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Port and coastal towers of Arbatax

Patrimonio culturale
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■ The port of Arbatax

Arbatax has had port structures since ancient times.

Roman Age sources cite a *Sulpicius Portus* whose position, according to scholars, was most probably along the Tortolì-Arbatax coast, near the area of today's pond¹.

Due to the poor, difficult communication routes between Ogliastra and the rest of the Island, the port has always been an efficient connection system with the outside, from both a trading and tourism point of view (figs. 1-2).

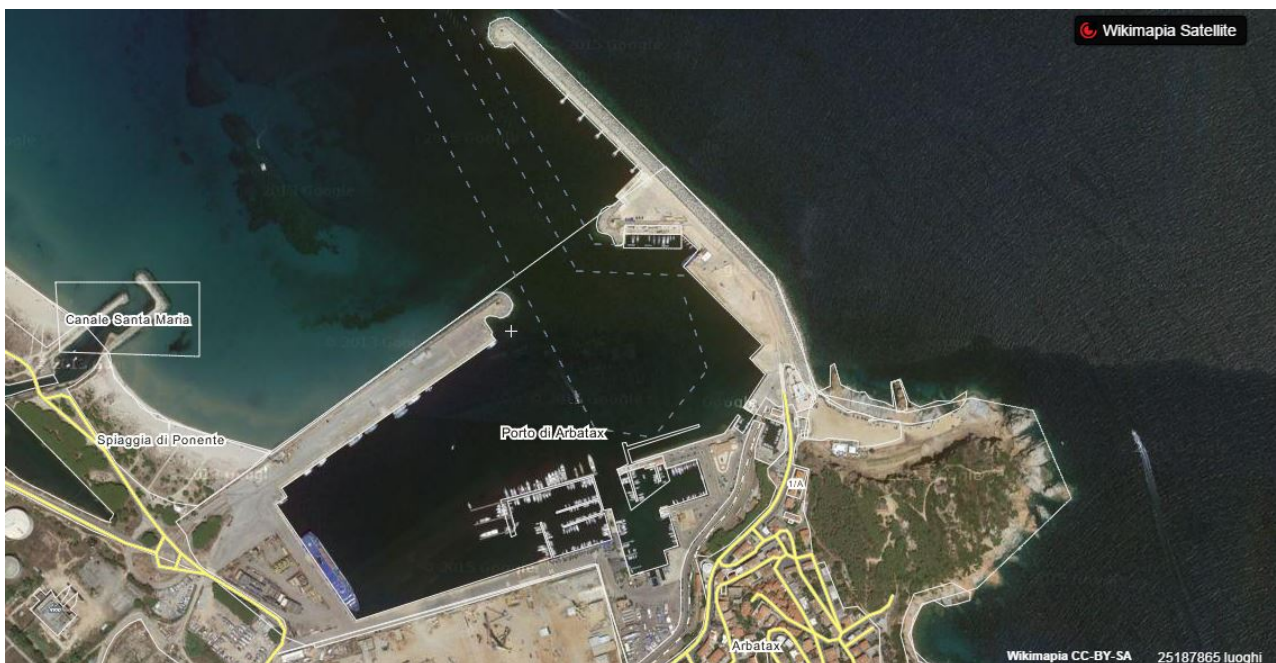


Fig. 1 - The port of Arbatax seen from above (from Wikimapia).

The modern history of the port of Arbatax began in 1861 when they decided to build it on its current site. Works lasted ten years, with difficulties and interruptions forcing the Municipality to declare that the enterprise had failed. After years of questions and

¹ The *Sulpicius Portus* is mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy (I century A.D.) in his work *Cosmography*, which includes coordinates of about 8000 different locations in the world known until then.

protests, works started again in 1882 and ended in 1893. In 1894 it was connected to the railway line to Cagliari (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - The port of Arbatax (photo M. G. Arru).

The port was expanded considerably in the mid XIX century thanks to the actions of fishermen and shipowners from the Pontine islands² which, though mainly for the export of charcoal, gave a strong boost to trading in local products

² The Pontine (or Ponziane) Islands are an archipelago located in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off the coast of the Gulf of Gaeta.

Max Leopold Wagner³, who stayed in Tortolì in 1907, told of his visit to Arbatax as follows <<... *We took a trip to the port village of Arbatax where ferries of the General Italian Navigation land twice a week. The solitary port, surrounded by mountain heights and with a cliff in its midst, is very picturesque. It owes its singular name, Arbatax, to the Saracens. During their frequent raids they called the old massive tower standing at the port entrance "the fourteenth" on the coast (Arabic "arba'tâsker"=fourteen)...>> .*

In the Sixties of the XX century, the port grew once more thanks to the expansion of structures linked to the sea transport of materials produced by the Arbatax paper mill, and also for the launch of the Genova-Olbia-Arbatax line and the arrival (1972) of Intermare Sarda (fig. 3)⁴.



Fig. 3 - The yards of Intermare Sarda (photo by C. Nieddu).

³ Max Leopold Wagner (Munich 1880 - Washington 1962) was an illustrious scholar of the Sardinian language and spent a long time in Sardinia. His most significant works include "The historical phonetics of Sardinian" (1941) and the "Sardinian etymological dictionary" (DES, Heidelberg, 1960-64).

⁴ *Intermare Sarda* is a company building off-shore steel plants for the oil industry.

The port now operates as a merchant stopover, well supplied with large docks and goods storage areas. It also has a dock with about 80 berths for boaters and is an attraction for tourists visiting Ogliastro (fig. 4).



Fig. 4 - The port area (photo by M. G.Arru).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Maria Grazia Arru

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Progetto cofinanziato dall'Unione Europea
Programma Operativo FESR 2007-2013

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