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REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA  
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# Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

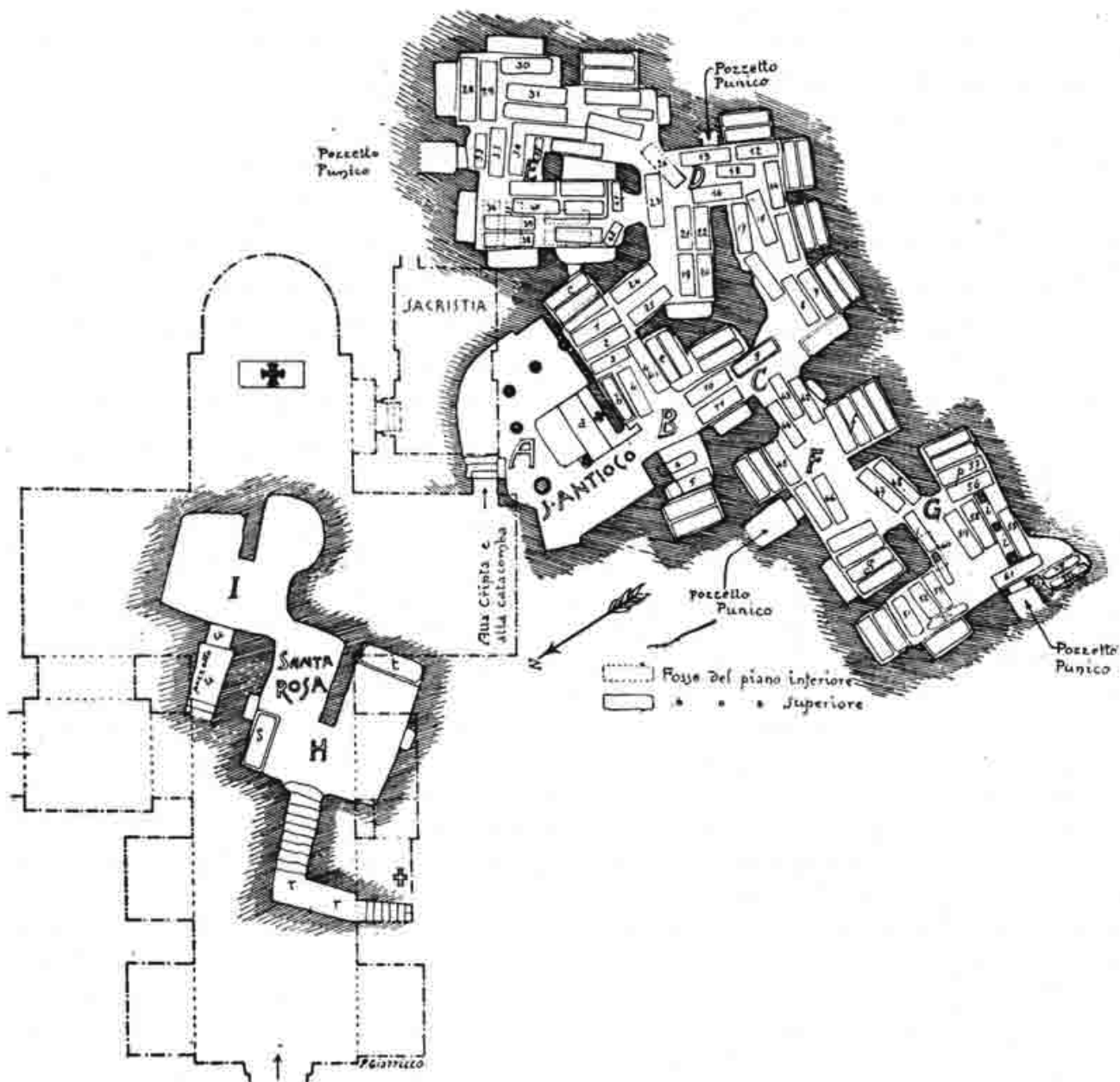
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**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Catacombs

In the Cathedral dedicated to Sant'Antioco there are Christian catacombs which, in respect of the more famous structures of Rome, have a very special feature: it was not necessary to dig to obtain the gallery branches, but only to resort to rehashing the vast Punic necropolis (VI-IV century B.C.) clearing the ancient burials from their previous arrangements to form a continuous series of cavities, knocking down the diaphragms that separated one Punic tomb from another. According to current knowledge, the underground graves of Sulky which were reused and linked together are seven, belonging to two nuclei with separate entrances: there are therefore the underground grave A + B + L, the D, E, F and the G one and the ambulatory C (fig. 1) Space A has an apse, with the vault supported by six columns and as many capitals reused from previous Roman buildings. At the centre of this small colonnade, which creates a circle, lies the sarcophagus-altar where it is said that the saint's bones were found in 1615 (fig. 2). There were two openings on both sides of the altar, that lead to the real catacomb, but the one on the left was walled up in ancient times for unknown reasons.



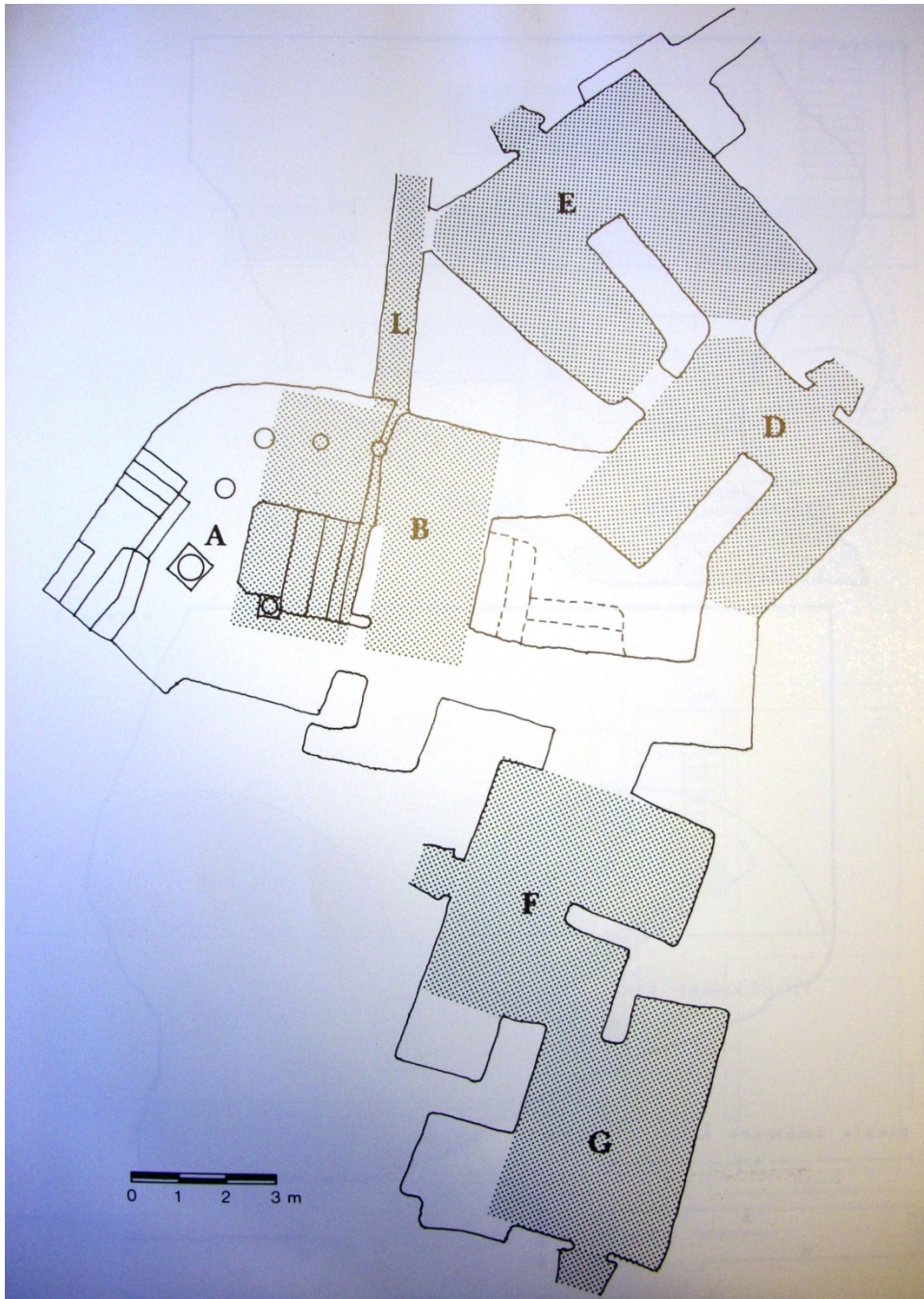


**Fig. 1** - Plan of the catacombs of Sant'Antioco and of those of Santa. Rosa (from <http://basilicasantantiocomartire.blogspot.it/p/catacombe.html> ).



**Fig. 2** - Entrance to the catacombs with the altar-sarcophagus of Sant'Antioco  
(from <http://www.parcogeominerario.eu/images/Catacombe%2001.jpg>)

The underground grave A + B + L is the one that has undergone most changes. D still has the original characteristics of the Punic layout: the vestibule, the two cells, the entrance from the south-east; hypogeum E also follows the classic layout of Punic burial chambers, apart from repairs on the walls, due to the opening of burial recesses and arcosoliums: the chamber is in a poor state of repair (fig. 3).



**Fig. 3** - Hypothetical reconstruction of underground graves A + B + L, D, E, F, G (from Porru 1989, table IX).

Chamber E was perhaps used for ritual purposes, given the presence inside of a large painted masonry box in which a considerable amount of glassware was found, both in pieces and complete, reported by Taramelli during the exploration in 1921 (fig. 4).



**Fig. 4** - Painted sarcophagus in E chamber (from Porru 1989, table XXII c)

Underground tomb F underwent an expansion in order to obtain a deeper cell than the existing Punic one. Finally chamber G appears very irregular in comparison with the original Punic system and the gravediggers worked in a more radical way, demolishing the partition between two distinct rooms to open a new cell to increase the capacity of the chamber which houses a special canopy tomb (fig. 5) Inside the rooms of the Sant'Antioco catacombs, several types of burial can be found: in the ground, arcosolium, a *enchytrismòs*, in simple burial recesses, in sarcophaguses, in boxes and lastly in the so-called canopy tombs.



**Fig. 5** - The canopy tomb in chamber G (from Porru 1989, table XIII)

In addition to the rooms we have just examined, we must also remember the so-called catacomb of Santa Rosa (fig. 1), formed by areas H and I, whose Punic setup is virtually intact, as they were not reworked: the only Christian elements are represented by two masonry sarcophagi, both inside chamber H, one of which, located immediately to the left of the entrance, is traditionally believed to be the sarcophagus of Santa Rosa, (fig. 6).



**Fig. 6** - Entrance to toom H in Catacomb S. Rosa with, to the left, one of the sarcophaguses (from Porru 1989, tab. XIII)

The entrance to the Catacomb of Santa Rosa is now possible via the *dromos* of room H, added to with a short, narrow ramp, from the floor of the church.

The Sulky catacomb also has a *martyrium* (fig. 7) and seven inter-communicating rooms, part of a large Punic and Roman necropolis that is impossible to pinpoint in time and transformation mode.



**Fig. 7** - The *Martyrium* basilica of Sant'Antioco (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Other paleo-Christian new uses for Punic hypogeum chambers in S.Antioco can be found in the *Is Pirixeddus* necropolis. Inside this small catacomb an arcosolium tomb was found that is difficult to attribute to anyone, filled with frescoes of Christian symbols and with a multi-coloured idealised image of the deceased (fig. 8).



**Fig. 8** - Painted Arcosolium in the necropolis of *Is Pirixeddus* (from Bartoloni 2007, p. 50, fig. 31)



## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

## ■ Bibliographic abbreviations

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