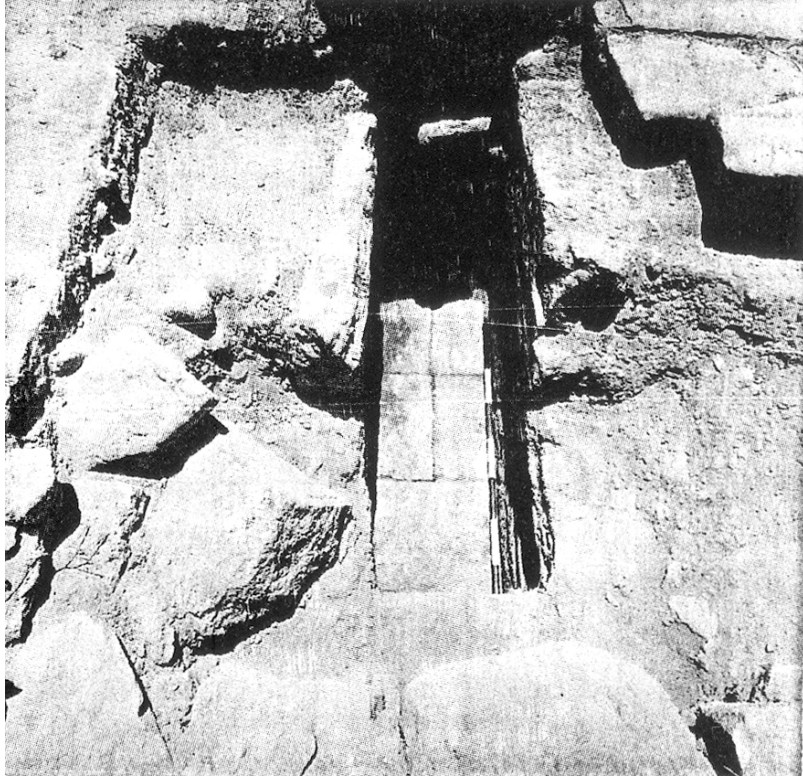


Fig. 10 - Excavation of the cardo maximus sewer (1994) (by C. DEL VAIS ET ALII 1995)

In 2013, the University of Sassari carried out a dig on the Roman amphitheatre area, on the Su Muru Mannu hill.

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Carlo Tronchetti





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