



Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Description of the site

Some remains from the ancient Phoenician and Punic town of Sulky have been found in the urban fabric of the modern-day town, where the evidence from various eras, from the Prehistoric age to today have been overlaid.

Of the items preserved, the necropolis has the most important and notable items, although there are still wide gaps in its original urban layout. The burial area occupies an area of about six hectares, on a hill with the Savoy fortress of Su Pisu on the top (fig. 1) and on the north-eastern slopes of the same hills. The oldest phases found in the burial areas date back to the 6th-5th century B.C., when the inhabitants of Sant'Antioco from the Punic Age mainly used them for multiple burials and continued to be used until the Roman Republican Age (3rd-2nd century B.C.) when the remains of cremated corpses were buried, placed in stone or lead boxes. Similar to other older necropolises, from the Phoenician age, the Sant'Antioco one was found 100 metres from the ancient coastline.





Fig. 1 - Stronghold of Su Pisu, entrance side (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The Punic necropolises were also intentionally placed on the outskirts of the inhabited centre, preferably on high ground, favouring rocky land not suitable for cultivation. The Phoenicians, in fact, both in the homeland and their Western descendants, buried or cremated their dead constantly in areas identified at a certain distance from the inhabited centre. It is now clear that the remains of the necropolises that were originally on the outskirts, ended up, due to urban needs over the centuries and the natural tendency of a town to expand, “moving” until they were quite central, incorporated into the urban fabric that is some way masks the original marginal connotation, therefore meeting subsequent burial needs in new peripheral spaces as they were encountered. This also happened in Sulky, the only centre in Sardinia that has tombs inside the urban area. Also, of the various Punic necropolises in Sardinia, Sulky is currently the most important from the point of view of the vastness of the burial area and the precious nature of the burial items found inside the tombs. In the Punic Age, the main

funeral ritual in the necropolis was burial, but cremation was also used, although this was later than the phases when the necropolis was used. This was mainly made up of hypogeum chambers, on various levels and depths. The oldest tombs are the ones now in the modern-day centre of the town (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Detail of the burial area of *Is Pirixeddus* (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Of the various types of tomb, *enchytrismòs* tombs were also found: an opening was made inside large commercial amphorae, where the deceased was inserted. The latter were only used to bury children, and placed inside a hole, but there were a few cases when they were also used for adults.

The hypogeum chamber tombs, as we mentioned, were by far the most common. The *dròmos* tombs, with entrance corridors with steps and landing. The corridors are different in size depending on the time when the tomb was built (fig. 3):

- end of 6th - beginning of 5th century B.C.: the width of the *dròmos* can exceed one and a half metres.

- mid 5th century B.C. : the width decreases considerably and rarely exceeds one metre.



Fig. 3 - Detail of the *dromoi* seen from above
(from <http://www.sardegnaigitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=615&s=17&v=9&c=4461&id=29211>).

The landing, at the end of the corridor, in front of the entrance to the hypogeum, generally has a surface area of 2-3 square metres.

On the back wall, there is an access door to the funeral chamber (fig. 4), which is generally narrow to avoid wooden sarcophaguses being introduced unless dismantled, and in fact, the entrance is such that only the deceased's body can enter lying on a narrow wooden stretcher.



Fig. 4 - Access door to one of the burial chambers of the necropolis, sector of *Is Pirixeddus* (Photo by Unicity S.p.A)

The door was locked from the outside with a single slab of tufa rock, saved while digging the tomb, and then sealed with clay. An alternative method for closing the door was the creation of a airtight wall made of stones or sun-baked clay bricks.

The floor of the funeral chambers is usually slightly lower than the outside floor, there are often two chambers, separated by a wall made during the dig, reinforcing the ceiling, in a central position, and sometimes decorated with slightly jutting line, almost as if a pillar was being outlined. In two cases, i.e. In a tomb found in 1968 and another in 2002, the end of the wall (in the first) or the side of the central pillar facing the entrance (in the second) were embellished by the presence of high-relief work portraying a person sculpted into an advancing figure in Egyptian style, at natural size (fig. 5), characterised by a beard, his right arm bent on his chest and the left arm stretched out along his side. The subject is wearing a short skirt and is carrying a *klaft*. In both cases, the sculptures found were painted.



Fig. 5 - Egyptian style high relief

(from <http://www.comune.santantioco.ca.it/cms/images/stories/archeo/ipogeoaffrescato.png>).

The two hypogeum chambers are adjacent and usually have an irregular square shape. They differ in size depending on the geological conditions of the rock.

The hypogeum tombs may also have only a single chamber, with access along one of the short sides, usually 4x5 metres in size (older type) (fig. 6)

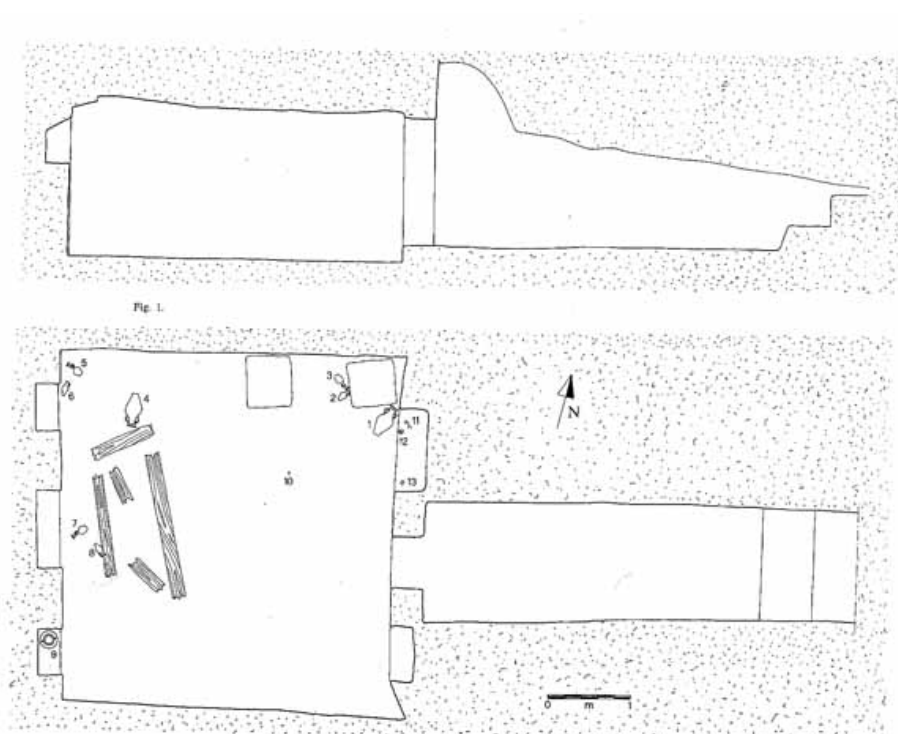


Fig. 6 - Map of tomb 2 AR (from *Bartoloni* 1987, fig.2).

A typical characteristic of the Punic necropolises, that can also be found in Sant'Antioco, is the fact that the tombs never follow a particular direction, but are arranged in an apparently disorderly fashion.

Inside the *Is Pirixeddus* burial area, some examples of the Roman Era use of the site can also be seen. This period went from 2nd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D., between the end of the Republic era and the start of the Imperial Era. There were four types of tombs in the age of the Roman Empire:

- 1) *Cappuccina* tombs, made using a bed of tiles on which the corpse was placed. The tomb was then covered with other sloping tiles placed vertically; these were generally poor burials (fig. 7);



Fig. 7 - Canetté Tomb in the Is Pirixeddus sector (photo by Unicity S.p.A).

- 2) Simple tombs, dug directly into the ground;
- 3) *enchytrismòs* tombs, i.e. Inside amphorae;
- 4) Cremation tombs, with burial of the cremated corpse inside a container (amphora, jug, urn) placed in the ground, often accompanied by a *sema*, a sign, a tomb stone showed the position on the outside (fig. 8).

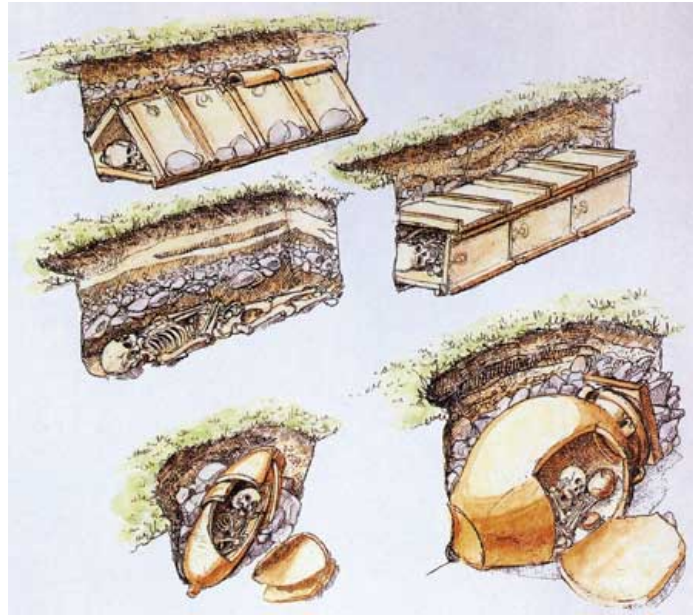


Fig. 8 - Types of burial in the Roman age: from the top: "cappuccina" tombs, "ground", in tile boxes, in amphora, in *dolium* or *enchytrismos* (from http://www.arketipoweb.com/Il_territorio_di_Tissi/immagini/08/tipologie-sepolture.jpg).

Part of the necropolis was turned into catacombs in the Paleo-Christian age (4th-5th century A.D.) when openings were made in the walls and previously separate chambers were connected, even if on different levels.

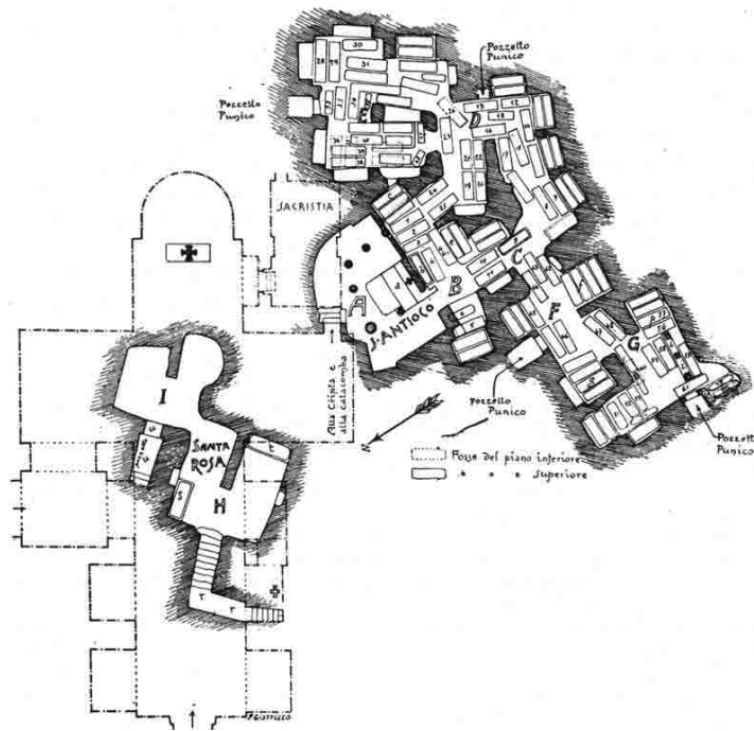


Fig. 9 - Plan of the catacombs of Sant'Antioco and of S. Rosa
 (from <http://basilicasantantiocomartire.blogspot.it/p/catacombe.html>)

In addition to the best-known catacomb, dedicated to Sant'Antioco, there is a second that is just under the floor of the church, separated from the other: the so-called Santa Rosa catacomb, made up of two rooms only (figs. 9-10).



Fig. 10 - Catacomb entrance (from <http://www.parcogeominerario.eu/images/Catacombe%2001.jpg>)

Another phase of use of the Sulky necropolis was the so-called hypogeum village, made up of a large number of tombs re-used as houses from 1700, and called “Is Gruttas”: the poorest population of Sant’Antioco lived there (fig. 11).



Fig. 11 - Entrance to *dròmos* tombs re-adapted as houses in the underground village (photo by Unicity).

The tombs, re-adapted and sometimes extended by breaking into adjacent rooms, were made larger with additional rooms, inside which oven with relative chimneys were sometimes built.



Fig. 12 - Detail of the interior of a kitchen of a house in the hypogeum village (photo by Unicity S.p.A.)

Spano (188) was struck by the use of the tombs as houses and in this regard he wrote: *"(...) Seeing people come out of those caves early in the morning is a terrible contrast with the men who were destined to sleep there forever"*. The so-called underground village remained in use until the end of the seventies of the last century (fig. 13).



Fig. 13 - Old photograph of the still inhabited underground village
(from <http://www.parcogeominerario.eu/images/Grutti.jpg>)

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olanas

■ Bibliographic abbreviations

- AMADASI GUZZO ET ALII 1992 M.G. AMADASI GUZZO, C. BONNET, S.M. CECCHINI, P. XELLA (a cura di), *Dizionario della civiltà fenicia*, Roma 1992
- BARRECA 1986 F. BARRECA, *L'attività della Soprintendenza Archeologica per le province di Cagliari e Oristano (1970-1986)* = *QuadCa* 1986, pp. 3-18.
- BARTOLONI 1989 P. BARTOLONI, *Sulcis*, Roma 1989.
- BARTOLONI 2009 P. BARTOLONI, *Testimonianze dalla necropoli fenicia di Sulky = Sardinia Corsica et Baleares Antiquae 7*, 2009,
pp.71-80.
- BARTOLONI 1987 P. BARTOLONI, 1987, *La tomba 2AR della necropoli di Sulcis* = *RSF* vol. XV, 1, Roma, pp. 57-73.
- BARTOLONI 1989 P. BARTOLONI, *Sulcis*, 1989 Roma.
- BARTOLONI 1993 P. BARTOLONI, *In margine a una tomba punica di Sulcis* = *QuadCa* 1993, Cagliari, pp. 93-96.

- BARTOLONI 2007 P. BARTOLONI, *Il museo archeologico comunale "F. Barreca" di Sant'Antioco*, Sassari 2007
- BARTOLONI 2009 P. BARTOLONI, *I Fenici e i Cartaginesi in Sardegna*, Sassari 2009
- BERNARDINI 1988 P. BERNARDINI, *I leoni di Sulci* in Sardò 4, Sassari 1988.
- BERNARDINI 1999 P. BERNARDINI, 1999, *Sistemazione dei feretri e dei corredi nelle tombe puniche: tre esempi da Sulcis*= *RSF* vol. XXVII, 2, Roma, pp. 133-146.
- BERNARDINI 2005 P. BERNARDINI, *Recenti scoperte nella necropoli punica di Sulcis*= *RSF*, vol. XXXIII, Roma 2005, pp. 63-80.
- BERNARDINI 2006 P. BERNARDINI, *Recenti ricerche nella necropoli punica di Sulky*, in S. ANGIOLILLO, M. GIUMAN, A. PASOLINI, *Ricerca e confronti 2006. Giornate di studio di archeologia e storia dell'arte*, Cagliari 2007
- BERNARDINI 2010 P. BERNARDINI. *Aspetti dell'artigianato funerario punico di Sulky. Nuove evidenze*, in M. MILANESE, P. RUGGERI, C. VISMARA (a cura di), *Atti del XVIII Convegno Africa Romana (Olbia, 11-14 dicembre 2008)*, Roma 2010, pp. 1257-1270.
- GUIRGUIS 2005 M. GUIRGUIS, *Storia degli studi e degli scavi a Sulky e Monte Sirai*= *RSF XXXIII*, 1-2, Roma 2005.

- MUSCUSO 2012 S. MUSCUSO, *La necropoli punica di Sulky*, in M. GUIRGUIS, E. POMPIANU, A. UNALI (a cura di), *Quaderni di Archeologia Sulcitana 1. Summer School di Archeologia Fenicio Punica (Atti 2011)*, Sassari 2012.
- PUGLISI 1942 S. PUGLISI, *Scavo di tombe ipogeiche puniche (Sant'Antioco)* = NSc (1942), pp. 106-115.
- PESCE 1962 G. PESCE, *Un dipinto romano in una tomba dell'antica Sulcis* = BA, 2-3, 1962, pp. 264-268.
- SPANO 1857 G. SPANO, *Descrizione dell'antica città di Sulcis* =
- TARAMELLI 1908 A. TARAMELLI, *S. Antioco - Scavi e scoperte di antichità puniche e romane nell'area dell'antica Sulcis* = NBAS, 1908, pp. 145-162.
- TRONCHETTI 1985 C. TRONCHETTI, *Sant'Antioco (Cagliari) - Scavo nelle necropoli puniche* = NBAS 1985, pp. 285-286.
- TRONCHETTI 1989 C. TRONCHETTI, *S. Antioco*, 1989 Sassari.
- TRONCHETTI 1990 A C. TRONCHETTI, *Nuove acquisizioni su Sulci punica* : AA. VV., *Incontro « I Fenici »*, Cagliari 1990, pp. 63-68.
- TRONCHETTI 1995 C. TRONCHETTI, *Le problematiche del territorio del Sulcis in età romana* in V. SANTONI (a cura di), *Carbonia e il Sulcis. Archeologia e territorio*, Oristano 1995.

TRONCHETTI 1997 C. TRONCHETTI, 1997, *La tomba 12 (A.R.) della necropoli punica di Sant'Antioco*, in P. BERNARDINI, R. D'ORIANO, P.G. SPANU (a cura di), *Phoinikes B Shrdn. I Fenici in Sardegna-nuove acquisizioni* (a cura di), Cagliari 1997, pp. 115-116.

TRONCHETTI 2002 C. TRONCHETTI, *La tomba 12 AR della necropoli punica di Sant'Antioco* = *QuadCa* 2002, pp. 143-171.

■ Periodicals and magazines

BA *Bollettino d'Arte*, Roma, 1907 e ss.

BAS *Bullettino Archeologico Sardo*, Cagliari, I, 1855 e ss.

NBAS *Nuovo bullettino archeologico sardo*, Sassari, I, 1984 e ss.

NSc *Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1944- Già: *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1876-1920 (fa parte di *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Memorie della Classe di Scienza Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, Roma 1876). Poi: *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1921-1939. Poi: *Atti della Reale Accademia d'Italia. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1940-1943.

QuadCa *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Province di Cagliari e Oristano*, Cagliari, I, 1986 e ss.

RSF *Rivista di Studi Fenici*, Roma, 1973 ess.



UNIONE EUROPEA



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

La Sardegna cresce con l'Europa



UNIONE EUROPEA

Progetto cofinanziato dall'Unione Europea
Programma Operativo FESR 2007-2013

FESR - Fondo Europeo di Sviluppo Regionale - Asse I, Linea di Attività 1.2.3.a