



UNIONE EUROPEA



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÓNOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

# Archaeological area of Mount Sirai

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Description of the site

There are places that are gateways, paradigms of a journey into the history of Sardinia, as they contain several passages and because they introduce a territory that goes way beyond its own borders.

This is the case of the Monte Sirai site, a distinctive example of landscape and memories of places in the region of Sulcis, with the islands of Sant'Antioco and San Pietro (fig. 1), the coastline and the mines, the lands that lead you inland towards the fields of wheat and metals. Its uninterrupted chronological series, it tells of a long period of Sardinian history between pre-history and the Roman era.



**Fig. 1, 2** - The islands of S. Antioco and S. Pietro and a view of Carbonia from the acropolis at Monte Sirai (photo Unicity S.p.A.);

Monte Sirai, quoted in medieval documents and indicated in the 19th century as an abandoned site, is a site filled with buildings along the high plain (fig. 2), showing an aware choice of landscape, strategic control and intense use of the dwelling area, preceded by much evidence of the neo-Eneolithic and Nuragic ages. There are several necropolises and a sacrificial area known as a 'tophet' nearby, but topographically separate<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In generale sul sito BARTOLONI 2004; GUIRGUIS 2013.



**Fig. 3** - Monte Sirai from high (processing photo Unicity S.p.A.).

A fortified entrance precedes the settlement area, a true acropolis. It is organised into blocks (in the history of studies called *insulae*) with spaces dedicated to the private and public sphere: the first with residential, crafts and production environments, places of daily life alongside mills and ovens for bread-making, and metal production areas, the second with small squares and town and communication roads. The religious spaces was the temple of Astarte, built on the ruins of a Nuragic place with several historical phases of worship, from the Phoenician age to the Roman age.

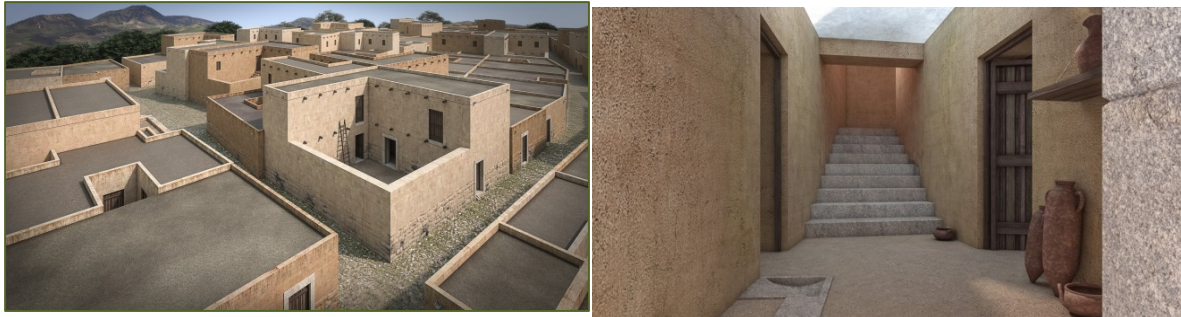
This monument is one of the strongest symbolical places in Sardinian history: The new Phoenician people, the meeting with Nuragic people, the relations, fights and then integration with the Carthaginian world: the remains of the Nuragic towers, the bronze Nuragic sculptures, the profile of an askoid jug used by a figure in a Phoenician bronze statue

(fig. 4), the small stone statue of Eastern origin (fig. 5), the use of a holy space until the 2nd century BC.



**Fig. 4, 5** - Phoenician bronze figure and Nuragic jug (MOSCATI 1988b, p. 427); statue of Astarte (MOSCATI 1988b, p. 286).

Several buildings have been investigated thoroughly, such as 'Casa Fantar' (fig. 6), 'Casa Amadasi', 'Casa del lucernario di talco' (fig. 7), and others that are coming to light and use such as the 'Casa di tufo'. Solid walls, high stone bases and higher parts in stones, sometimes with a frame, or rough bricks; spaces sometimes with an inner courtyard, upper floors and roofs without tiles.



**Fig. 6, 7** - The 'Casa Fantar' and the 'Casa del lucernario di talco' (virtual reconstructions Unicity S.p.A.).

The oldest parts of the settlement - preceded by Neolithic and Nuragic presences and with some Punic and Roman elements, the development of which outside the living area must still be defined - can be dated at the 8th century B.C. Red slip (red paint) pottery, typically Phoenician, native pots, sculptures, bronze figures and amulets, contemporary to the ones from the nearby Sulky, San Giorgio di Portoscusco and the Island of San Pietro, support this ancient beginnings. In the later 7th and 6th centuries B.C., intense building went on along the entire highland: the necropolis with incineration site, (with classic trilobate-edged and mushroom shaped urns, precious ornamental and magic items and Greek pottery from Corinth) correspond to this phase of life.

The next phase, that begins with the conquering of Sardinia by Carthage in the last decades of the 6th century B.C. And continues until the first half of the 4th century B.C., is not easy to see in the buildings, due to overlapping, but is well documented in the Punic striped ceramics, Attica production vases with black and red figures, trade amphorae, and terracotta figures from the contemporaneous underground necropolis.

Monte Sirai enjoyed its period of maximum expansion between the 4th and 2nd centuries B.C., between the late Punic age and the Roman Republic age, when the settlement took on the shape of a town, which is still visible and the *tophet* sanctuary was opened.

The necropolises are located in three basic areas north of the acropolis, with an extraordinary chronological, typological and spatial sequence: from the centres of the Phoenician tombs (mainly pit tombs, used with cremation, and with inhumation to a less extent) to chamber tombs from the Carthaginian age, with interesting architectural and decorative solutions (stone masks symbolising the god *Tinnit* on one of the pillars of tomb no. 5:



fig. 8) destined for some high class family groups, for the next burials. There were burials in amphorae, cremations, dual burial tombs, use of the Phoenician incineration area for later infant burials, but still Phoenician, perhaps, a progressively larger area was occupied, due to the increase in population and the need for new space for burials, with the presence and sometimes coexistence of different cultural traditions.



**Fig. 8** - Pillar decorated with an upside down picture of Tinnit from a tomb in chamber no. 5 (photo Unicity S.p.A.).

The tophet (fig. 9), the Phoenician sanctuary typically located in towns, reserved for deceased infants (some experts believe they were subjected to periodical sacrifice rituals, others believe the area was for premature births and abortions). The ceremony involved a purification sacrifice in fire. It is proof of the urban culture and a growing population in the place, arranged at the edges of the residential area, as by tradition. The digs indicate a presence from the 4th and throughout the 2nd century B.C.



**Fig. 9** - The *tophet* sanctuary (reconstruction Unicity S.p.A.).

The sanctuary contained a compact area of burials, where the urns, mostly round and containing the ashes of young deceased (about four hundred have been found) that were covered by slabs and placed in the ground. A stele made from various types of stone and Egyptian and Greek style decorations, or simple patterns, were placed as visible signs, but not for all the burials and presumably not for common availability. There was also a small temple with various functional area, that could be reached by a ramp and steps, in this area.

The settled area of Monte Sirai was abandoned for a long time in the early decades of the 1st century B.C. but was then inhabited again in the Late Ancient time, with extensive levelling of buildings between the 6th and 7th centuries A.D.

## ■ Credits

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