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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Nuraghic complex of S'Arcu 'e Is Forros

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Description of heritage site

The Nuragic sanctuary of S'Arcu'e Is Forros stands on highland at the boundary between the Barbagia and Ogliastra areas, in the countryside around Villagrande Strisaili, in the Riu Pira'e Onni valley south of the Correboi pass, named on maps with the Sardinian place name of ancient meaning *Interrabbas*, naturally bordered by two tributary rivers to the Rio Flumendosa, a meeting point for transhumance that travelled from the coast towards the inland mountain areas. The site includes an archaeological context (15th-6th century B.C.) that includes a sanctuary village with *megaron* type religious buildings, that were built on a previous Nuragic settlement (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 - Photo of an area of the S'Arcu 'e Is Forros site (photo by Unicity S.p.A.)

The Arcu'e Sforru and Lotzoracesus Nuraghi and the giants' tomb of the same name are close by (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Photo area of the Arcu 'e Sforru nuraghe (photo by Unicity S.p.A.)

Over the years, the site was damaged several times by clandestine diggers. Consequently, from the 1980s, also with the aim of stopping the sacking of the extended archaeological area, The Sardinia Archaeology Superintendency, under the leadership of Dr Maria Ausilia Fadda started up a series of digs, the results of which have contributed to topographic and planimetric knowledge of the site and the discovery of objects of considerable scientific value, able to describe some aspects of daily life, production activity and religious life in the Nuragic community in the area in detail

The monuments that can now be visited are made from large local granite blocks, evident indication of the relationship between man and the territory in the past, based on an economy that was linked to use of the high altitude pastures. The construction logic was to use the nearest stones to the building site and therefore immediately available. One of the most important aspects is the compactness the materials, that has allowed good preservation of structures. The stones of various shapes and sizes have produced a mixed type of architecture.

For example, in the sacred area, granite was used, as in most nuraghi in the area, to create walls of irregular rows, with different pieces. On the other hand, it can be seen how the schist, a soft rock that is easy to work, was used in the top part, i.e. for the roof of the entire temple structure, perhaps chosen for its sunlight refraction. The expertise achieved in working the limestone emerges, instead, from the accessories closely connected to the place of worship: Bases were found, for example, with holes that were intended for the insertion of votive bronzes.

Religious buildings were built in the period between the 12th and 9th centuries B.C over a previous village of huts from the Middle Bronze Age (15th century B.C.) which stood at the top part of the hill. Several bases for the offers, also in the shape of nuraghi and several items for use in worship were fundamental for setting the *megara* on a time-line between the 12th and 9th century B.C. The first digs carried out revealed the megaron temple 1, made from blocks of granite and schist of various sizes, irregular in shape but more or less sub-rectangular, split into four areas, with arched entrances bordered by stone walls, that stood over a length of 17 metres and a width of 5.50 to 6.50 metres (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 - Interior of the *megaron* temple 1(photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The layout of the monument seems to be traceable to two separate building phases that after a fire (12th-11th century B.C.) brought about a new division of the interior space and above all of the renovation of the façade and rear façade of an older building with dual *in antis*, i.e. with an *anta* on the façade and one at the rear (fig. 4).



Fig. 4 - Detail of the rear of the *megaron* 1 temple (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The internal plastered perimeter walls are sloping and are made more stable by the presence of a jutting out stone skirting at the base, also used as a bench and/or table. The original stone-slab flooring only remains in the last room. It has been hypothesised that originally, the building was covered by a sloping roof supported by wooden beams and schist slabs. The water used during rituals carried out in the temple flowed outside via a rectangular opening on the right hand side of the second room, and flowed inside through channelling bordered by orthostats covered with flat stones.

The temple is inside a large *temenos*, an external wall of sub-oval shape, with a bench formed at the base of the perimeter wall, where the worshippers sat (fig. 5). This open space incorporates the circular wall of a previous hut belonging to the oldest construction phase of the site. To the west, in the *temenos*, the opening of another circular building

can be found, with a trapezoid entrance, that can be interpreted as a kind of multi-use structure for the temple.



Fig. 5 - *Temenos* that holds within it the *megaron* temple 1 (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Close to the megaron temple 1, there are the remains of two circular ovens close to each other, used to melt copper, lead and iron minerals, and a circular hut (fig. 6).





Fig. 6 - melting ovens (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

In the period 2007-2011 other digs brought to light another two temples, one of which in particular, the *megaron 2* temple, is a new type. The temple is built in local granite and schist, semi-circular ended rectangular shape about 14.5 metres long, divided into three rooms originally covered with a roof made of wooden beams and boughs (fig. 7).



Fig. 7 - Overview of the *megaron 2* temple (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Inside the rear semi-circular room an altar was discovered with a base of river pebbles topped by five rows of square blocks, alternated with rows of different colours, taken from basalt and vulcanite, non-local volcanic rocks. The central part is finely adorned by two protomes of rams, sculpted as relief work in the basalt. Above this, on the wall at the centre of the altar, there was a ritual fireplace, made of several blocks of wedge-shaped basalt blocks, tied to each other by lead staples, imitating the large shelves that complete the upper part of a Nuragic tower (fig. 8).



Fig. 8 - The apse where the altar-fireplace was found during the dig (from Congiu 2013, fig. 5 page 1475).

This temple is inside a large, irregular-shaped *temenos* with a bench, that is surrounded by another two rectangular-shaped rooms: this area is where religious rituals were supposed to take place, as proven by several items that prove that the place was attended between the Late Bronze Age and the 1st Iron Age.

The building dig shows three separate building phases. At the start of the Recent Bronze Age, the rectangular temple with the front part *in antis* and a semi-circular base wall was built.

The first entrance *in antis* was walled up during the Final Bronze Age and the *temenos* was added, for which the entrance, pointing south, was on an axis with the entrances of the architraved rooms in the temple. In a small area in the back apse, an altar-fireplace was built. During the Iron Age, in the third building phase, two additional rectangular rooms were built that could be accessed from an open entrance on the right hand side of the *temenos*.

During the 2010 dig, a third rectangular building was explored, a kind of disused *megaron* temple, the third, where a fireplace oven was kept that was used for forging metals.

The sanctuary was included in a settlement characterised by a flourishing metal craft activity, capable of producing all the items given as offers, or used in the liturgies in the place of worship.

A residential *insula*, built close to *megaron 3*, on steep land, surrounded by external walls, with 12 rooms with entrances originally opened onto a central circular courtyard covered by a beaten clay flooring.

During its use, it underwent continuous adaptations and modifications that are still visible in the residual walls of the various rooms (fig. 9).



Fig. 9 - Overview of the *insula* 1 (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

A second grouping of huts, *insula 2*, located in an area that was strongly sloping between the *megaron* temple 1 and 3, has only been partly dug up so far. Inside, 10 rooms have

been found, arranged around a perimeter, a sub-elliptical *temenos*. Unfortunately, the state of collapse that obliterates part of its surface does not make the complex accessible for a better interpretation, that would seem to belong to an older construction phase (fig. 10).



Fig. 10 - Overview of the *insula* 2 (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Some of the materials found in the rooms and storage included several items in bronze, iron, pottery, including an urn with handles with an inscription engraved on its shoulder in Phoenician philistine characters that can be dated between 9 and 8th centuries B.C.



■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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