



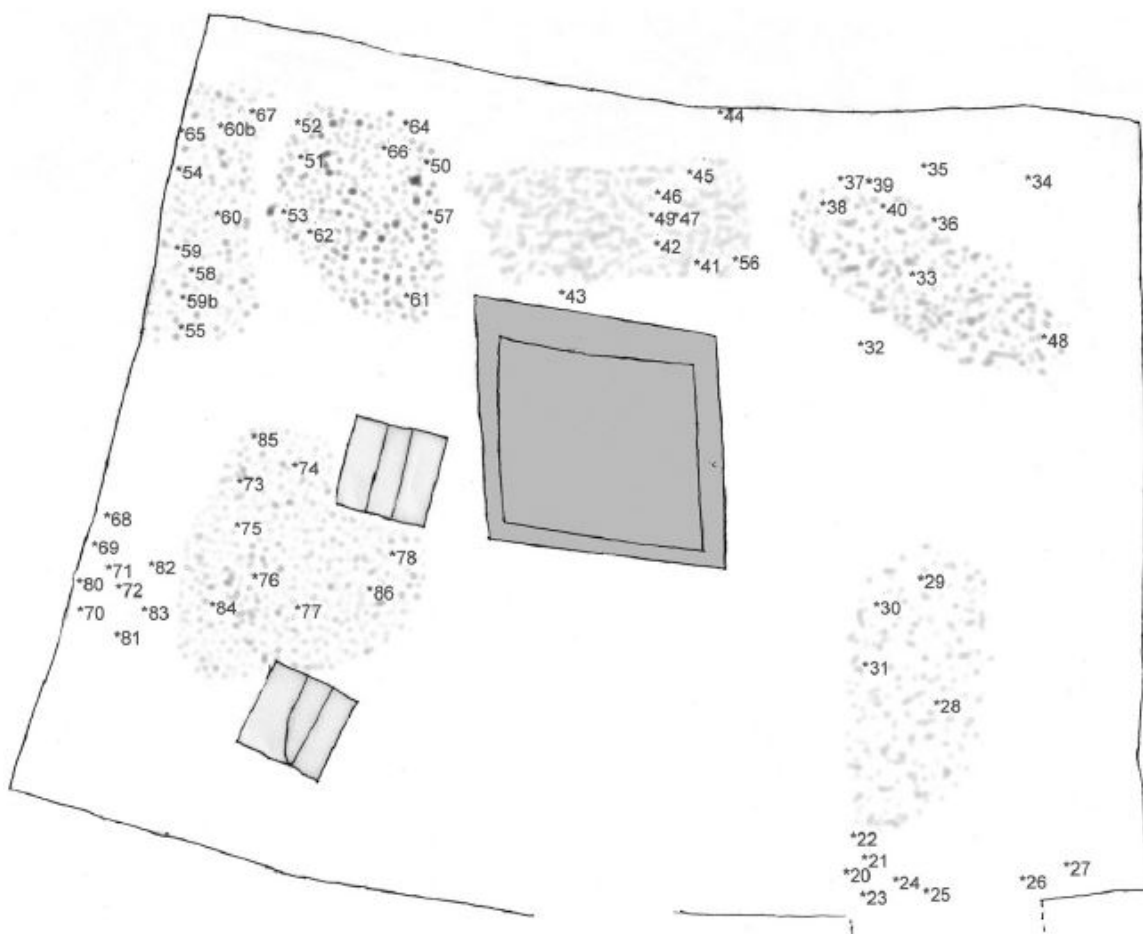
# Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

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**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ General features of Phoenician-Punic necropolises

The Phoenicians buried their dead, always respecting a certain distance from the houses and the necropolises never became particularly large, at least judging from the material evidence uncovered so far. The use of tomb *sema* in some necropolises of the western Mediterranean: in Tharros, for example, there is evidence of some funeral stones that survive today and in Carthage funeral stelae were used, a custom that became popular only starting at the end of the 4th-beginning of the 3rd century B.C. In the case of Sant'Antioco, two betyls were found inside tomb no. 12 (figs. 1-2).



**Fig. 1** - Map of Tomb no. 12 in *Sulky* (from Bernardini 2010, p. 1263, fig. 1).

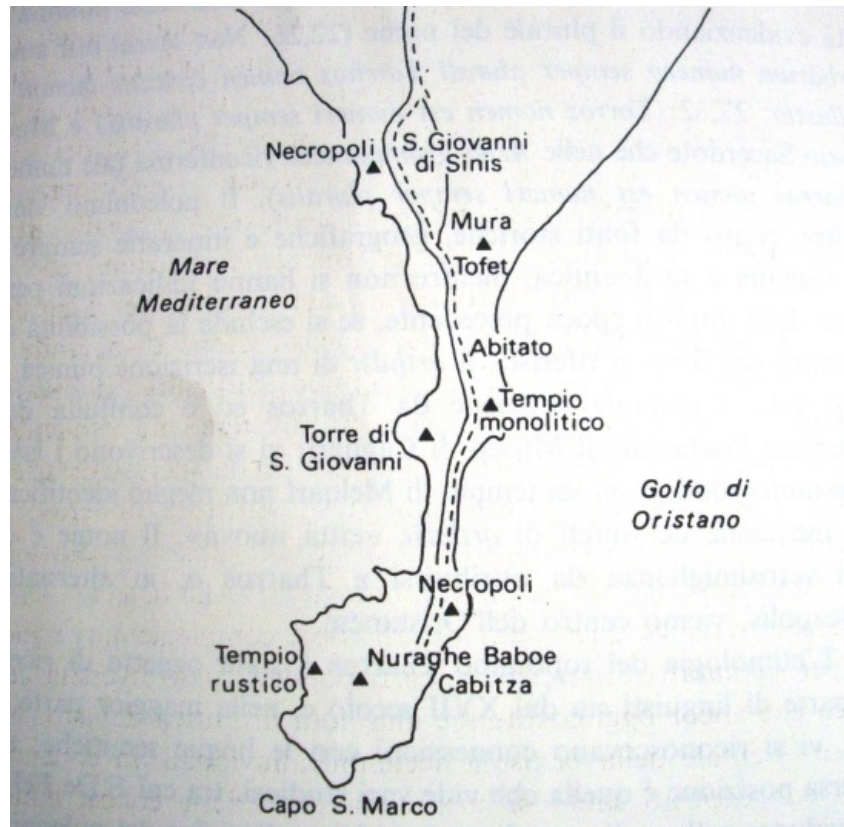


**Fig. 2** - The two bethels in the left-hand cell of tomb no. 12 (from Bernardini 2010, p. 1264, fig. 2).

The Eastern Phoenician necropolises are still decidedly less well-known and in particular suffer from the lack of written sources that penalises studies on them, as indeed in other aspects of Phoenician and Punic life.

The Phoenicians used to choose certain areas of land for the necropolises, placing a certain distance between one (or them, when more than one) and the urban centre. In the case of plots on islands, the necropolis may be placed on another island, as is the case with Cadice; when settlements were on the mouth of a river, for example Toscanos, also in Spain, the settlement and the necropolis were arranged on opposite shores. In other circumstances a distance not determined by natural obstacles could be considered: this is the case of Motya, with the necropolis placed at the opposite side of a diameter compared to the settlement. In Nora in Sardinia, a peninsula site, the distance between settlement

and necropolis is about 500 metres; in Tharros the distance varies from 500 to 1000 metres, and in the latter, the necropolises are located in Capo San Marco, therefore towards the sea on the end of the peninsula of Sinis (OR) and the other stands inland, in San Giovanni di Sinis, below the modern day settlement (fig. 3).



**Fig. 3** - Schematic map of the end of the Sinis peninsula with indication of the ancient ruins of Tharros (from Acquaro, Mezzolani 1996, p. 8, fig. 1).

The choice of these two separate areas out of town can be found often in Sardinia and in other Punic regions and is given a good example in Cagliari, that could count on two burial sites, one to the west and the other to the east of the urban centre. The western necropolis is on the Tuvixeddu hill (the name means "small holes") where the main type of tomb is underground with an entrance from a vertical well, used from the 6th to the 3rd-2nd century B.C. (fig. 4), while the eastern necropolis stands next to the Bonaria hill, where there is the same type of tomb as the western one and where bodies were not deposited



prior to the 4th century B.C. This latter necropolis was an alternative, at a later date, to the western one, when Tuvixeddu was almost close to saturation.



**Fig. 4** - Aerial view of a portion of the necropolis of Tuvixeddu (CA)  
(from <http://www.archeocaor.beniculturali.it/getImage.php?id=304>)

Only Sulky has a definite presence of tombs within the town walls; in a circumstance such as this, it is likely that the remains of the necropolis for various reasons, that originally fell inside a peripheral area, with the expansion of the town over time for the inhabitants natural need, ended up being moved to recover a part of its central nature. The tombs were incorporated into the urban fabric totally, providing an outlet for the growing funeral needs in the new peripheral spaces too that will be frequented a lot! The Punic necropolis of *Sulky* also involved eastern and western sides of Mont'è Cresia, and the high land now occupied by the Savoy fortress.

One characteristic of Phoenician and Punic necropolises, is the absence (at least apparently) of a fixed order, of a project aimed at observing a particular direction, not connect to any pre-established architectural development.

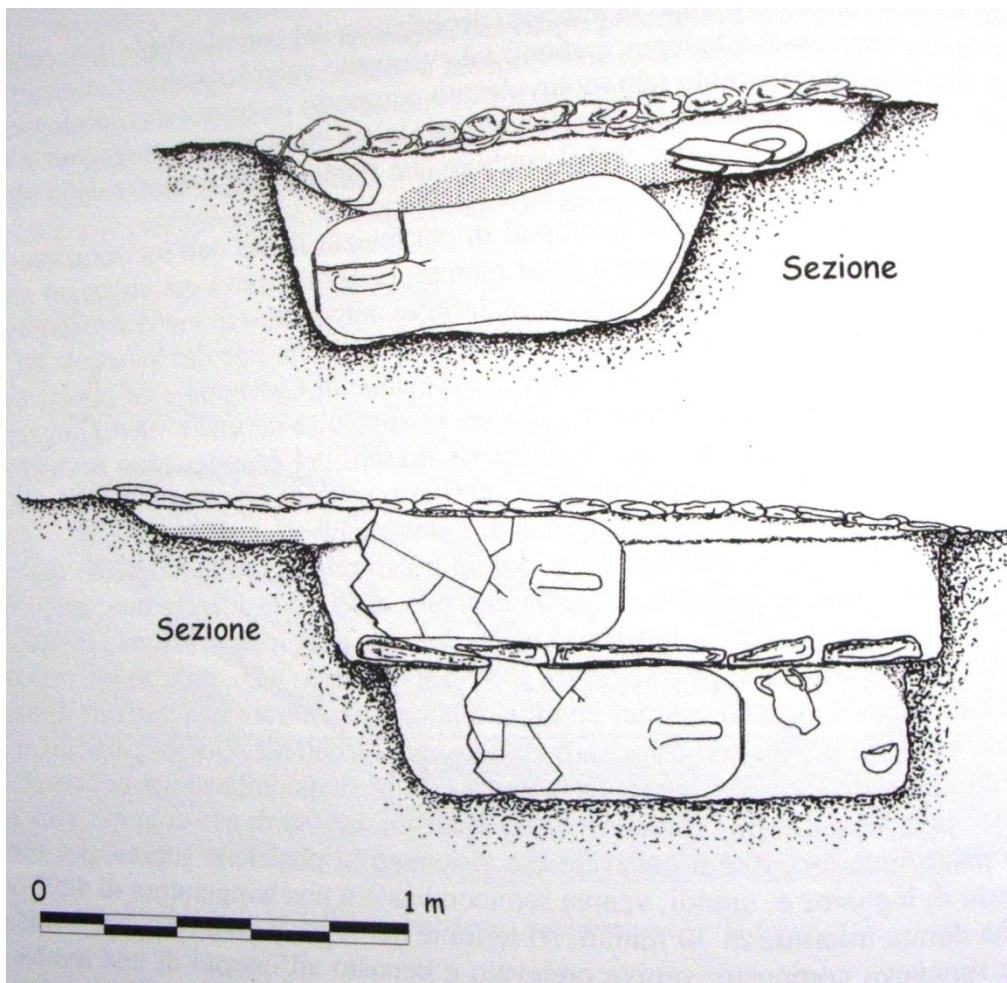


**Fig. 5** - Part of the Sulky necropolis highlighting the irregular orientation of the graves (<http://www.sardegnaigitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=615&s=17&v=9&c=4461&id=29043>).

The main types of Phoenician tombs, albeit with significant variations, are based on those used in the Syrian-Palestinian area, as early as during the Bronze Age (3000-1200 B.C. circa) The types may vary from site to site but inside each of them there may be different architectural solutions. The burials are individual more often than not, however, in the East as in the West some great tombs accommodated, over time, many bodies: the latter were probably "family graves".

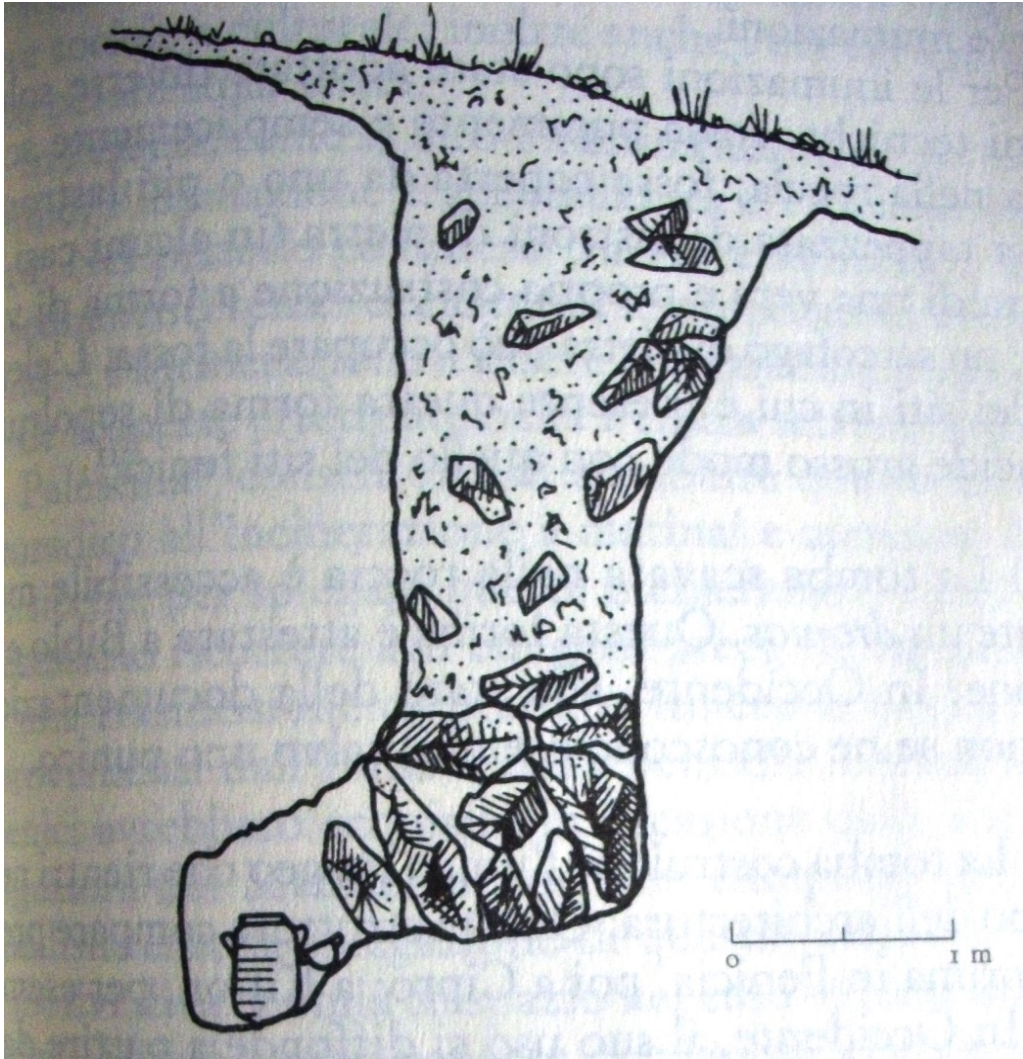
In general, we can therefore distinguish at least five different types of tombs:

a – a **natural ravine in the rock**, which could possibly be expanded, where burials could take place (with or without deposition in amphorae, a burial reserved for children, called *enchytrismos* burial); in the case of ritual cremation the burnt bones could be placed on the bare rock, or otherwise they were placed in an appositely built tomb or stone tray, or placed inside an urn (fig. 6).

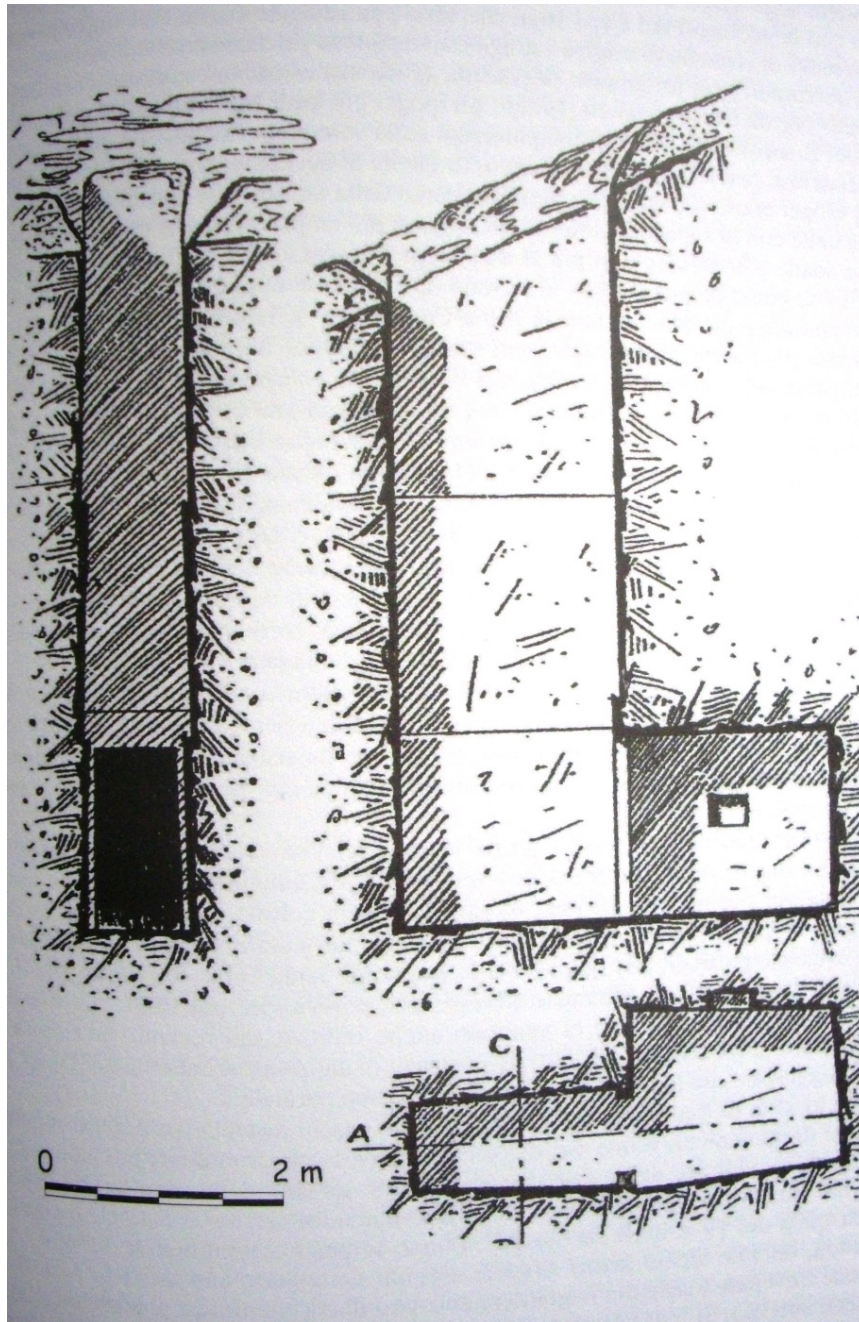


**Fig. 6** - *Enchytrismos* graves (from Bartoloni 2009, p. 154, fig. 94).

b - **vertical shaft burial**, narrow, deep, often expanded at the base, with a chamber intended for the deceased, dug laterally to the well itself which could also be used for cremation remains (fig. 7-8);

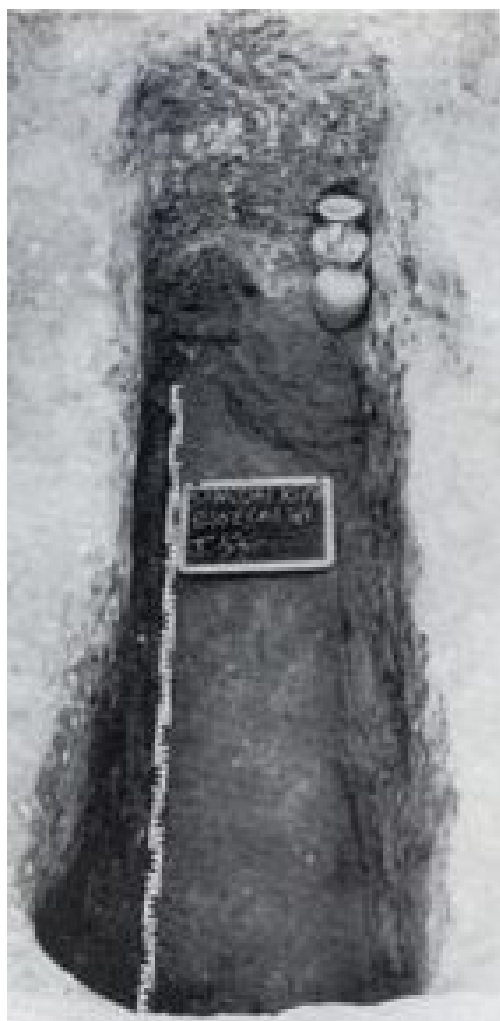


**Fig. 7** - Vertical shaft tomb, with cremation burial in the necropolis of Cerro de San Cristòbal, in Almuñecar (from Gras, Rouillard, Teixidor 1995, p. 185, fig. 18).



**Fig. 8** - Cagliari, necropolis of Tuixeddu, plant and sections of an underground pit tomb (from Bartoloni 2009, p. 107, fig 719).

c - **rectangular grave** which usually contains a single body. This type has been used both for burial and for cremation (fig. 9). Various different techniques were used for burials: the deceased could be simply placed into the pit, which was then closed with stone slabs; the slabs could also be used to clad the interior of the pit, inside which, alternatively, a sarcophagus could be buried.



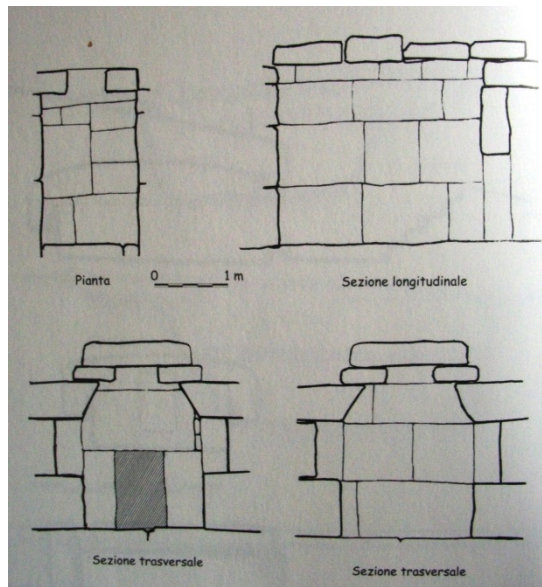
**Fig. 9** - Single pit tomb of a Punic necropolis found in Sanluri  
(from [http://web.tiscali.it/sanluri.s2k/storica/sanluri\\_punica.htm](http://web.tiscali.it/sanluri.s2k/storica/sanluri_punica.htm)).

d - **Tomb cut out of the rock**, with an irregular square chamber, sometimes divided by a partition, or supported by a “free” pillar with an underground dromos entrance, namely a corridor with stairs leading to an landing and to the entrance to the burial chamber (the latter two cases are the most common in Sant'Antioco) (fig. 10);



**Fig. 10** - Dromos tombs in the necropolis of Sulky seen from above  
(detail from <http://www.sardegna.digitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=615&s=17&v=9&c=4461&id=29211>).

e - **Built tomb**. This is the only tomb that is part of the field of architecture and soon appeared in Phoenicia, in Cyprus and then spread through the west: they were used, for example in Carthage from 7th century B. The tombs were built at various levels under the ground, built in large square blocks: it is entered through a door made in the short side. Access via the vertical well rather than from the *dromos* was more common. Examples of this type of tomb are also found in Sardinia, in Othoca (Santa Giusta, OR) (fig. 11).



**Fig. 11** - Underground tomb built near the necropolis of Othoca, Santa Giusta (OR) (from Bartoloni 2009, p. 156, fig. 96).

## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

## ■ Bibliographic abbreviations

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Programma Operativo FESR 2007-2013

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