



UNIONE EUROPEA



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Port and coastal towers of Arbatax

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ The territory in the Punic Age

The presence of Phoenician-Punic peoples along the eastern coast of Sardinia and, in particular, in the territory of Tortoli can be proved by items found, by some literary sources which, though from a period after the Punic one, are full of news useful for reconstructing historical events.

The poet Claudius Claudianus¹, who lived between the end of the IV and the start of the V century A.D., in his work *De bello Gildonico*, in verses 503-526, talks of Sardinia and describes it as a large human foot-shaped, fertile island, in a favourable position for those wanting to head towards Carthage or Italy. He tells of ships that have to be careful to avoid the rocks and dangers of the Sardinian coastline so some enter *Sulci*, an ancient colony of Carthage, while others stop in Olbia (fig. 1).

Si mihi tempestas Libyam ventique negabunt, Augusti Fortuna dabit. Jam classis in altum Provehitur. Dextra Ligures, Etruria læva	505
Linquitur, et cæcis vitatur Corsica saxis. Humanæ in speciem plantæ se magna figurat, Insula (Sardoam veteres dixere coloni) Dives ager frugum. Pœnos Italosve petenti	
Opportuna situ. Quæ pars vicinior Afris,	510
Plana solo, ratibus clemens: quæ respicit Arcton, Immitis, scopulosa, procax, subitisque sonora Flatibus. Insanos infamat navita montes. Hinc hominum pecudumque lues, hinc pestifer aër	
Sævit, et exclusis regnant Aquilonibus Austri.	515
Quos ubi luctatis procul effugere carinis;	
Per diversa ruunt sinuosæ littora terræ. Pars adit antiqua ductos Carthagine Sulcos: Partem littoreo complectitur Olbia muro.	

Fig. 1 - The verses of *De bello Gildonico* by Claudius Claudianus which talk about eastern *Sulci*.

Most scholars place the port of *Sulci* mentioned by Claudianus near the coastal pond of Tortoli, in the Arbatax-Capo Bellavista area. As well as the older settlements of *Sulki* (S.

¹ Latin poet, born in Alexandria of Egypt in about 370 and died in Rome in 404.

Antioco), *Tharros* and *Karalis* in the south-western part of the island, there were others along the eastern coast, indispensable for trading routes, both Phoenician and Punic, leading to central-western Italy, in particular, to Etruria.

The *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti et Hierosolymitanum*², a sort of register of stations and distances between places located along the Roman empire roads, indicates the port of *Sulcis*³ and this mention also helps place the site near the pond of Tortolì.

Sulci was also a stop on the eastern coastal road, at *Portus Tibulas Caralis*. Even in Punic times, the various towns were connected by a road network; but we can only presume where roads were as it is not possible to distinguish them from those of the Roman Period (fig. 2)⁴. However, it has been ascertained that the main Roman roads were along the routes of those built in Punic times⁵.

² The original version of the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti et Hierosolymitanum* was composed under the reign of the Emperor Caracalla (188-217 A.D.), but reached us thanks to a new edition in the Diocletian period (244-311 A.D.).

³ Pinder 1848, p. 36.

⁴ Archeo System 1990, p. 118.

⁵ Meloni 1975, p. 266.

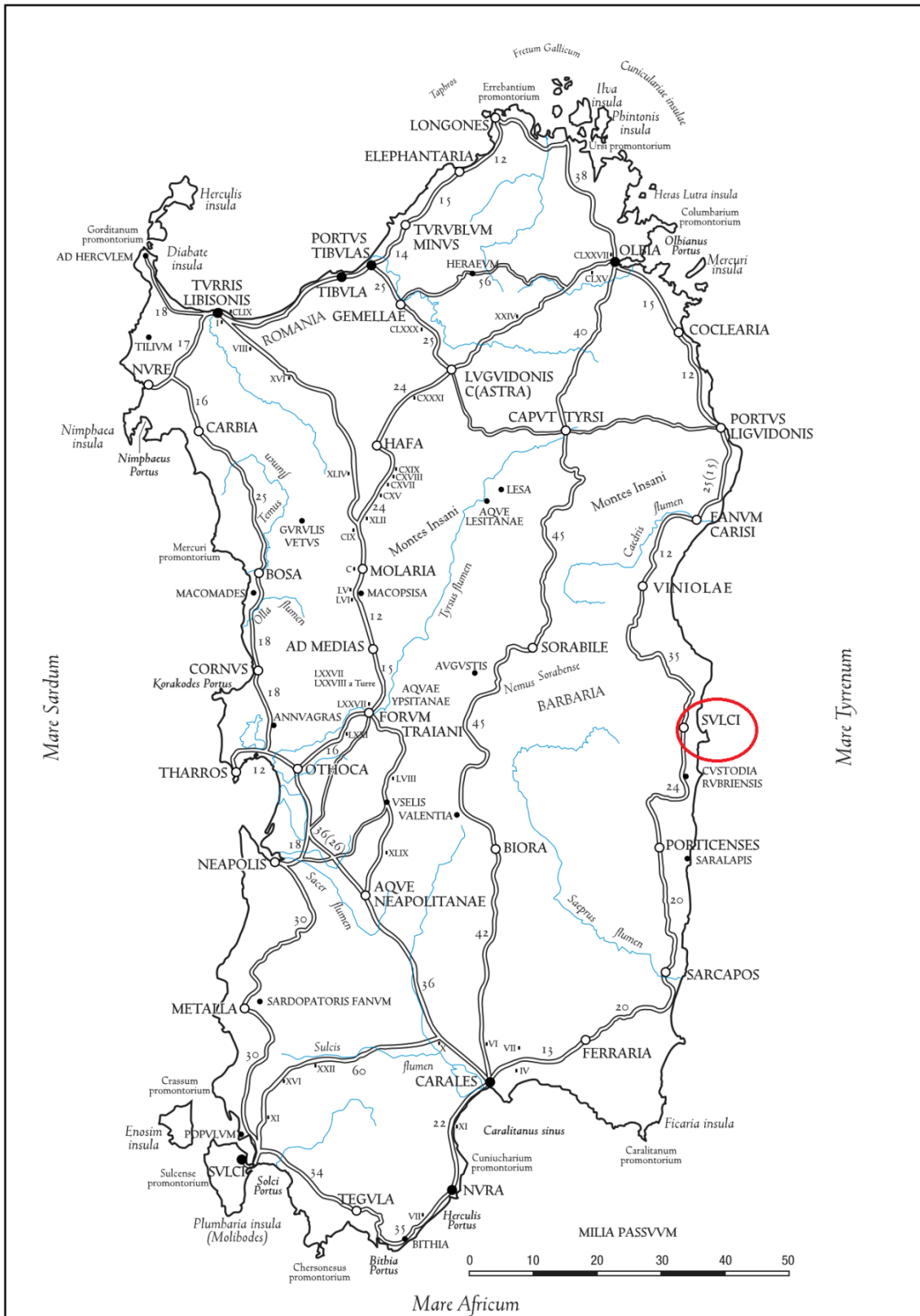


Fig. 2 - The Roman road system in Sardinia. *Sulci* is highlighted in red (from Mastino 2005, p. 340, fig. 37).

The literary sources are confirmed by finds made during archaeological surveys carried out in 1966 in the ruins of the medieval castle of Medusa at Lotzorai, a short distance from the pond of Tortoli (figs. 3-4)⁶. Here they identified wall structures coming from a previous period building, almost certainly Punic, datable to the IV-III century B.C. based on the building technique used, found identical in the buildings of western *Sulki* (S. Antioco). This dating is confirmed by the remains of cultural material and by the strategic position on a hill that, though modest in height (25 metres a.s.l.), seems to place it as a military or religious building.



Fig. 3 - The position of the castle of Medusa compared to the pond of Tortoli (from Sardegnaageoportale; reworked by M.G. Arru).

⁶ The castle of Medusa stands on the border between the municipalities of Lotzorai and Girasole.



Fig. 4 - The ruins of the castle of Medusa, Lotzorai
(from <http://www.sardegnaigitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=615&s=17&v=9&c=4461&id=253747>)).

Finding Punic and Roman stone fragments on the island of Ogliastro, opposite the pond of Tortolì, is further confirmation of the Punic presence on the eastern coast ⁷.

⁷ Cecchini 1969, p. 109; Archeo System 1990, p. 118.

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Maria Grazia Arru

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La Sardegna cresce con l'Europa



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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