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Necropolis of Is Pirixeddus

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Paintings in Punic tombs

The Sulky necropolis has only a few tombs with paintings. In spite of the lack of evidence about *Sulky*, the funeral paintings are one of the most distinctive elements of the hypogeum chamber necropolis of Punic Sardinia. Dominant, in this sense, is the rich Cagliari heritage that represents the most important example in the Mediterranean together with that of Capo Bon, on the north-east coast of Tunisia. The Sardinian funeral painting from the Punic Age was mostly ignored until the discovery of the tombs called "del Sid" and "dell'Ureo" (fig. 1) at the necropolis in Tuixeddu (CA). That together with the necropolis in Kerkouane (Gebel Mlezza), at Capo Bon (figs. 2a - b) have some of the most complex and interesting examples.



Fig. 1 - The so-called Tomb of "Uraeus" in the necropolis of Tuixeddu (CA) with friezes painted in red (from https://virtualwunderkammer.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/fig-182-karali-necropoli-punica-di-tuixeddu-tomba-e2809cdell_ureoe2809d-particolare-del-fregio-a-palmette-e-fiori-di-loto.jpg).

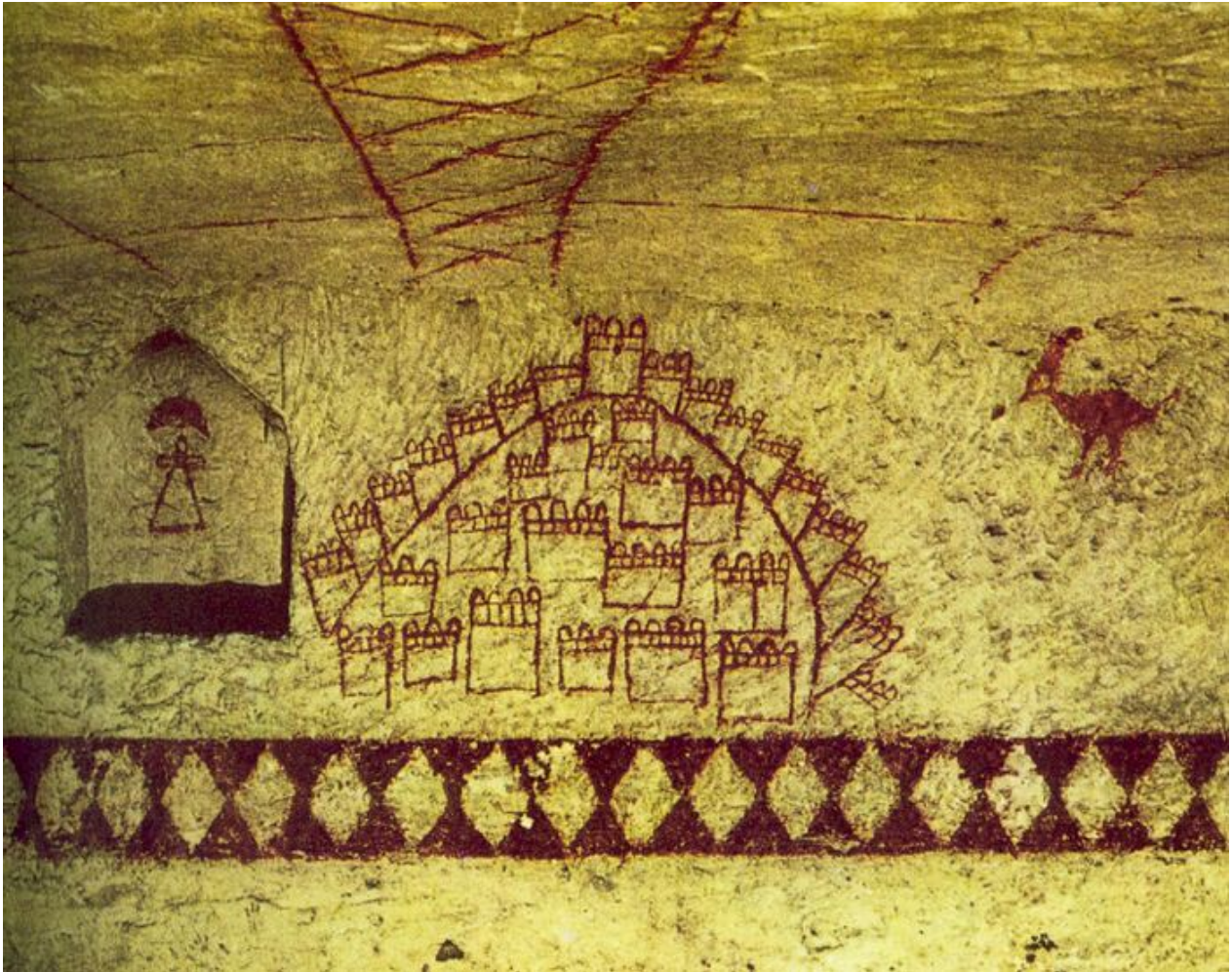


Fig. 2a - Red painted wall in a Punic underground grave in Gebel Mlezza datable to the IV-III century B.C. (from MOSCATI 1972, p. 449)



Fig. 2b - Red painted wall in a Punic underground grave in Gebel Miezza datable to the IV-III century B.C. (from MOSCATI 1972, p. 449).

With regard to ancient Sulky, evidence found so far is limited to three tombs: tomb 2 AR that is in tact without later re-use, that can be dated to the first quarter of the 5th century B.C., and is the oldest proof of painting known so far. A second tomb, written about in 1942 by S. Puglisi, seems to have traces of painting but the data is not clear: on five of the nine pillars built with blocks of stone that characterises the tomb, there were *"traces of signs made with red paint, which did not seem to contain letters from the alphabet or symbols"*. A last tomb, discovered recently, deserves attention: it is tomb no. 7, that can be dated to the second half of the 5th century B.C., judging from its pottery collection, that is in tact, and contains a single buried corpse. The tomb in question has paintings on the walls, but also Egyptian-style relief work showing a male figure with beard and *klaft* (fig. 4) This figures is sculpted on the central pillar of the burial chamber and faces the threshold.

The pillar is “free” and represents an innovation of some interest in Sulky burial architecture, together with a decorative programme that shows the combined use of relief sculpture and painting: in fact, the colour fills the walls with horizontal bands, framing the eight niches (two per wall), the false door (figs. 5-6) and adds distinctive details to the figure sculpted on the pillar. The decorations on the wall are the usual colour red, while the detail of the figure are painted in red and black.

The technique used in most Sardinian burial paintings, as in the case of Sulky, is that of the colour applied directly onto the rock, without any special preparations, meaning that the pigment follows all the roughness of the rock and deteriorates over time.

In a few rare cases, plaster has been found, like in the “dell’Ureo” tomb in Tuvixeddu , where it is used to decorate the most complicated frieze in the top part of the chamber, while the middle and lower parts have two thin horizontal lines with the paint placed directly on the bare rock. As we saw earlier, tomb painting is generally monochromatic, characterised by so-called funerary red, but other colours are also documented such as black, and especially in Cagliari and *Othoca* (Santa Giusta, OR) blue and yellow.





Fig. 4 - The Egyptian-style high relief of tomb no. 7 (from BERNARDINI 2010, table I, 2).



Fig. 5 - Detail of the pictorial decoration on the right side of underground tomb no. 7 and along



Fig. 6 - Detail of the false door of tomb 7 (from BERNARDINI 2007, p. 156, fig. 10).

Strips, bands and lines are among the most common decorations. Other types, which at the present state of knowledge are unknown in the Punic necropolis of Sulky, are those which reproduce: architectural elements; geometric elements; various symbols of a funerary and sacred nature, such as Tanit or the sun disk and the crescent moon, plant elements and finally the iconography of human characters and animals.



■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Cinzia Olianas

■ Bibliographic abbreviations

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- QuadCa** *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Province di Cagliari e Oristano, Cagliari, I, 1986 e ss.*
- RSF** *Rivista di Studi Fenici, Roma, 1973 e ss.*



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