

# Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology

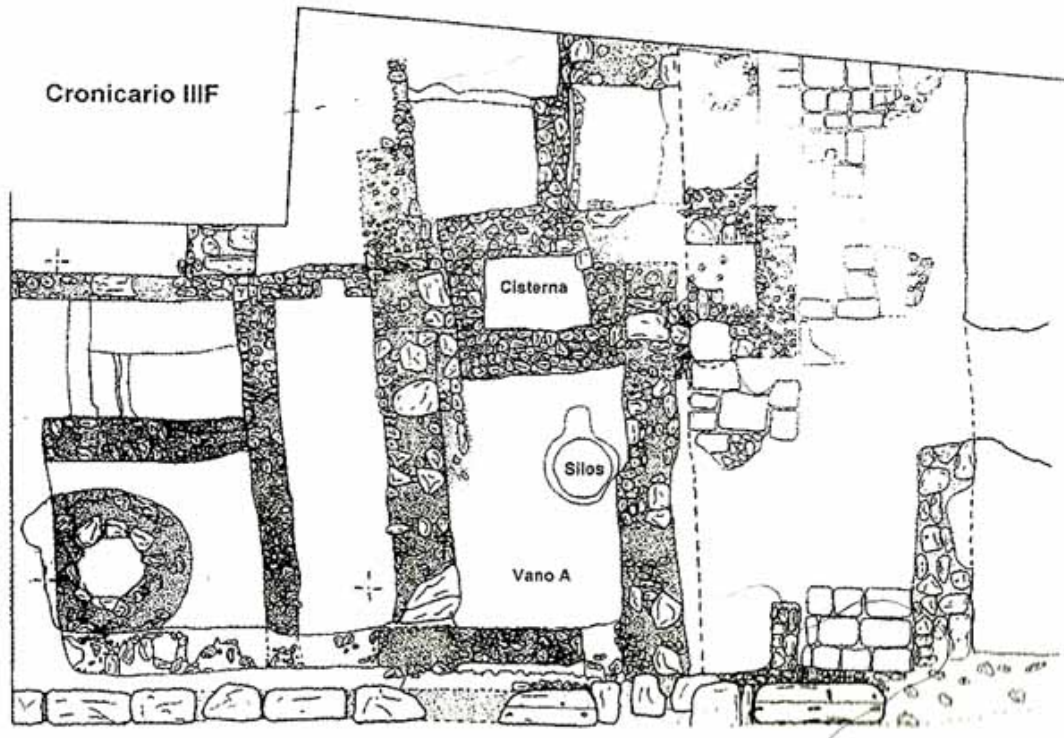


## ■ Sant'Antioco during the Phoenician and Punic Ages

The first concrete signs of a stable Phoenician presence, the last to reach Sardinia after the Mycenae, North-Syrian and Cypriot merchants, come from around 780/770 B.C., a date supported for Sant'Antioco by the fact that the oldest findings in the settlement areas cannot be dated to prior that era. Therefore the date of the founding of Sulky is close to that of Carthage, which took place in 814 B.C., on the basis of current knowledge, and is the oldest town of the ones founded by the Phoenicians in Sardinia. Chronological information comes mostly from ceramics and little can be said about the size of the ancient settlement. The first Phoenician occupation was of an area not too far from the coastline and in which there is no evidence of native settlements; some materials of Sardinian production, only a very small amount, have been found with Phoenician pottery in the ancient dwelling areas. The Phoenician layout developed over a neolithic phase of Ozieri culture and no traces of violent occupation or destruction has emerged. To the contrary, relations between natives and the new arrivals seemed to be peaceful.

The urban structure and the topography of the Phoenician settlement is not known in detail, as there are very few remains of stone structures in the area of the modern-day town. When the Phoenicians arrived, the native settlement stood on the hill where the Savoy fortress now stands, a place where traces dating to the Nuragic age have been found and where the Phoenician acropolis would later stand. One part of the settlement stretches to the foot of the hill, to the area of Cronicario (fig. 1).





**Fig. 1** - Map of the Cronicario area  
(from <http://www.antika.it/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/sulci-abitato-arcaico-mappa.jpg>).

The town soon became a very wealthy city thanks to its huge trading network and its two ports, one on the lake and the one in the Gulf of Palmas. The evidence of its relations with the mother-country Tyre and with other Phoenician cities of the eastern and western Mediterranean coasts and with Magna Greece is apparent from at least the first half of the eighth century B.C. (fig. 2-3).



**Fig. 2** - Fragment of Euboea-Greek pottery on display at the Municipal Archaeological Museum "F. Barreca". (photo by M. Murgia).



**Fig. 3** - Olla of Greek-Euboea production from Pithecusa (730-710 B.C.) (From Tronchetti 1989, p. 8 fig. 1).

The Phoenician community of Sulky led a life based on commerce and on farming for at least two hundred and fifty years, until it was conquered by Carthage around 540 B.C. Carthage was also a Phoenician colony and had shown intentions of expansion that became concrete in the mid 6th century B.C. with the invasion of the Western part of Sicily, the conquest of Motya and the Phoenician centres in the area. Once the armed conquest of western Sicily was completed, Carthage tried to take over Sardinia, the times in 540 B.C. with a military expeditions under the command of General Malco, but which failed; the second invasion lead by Hasdrubal and Hamilcar in 530 B.C. was successful for the Carthaginians. Traces of destruction found in the archaeological layers corresponding to the end of the 6th century B.C. in various Phoenician centres involved in Carthaginian attacks, including Sulky, are proof of a victory that had a heavy price of devastation and death of the population. Carthage took possession of Sardinia and placed it under tight control, as can be seen in the 1st treaty with Rome (509 B.C.), as told by the Greek historian Polybius. After its defeat, Sulky went through a period of economic crisis and difficulty, due to the sudden exclusion from commercial traffic that it had previously benefited from greatly. New inhabitants came to Sulky at that time, perhaps people of Punic Berber North-African extract, who brought with them new customs. They settled in the Phoenician town, re-storing a part of the buildings and building new ones on the ruins of the ones damaged by war. At that time, funeral rituals changed: while cremation of the body in small hollows was the main method in Phoenician times, in Punic times (from the Carthaginian conquest onwards) people were buried in hypogeum tombs. Around the first half of the 4th century B.C., between 380 and 370, Carthage decided to restore, fortify and expand some towns in Sardinia, Sicily and North Africa: Sulky was a part of this programme, that was, due to its proximity to the strategic mineral areas, most certainly one of the central points in Sardinia but also in the whole Carthaginian empire. The town of Karalis, Nora, Monte Sirai, Neapolis, Othoca, Tharros and Olbia were also fortified in Sardinia as were some non-urban settlements, that were probably military camps such as Santu Antine di Genoni, San Simeone di Bonorva and various others.

The areas of the settlements that were too far to be included in the city walls, such as the *tophets*, were given their own fortifications. From here, a new flourishing period began

for Sulky. The city took part in the 1st Punic War (264-241 B.C.) and hosed military contingents made up of mercenary soldiers. The end of the war meant the transfer of Sicily under Roman rule. Carthage had to face the revolts caused by the mercenary troops, in North Africa and in Sardinia, and also had to fight them in their own North African lands, managing to beat the mercenaries but at a heavy price; Carthage was forced to abandon its domination of Sardinia, in fact. From 238, Roman rule began on Sardinia, which by this time had adopted many Carthaginian traditions and practices.



**Fig. 4** - Roman expansion in the Mediterranean between the third and second centuries B.C. (from <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/punico/>).

## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

## ■ Bibliographic abbreviations

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- RAL** *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, I, 1884-85 e ss.



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