



# Necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Location of site

The archaeological site can easily be reached from Bonorva, about ten kilometres away. On leaving the town, take the provincial road for Bono, and at km 6.8, turn right and take the road that leads to the country church of Santa Lucia. Once past the church, continue for about 500 metres until you reach the necropolis area on the left of the road, run by the local cooperative, Costaval.

## ■ History of digs and studies

The Sant'Andrea Priu necropolis lies at the foot of the outcrop that borders the Campeda plain, the Mariani hill, that opens towards Goceano, and the Santa Lucia plain. For years, the area of the Santa Lucia plain, full of archaeological findings, was a location for experts, scholars, tomb-robbers and shepherds who used the hypogeum tombs, pillaged since the beginning of time, and turning them into homes for animals and hay stores.

In 1834 the abbot Vittorio Angius<sup>1</sup> gave a short description of the Tomba del Capo and its frescoes. In 1841, the historian Pietro Martini<sup>2</sup> reported the news from a manuscript by the Bishop of Sassari Simon, according to which inside the church of "S. Andrea Frias", which once belonged to the diocese of Sorra, a small copper vase had been found containing some remains and a consecration parchment that dedicated the church to the apostle Andrew in 1303, thanks to the Bishop of Sorres Guantino de Farfara (fig. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> ANGIUS V., s.v. *Bonorva*, in *Dizionario geografico, storico-statistico-commerciale degli Stati di S.M. il Re di Sardegna*, II, Turin 1934, pages 440-441.

<sup>2</sup> MARTINI P., *Storia ecclesiastica di Sardegna*, III, Cagliari 1841, page 574.

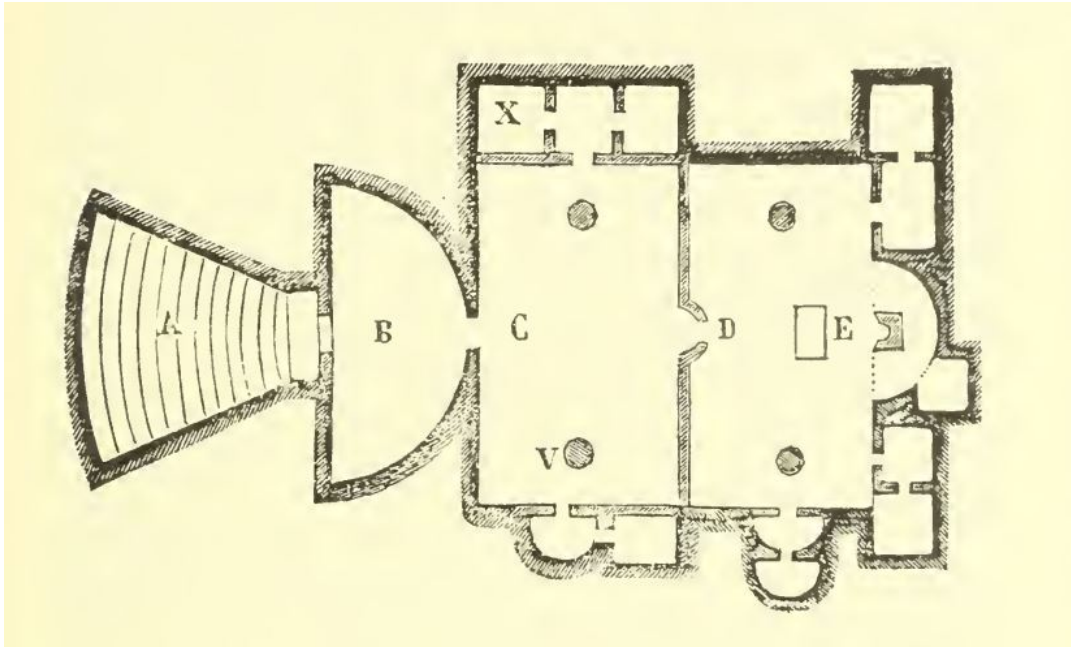


**Fig. 1** - Trachyte outcrop in which the Sant'Andrea Priu *domus de janas* were created  
(photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The first studies on the hypogeum necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu date back to 1856, when the Canon Giovanni Spano<sup>3</sup> published an evaluation of the *domus* (with eighteen rooms), that would later be called "Tomba del Capo" (fig. 2). Spano did not capture the original structure but recognised its use as a Christian church. He also described details that are no longer visible today, such as the walls and the vault in the first vestibule that were stuccoed and painted red. In the innermost room he described paintings portraying "*the 12 Apostles [...], the Virgin feeding the Baby Jesus, the nativity scene, the adoration of the three Kings and other scenes from the New Testament*", while the ceiling "*is painted with swirls and roses, stars in red, yellow and green, each different from the next*".

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<sup>3</sup> SPANO G., *Catacombe di Sant'Andrea Abriù presso Bonorva*, in *Bullettino Archeologico Sardo*, II (1856), pages 170-179.



**Fig. 2** - Map of the Tomba del Capo (by Spano 1956, page 171).

The cartographer Alberto Ferrero Della Marmora<sup>4</sup> in his *Itinerario dell'Isola di Sardegna* from 1868, and referring to the previous description by Spano, wrote:

*"It is believed that the catacombs belonged to an ancient village, Frius, that was probably originally built by the Romans; it also seems that, when Christianity could be openly practised, the altar and holy table underground were taken to a church dedicated to Saint Andrew; this gave the name to the place of Sant'Andrea de Abriu or Priu a corruption of Frius. It is certain that the village of Frius existed in this place and that the church was officiated in the 14th century, as in 1775, a copper box was found in the altar, containing a small parchment indicating the date of the consecration of the church, in 1303 by Guantino di Farfara the Bishop of Sorres, under the protection of Sant'Andrea".*

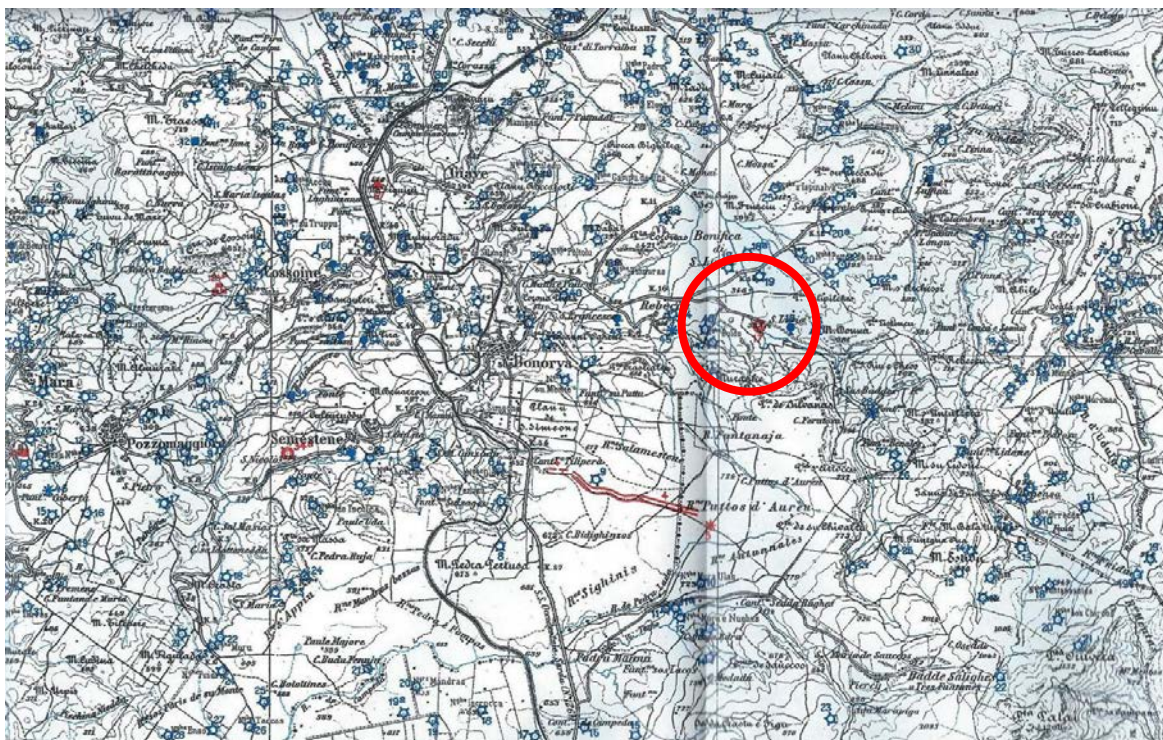
In 1881, the director of Antiquity and Fine Arts Giuseppe Fiorelli<sup>5</sup> reported the news received from the lawyer Stefano Vallero about the finding of Roman tombs and a bronze seal in Greek letters near the church of Santa Lucia, by Antonia Rufina.

<sup>4</sup> DELLA MARMORA A., *Itinerario dell'Isola di Sardegna del conte Alberto Della Marmora, translated and compiled with notes by Canon Giovanni Spano*, II, Cagliari 1868, pages 507-508.

<sup>5</sup> FIORELLI G., in section XXVI. *Bonorva*, in *Notizie degli Scavi*, Roma 1881, pages 71-72.

In 1902, the Ministry of Education started the publication of the *List of Monuments*, with the aim of placing in order and cataloguing the huge heritage of antiquities and works of art found in Italy, dedicated two chapters to Sardinia; the book about the province of Sassari marked the *domus de janas* di Sant'Andrea Priu.

Starting in the first half of the 20th century, the archaeologist Antonio Taramelli<sup>6</sup>, explored the region of Logudoro and the land around Bonorva several times. His publications are still essential texts for studying the Sant'Andrea Priu necropolis, where the tombs are mentioned as the "*the most interesting domus in Sardinia*".<sup>7</sup>

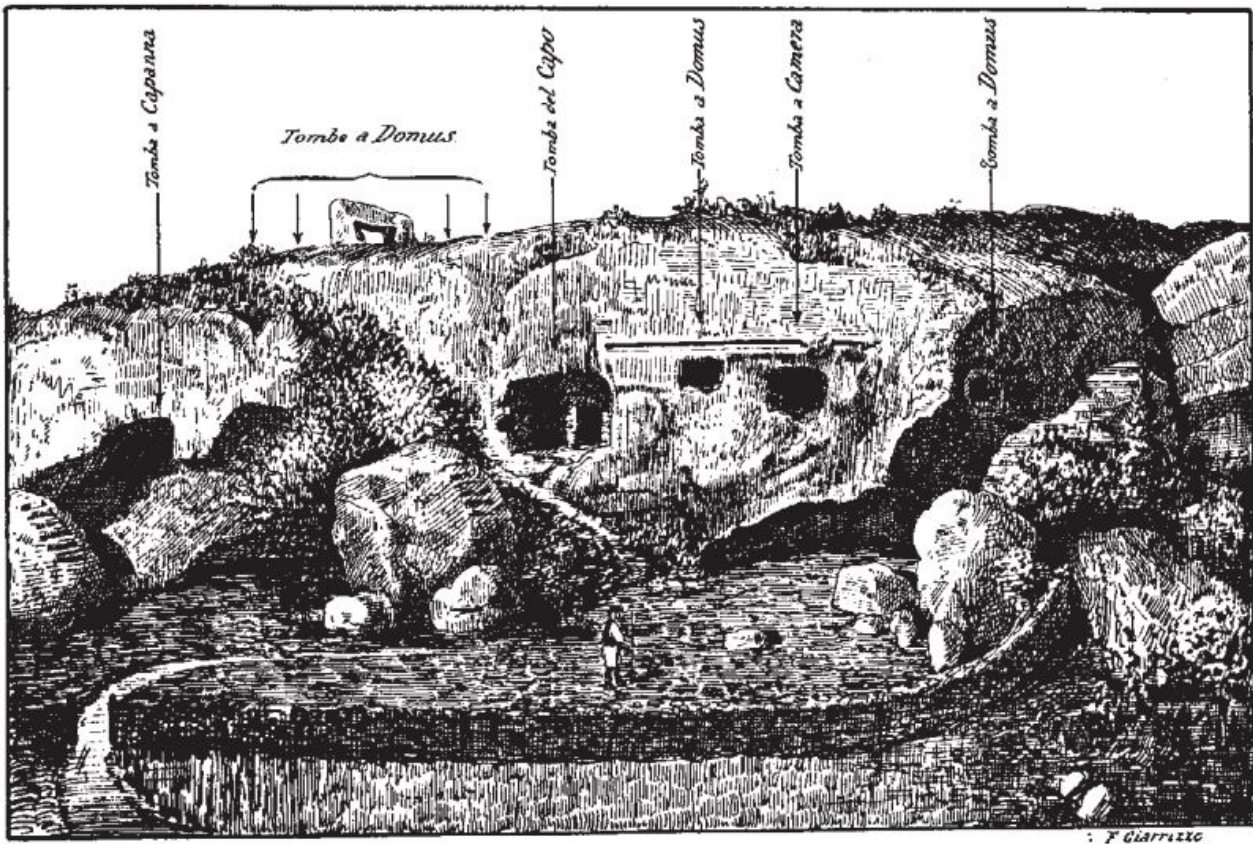


**Fig. 3** - In red on the Archaeological Map of Dardinia Sheet 193, Bonorva part II NE, in Santa Lucia or Sant'Andrea Priu the *domus de janas* necropolis is marked (by Taramelli 1940).

<sup>6</sup> TARAMELLI A., *Bonorva - Di una città nuragica nel Logudoro*, in *Notizie degli Scavi*, XLI, 10, 1916, pages 332 - 334; TARAMELLI A., *Fortezze, Recinti, Fonti sacre e Necropoli preromane nell'Agro di Bonorva (Prov. di Sassari), con rilievi e disegni del Prof. Francesco Giarrizzo*, in *Monumenti Antichi dei Lincei*, XXV, 1919, coll. 765-904.

<sup>7</sup> TARAMELLI A., *Edizione archeologica della Carta d'Italia al 100.000, Foglio 193 Bonorva, quadrante II NE*, Firenze 1940 (XVIII), pages 48-49.

The relief work of the *domus* carried out by Francesco Giarrizzo (fig. 4) accompanies his studies.

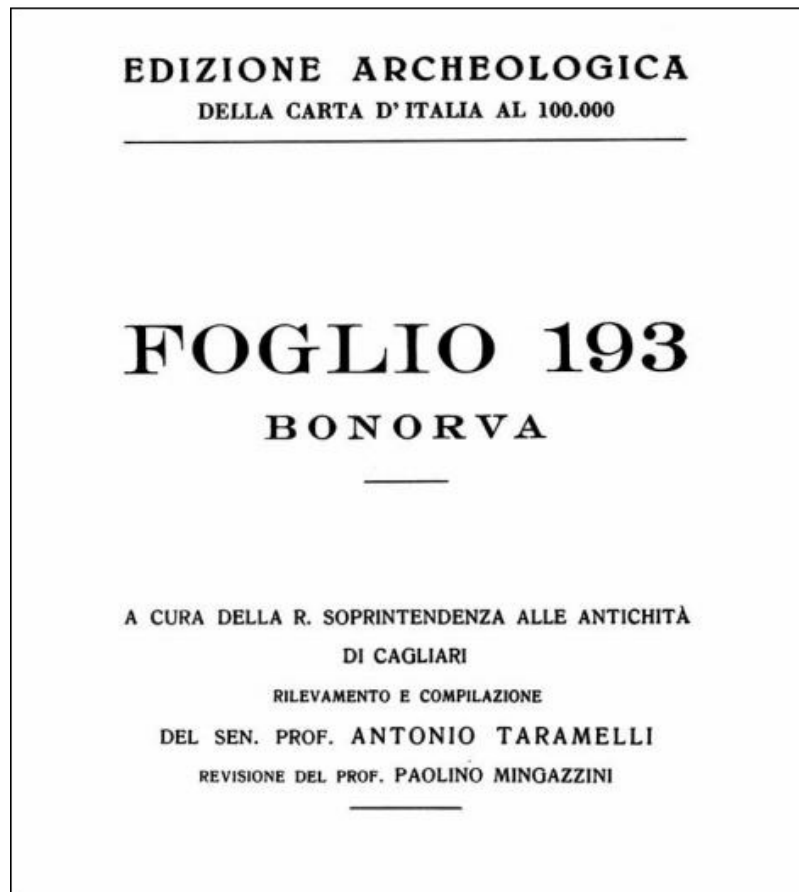


**Fig. 4** - The rocky outcrop with the domus of S. Andrea Priu drawn by F. Giarrizzo (By Taramelli 1919, fig. 37, p. 90).

In 1940, the archaeologist Paolo Mingazzini<sup>8</sup> completed the work started by Taramelli of Sheet 193 (Bonorva) on the Archaeological Map of Italy on the scale 1:100,000 (fig. 5).

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<sup>8</sup> Sheet 193, *Bonorva*, by Antiquity Superintendency of Cagliari; detection and compilation by Antonio Taramelli; revision by Prof. Mingazzini Paolo, Firenze 1940, R. Istituto Geografico Militare.



**Fig. 5** - Front page of Foglio 193 Bonorva, Edizione Archeologica della Carta d'Italia al 100.000 (by TARAMELLI 1938)

In 1954 the French art publisher and collector Christian Zervos<sup>9</sup> mistakenly attributed the necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu to the Nuragic Age, but published some photographs of the interior of the Tomba del Capo with the frescoes in a fair state of conservation. In the same year, the geologist and palaeontologist Alberto Malatesta formulated his own reconstruction of the so-called "Campanile", considering it similar to the figure of a bull, associated with the pre-Nuragic religious ideology of the symbol of fertility<sup>10</sup> (fig. 6).

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<sup>9</sup> ZERVOS C., *La civilisation de la Sardaigne du début de l'énéolithique a la fin de la période nuragique*, Paris 1954.

<sup>10</sup> MALATESTA A., *Il cosiddetto campanile della necropoli nuragica di S. Andrea Priu (Bonorva)*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, IX, Firenze 1954, pages 105-113.



**Fig. 6** - The so-called Campanile according to the reconstruction by Malatesta (by Malatesta 1954, fig. 45)

In 1963 the archaeologist Margaret Guido<sup>11</sup> dedicated a few pages and a photo to the *domus*.

In the same year, the expert Felice Cherchi Paba<sup>12</sup>, repeated the description by Spano and reported one phase of the monument's life to Byzantine culture.

In 1964, the archaeologist Ercole Contu<sup>13</sup> provided some important elements for comparing architecture, as also done by his colleague Maria Luisa Ferrarese Ceruti<sup>14</sup>.

In 1967, the archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu<sup>15</sup> described and analysed the three most representative hypogeum sites of the prehistoric necropolis: the "capanna circolare", the "tomba a camera" and the "Tomba del Capo", highlighting the relationship between the dwelling places of the living and the dead.

<sup>11</sup> GUIDO M., *Sardinia*, London 1963.

<sup>12</sup> CHERCHI PABA F., *La Chiesa greca in Sardegna*, Cagliari 1963.

<sup>13</sup> CONTU E., *La tomba dei vasi tetrapodi in località Santu Pedru (Alghero-Sassari)*, in *Monumenti Antichi Lincei*, XLVII, 1964.

<sup>14</sup> FERRARESE CERUTI M.L., *Domus de janas in località Molimentos (Benetutti-Sassari)*, in *Bullettino Paleontologico Italiano*, 76, 1967, pages 69-135.

<sup>15</sup> LILLIU G., *La civiltà dei Sardi dal Neolitico all'Età dei Nuraghi*, Torino 1967 (1975).

In 1976, the archaeologist Vincenzo Santoni<sup>16</sup> published a relief map of the “Tomba del Capo” for the first time not redesigned from the one by Giarrizzo in Taramelli’s publication from 1919.

In 1984, for the publication of a volume written by several authors on the most well known sites in Sardinia from the Paleolithic to the Roman Age, the archaeologist Alba Foschi<sup>17</sup> wrote the part about the S. Andria Priu di Bonorva necropolis.

In 1985, the archaeologist Giuseppa Tanda published the catalogue from the photographic exhibition *L’Arte delle domus de janas nelle immagini di Ingeborg Mangold*<sup>18</sup>, where the first part is focused on the Sant’Andrea Priu necropolis.

In 1986, the archaeologist Roberto Caprara<sup>19</sup> published a complete guide to the S. Andrea Priu necropolis, with photographs of the frescoes in the Tomba del Capo that show the deterioration before restoration.

In 1997, the archaeologists Susanna Bafico and Maria Solinas<sup>20</sup> carried out an initial census on the Bonorva archaeological heritage.

In the same year, the archaeologist Antonietta Boninu<sup>21</sup> led the conservation and restoration work on the Christian frescoes in the labyrinth that was the Tomba del Capo, carried out by the Centro di Conservazione Archeologica di Roma.

In 1999 the Bonorva archaeological museum was opened. It was filled mostly thanks to the fact that the area contains so much historical evidence of vast interest. At the same time that the archaeological museum was opened, thanks to the personal effort by the archaeologist Maria Solinas, who followed the list of work, an illustrated booklet about

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<sup>16</sup> SANTONI V., *Nota preliminare sulla tipologia delle grotticelle artificiali funerarie in Sardegna*, in *Archivio Storico Sardo*, XXX, 1976, pages 3-49.

<sup>17</sup> FOSCHI A., *Bonorva. Loc. Sant’Andria Priu*, in Anati E. (by, *I Sardi. La Sardegna dal Paleolitico all’Età Romana*, Milano 1984, pages 287-289.

<sup>18</sup> TANDA G., *L’Arte delle domus de janas nelle immagini di Ingeborg Mangold*, Sassari 1985, pages 61-65.

<sup>19</sup> CAPRARA R., *La necropoli di S. Andrea Priu. Sardegna Archeologica. Guide e Itinerari*, 3, Sassari 1986.

<sup>20</sup> BAFICO S., SOLINAS M., *Bonorva (Sassari) censimento archeologico*, in *Bollettino di Archeologia*, 43-45, XXV, coll. 765-904, Roma 1997, pages 179-181.

<sup>21</sup> BONINU A., SOLINAS M., *La Necropoli di Sant’Andrea Priu. Bonorva*, Mores 1999.

the necropolis was published <sup>22</sup> and some panels were created that allow a correct interpretation of the various findings and monuments as visitors move around.

Several experts dedicated themselves to the study of Roman roads and milestones, such as the former mayor Virgilio Tetti<sup>23</sup> and, above all, the Roman History expert Piero Meloni<sup>24</sup>. Later contributions to knowledge of Roman roads is owed to Emilio Belli<sup>25</sup> and in recent years, to the historians and epigraphists, Attilio Mastino and Paola Ruggeri<sup>26</sup>.

In 2005, the archaeologists from La Sapienza University in Rome, Nicola Ialongo, Andrea Schiappelli, Alessandro Vanzetti<sup>27</sup>, carried out a careful study on the Sas Presones thermal system, the Su Lumarzu fountain and the Tresnuraghes complex.

With regard to the strategic position of the site, on the natural connection route with the Goceano and Valle del Tirso, and falling into the area where the old road to Olbia could be traced (*a Karalibus Olbiam*), some studies were carried out by the historian Marilena Sechi<sup>28</sup>, who, between 2011 and 2012, studied roads and settlements from the Roman Age that involved the Marghine and the Meilogu.

In 2013 the archaeologist Luisanna Usai<sup>29</sup> published an article on Sant'Andrea Priu necropolis in the section dedicated to archaeology in the local magazine Almanacco Gallurese.

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<sup>22</sup> SOLINAS M., *Bonorva Museo archeologico*, Bonorva 1999.

<sup>23</sup> TETTI V., *Appunti sulle strade romane nella zona di Bonorva (Sassari)*, in *Studi Sardi*, XXIII, 1973-1974, pages 191-211.

<sup>24</sup> MELONI P., *La Sardegna romana*, Sassari 1975, pages 265-276.

<sup>25</sup> BELLI E., *La viabilità romana nel Logudoro-Meilogu*, in *Il nuraghe S. Antine nel Logudoro-Meilogu* (by MORAVETTI A.), Sassari 1988, pages 330-395.

<sup>26</sup> MASTINO A., RUGGERI P., *La viabilità della Sardegna romana. Un nuovo praetorium a Sas Presones di Rebeccu a nord della biforcazione Turris - Olbia?*, in *Παλαιά Φιλία. Studi di topografia antica in onore di Giovanni Uggeri*, a cura di MARANGIO C. E LAUDIZI G., Galatina 2009, pages 555-572.

<sup>27</sup> IALONGO N., SCHIAPPELLI A., VANZETTI A., *L'edificio termale di Sas Presones, Rebeccu, Bonorva (SS)*, in *Ricerca e Confronti 2006. Giornate di studio di archeologia e storia dell'arte*, a cura di ANGIOLILLO S., GIUMAN M., PASOLINI A., Cagliari 2007, pages 199-210.

<sup>28</sup> SECHI M., *Viabilità e dinamiche insediative in età romana nel territorio di Bonorva*, in *Studi sul paesaggio della Sardegna romana* (by PIANU G., CANU N.), Mores 2011, pages 83-103; SECHI M., *La viabilità nella Sardegna romana tra le stazioni di Hafa e Molaria*, in *Alta Formazione e Ricerca in Sardegna. Atti del Convegno di Studi Giovani Ricercatori (Sassari 16 dicembre 2011)*, by CICU E., GAVINI A., SECHI M., Raleigh 2014, pages 18-36.

<sup>29</sup> USAI L., *La necropoli di Sant'Andrea Priu a Bonorva*, in *Almanacco Gallurese*, 2013-2014, Muros, pages 40-47.

The frescoes from the Tomba del Capo were studied several times, between 1988 and 2004, by the art historians Anna Saiu Deidda<sup>30</sup>, Annamaria Nieddu<sup>31</sup> and Roberto Coroneo<sup>32</sup> (fig. 7).



**Fig. 7** - Female figure painted in the room of the Tomba del Capo (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

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<sup>30</sup> SAIU DEIDDA A., *Corredo iconografico nell'architettura rupestre della Sardegna : le pitture di S. Andrea Priu a Bonorva*, in *Il popolamento rupestre dell'area mediterranea: la tipologia delle fonti: gli insediamenti rupestri della Sardegna. Atti del Seminario di studio (Lecce, 19-20 ottobre 1984)*, Galatina 1988, pages 279-291.

<sup>31</sup> NIEDDU A.M., *La pittura paleocristiana in Sardegna: nuove acquisizioni*, in *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, LXXII, 1996, pages 245-283.

<sup>32</sup> CORONEO R., *Gli affreschi di Sant'Andrea Priu a Bonorva. Nota preliminare*, in *Archivio Storico Sardo*, XLIII, 2003, pp. 9-38; CORONEO R., SERRA R., *Sardegna preromanica e romanica*, Milano 2004, pages 61-68.

Recent findings on the Sant'Andrea Priu site during two separate interventions in 2011-2012 and 2015<sup>33</sup> led by the Sardinia Archaeology Department, brought to light the remains of a large rural agglomerate in the outer area of the burial ground, at the foot of the rocky outcrop and lived in until the 6th century A.D. Structures connected to a thermal bath building, straight stone structures with a apse-like profile made from square trachyte blocks remain, together with ceramic material from the 4th-5th century A.D., with rectangular rooms standing next to them that still have stone bases of an irregular shape, and a group of rectangular rooms, one of which has a trachyte tub. The finding of ceramic fragments in ancient majolica pottery (15th-16th century A.D.) bears witness to a later inhabitation of the site.

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<sup>33</sup> SALIS G., *Bonorva. Sant'Andrea Priu. Rinvenimenti nell'ambito dei lavori di valorizzazione e infrastrutturazione dell'area*, in *Notizario*, Quaderni Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo-Soprintendenza Archeologia della Sardegna, 26, 2015, pages 481.

## ■ Credits

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