



Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ The underground village

A rather characteristic aspect of the town of Sant'Antioco is the reuse of part of the Punic necropolis as an area to live in. The portion of necropolis involved in this phenomenon is positioned on the western side of the hill of Mont' e Cresia at the foot of the Savoy fortress of Su Pisu (figs. 1-2).



Fig. 1 - Overview of a part of the hypogeum village as it stands today; in the background it is possible to see the Savoy fortress (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



Fig. 2 - Savoy stronghold of Su Pisu (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Starting from the second half of the 18th century, after a long period of abandon due to the frequent attacks by Saracen pirates, whose raids began midway through the 8th century and continued until the 19th, the island began a repopulation process of the land that gave rise to the modern-day settlement.

Already in 1615 after the finding of what were presumed to be the remains of Sant'Antioco under the so-called *basilica-martyrium* dedicated to the martyr, Bishop Francisco De Esquivel promised to grant the lands to whoever accepted to live there, as a part of his declared attempt to stop the depopulation of the island. Several families began a new life on the island, attracted by this promise; the ones who followed later, however, did not benefit from this favour and adapted to a miserable existence of poverty and emargination. The last ones who arrived, in fact, pushed by desperation, occupied the tombs that were adapted to the most elementary type of housing for the living, and then became more adequate housing. They knocked down the diaphragms of rock that separated the

tombs, the original hypogea were connected to each other and expanded and in some even fireplaces and ovens were built (figs. 3-5).



Fig. 3 - Exterior of an underground Punic funerary tomb converted into a dwelling (photo by Unicity SpA).



Fig. 4 - Hypothetical reconstruction of an underground Punic funerary tomb converted into a dwelling (photo by M. Murgia)



Fig. 5 - Hypothetical reconstruction of a kitchen with a fireplace in an underground Punic funerary tomb (photo by Unicity SpA).

Anyone living there collected the wild produce from the land necessary to trade with other primary goods. The outside of the houses was frequently cleaned and the walls were painted white. Attempts were also made to disinfect the floors and ceilings of the underground rooms, trying to limit the progressive erosion of the rock. Even the priest G. Spano was affected by this use, and wrote about the matter: *"(...) 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. 6).



Fig. 6 - Old photograph of the still inhabited underground village
(from <http://www.parcogeominerario.eu/images/Grutti.jpg>).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

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