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REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

# Necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ The rock church of Sant'Andrea Priu

The *domus de janas* known as the “Tomba del capo”, comprising 18 rooms, extends in length and comprises a small atrium, that acts as an entrance, an ante-cell and two main rooms in which the other smaller rooms open on to.

During the Paleo-Christian, Byzantine and Medieval ages, the central part of the *domus* was used as a Christian place of worship, and was subject to several transformations over time, that converted it to a rock church. In 1313, it was probably reconsecrated by the Bishop of Sorres Guantino di Farfara and dedicated to Sant-Andrea. During its re-use for Christian worship, the ante-cell was used as a narthex (reserved for catechumens that had not yet been baptised), while the main rooms became the room for baptised people and bimah (or presbytery) for the priests.

Renovations carried out in 1997 allowed a part recovery of the frescoes that covered the church walls. During this work the frescoes from different periods were freed of a thick layer of black smoke that made them difficult to see. In fact, the presence of several layers of painted plaster confirmed that these rooms were used from the early centuries of Christianity to the Middle Ages. On the north-east wall, a female figure, garlands and birds from the Paleo-Christian era can be seen, datable to 4th-6th century A.D. (fig. 1).





**Fig. 1** - Frescoes on the room wall (photo Unicity S.p.A.).

On the bimah wall, there are traces of paleo-Christian frescoes, some of which painted over others from an earlier period (datable to the second half of the 8th century A.D.): the decorative cycle with New Testament scenes (Annunciation, Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, Birth of Jesus, Adoration of the Kings, Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the Massacre of the Innocents, Return of the Holy Family to Egypt (fig. 2); Christ Blessing surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists; the disciples, the apostles, St John the Baptist and Mary.



**Fig. 2** - Scenes from the New Testament on the bimah walls (photo Unicity S.p.A.).

The bimah ceiling, decorated by geometric patterns, was dug to create a square skylight that reaches the land above, through 5 metres of rock. The paleo-Christian altar was created under the skylight, that was later (probably after the 10th century) moved to the south-east wall of the bimah, where the apse was created (fig. 3). Probably, in the first half of the 14th century, when the church was dedicated to Sant'Andrea, maintenance was carried out on the painted surfaces.



**Fig. 3** - The apse created in the southeast wall of the bimah (photo Unicity S.p.A.).

## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Maria Grazia Arru and Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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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