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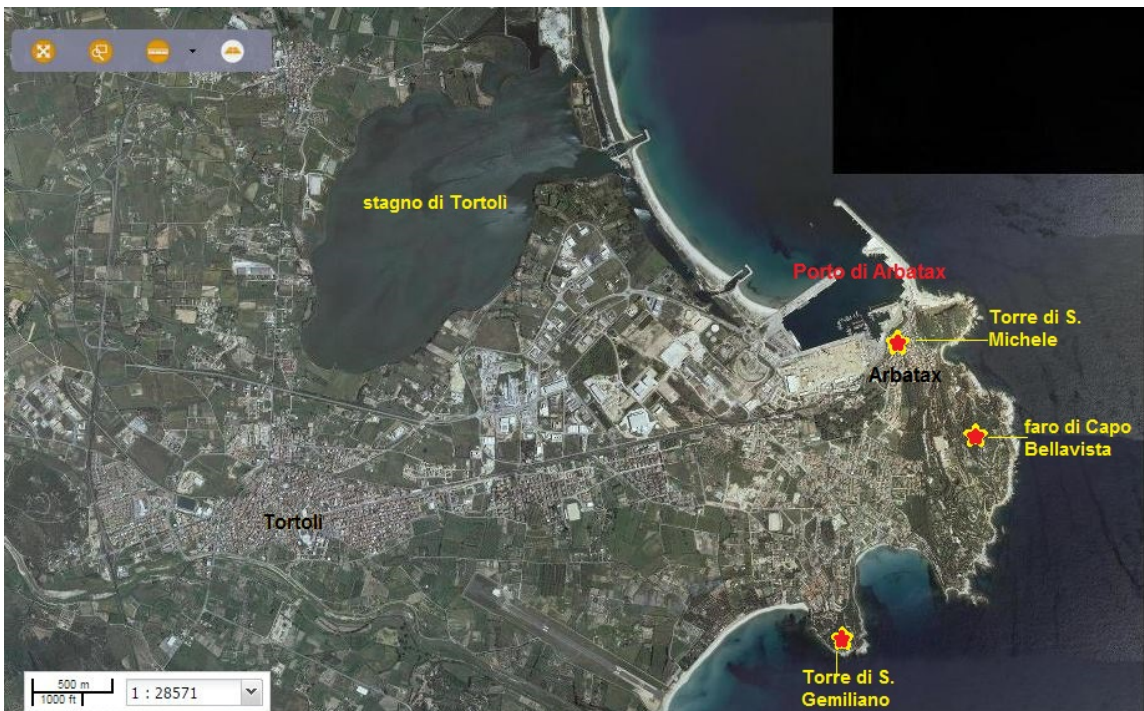
# Port and coastal towers of Arbatax

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ The tower of San Miguel (San Michele)

Between the XVI and XVII century, in the central part of the East Sardinian coast, three lookout towers were built in Arbatax to defend and protect the territory against pirate raids. The towers of San Miguel and San Gemiliano are still visible; whilst the third one, called “di Largavista” was demolished in 1866 to make room for the Bellavista Lighthouse (fig.1).



**Fig. 1** - Orthophoto of the Tortoli-Arbatax area indicating the coastal towers (from *Sardegnaoportale*; reworked by M. G. Arru).

The tower of San Miguel, originally indicated in Arabic as “*Arba a Tasciar*”, the “fourteenth tower”, is said to have given its name to Arbatax which grew, over the years, right around it (figs. 2-3)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner 1950, p. 180. According to other scholars, Arbatax means “white refuge”, “white beach”, see Nonnis 2005, p. 143.



**Fig. 2** - In the foreground the tower of S. Miguel; in the background on top of the headland, the Bellavista Lighthouse (photo of Unicity S.p.A.).



**Fig. 3** - The tower of S.Miguel seen from above (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Built in the mid XVI century, it is a truncated cone in shape (diameter less than 15, more than 11 metres) and an imposing wall structure made from granite and porphyry blocks, 15 metres high (fig. 4).



**Fig. 4** - The tower of S. Miguel (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The interior was divided into several levels: the cistern, the first floor and place-of-arms (terrace). The first floor, domed and sustained by a central pillar, housing the soldiers' lodgings and connected to the place-of-arms by a staircase inside the walls (fig. 5). This division was modified in the XIX century when the building became a Tax Police barracks and the terrace is now covered by a concrete floor.



**Fig. 5** - The stairs leading the upper floor of the tower (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The tower, guarding the port (fig. 6), had canons and mortars and suffered several attacks and landing attempts over the centuries. In 1846, they stopped using the building for lookout and defence purposes and it then became a barracks. Perfectly preserved and returned to its ancient splendour by recent restoration, the tower still has its old canons (fig. 7). The current access, with a concrete staircase surrounded by iron railings, was built in the XIX century.





**Fig. 6** - The port of Arbatax seen from one of the tower lookout slits (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



**Fig. 7** - Detail of the tower of S. Miguel (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Maria Grazia Arru

## ■ Bibliography

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