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REGIONE AUTÓNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Nuraghic village of Su Nuraxi

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Archaeological description of the asset

The site of Su Nuraxi in Barumini stands in the fertile region of Marmilla, on a marl terrace that dominates the fertile basin of Pardu'e S'Eda, which was once used to grow wheat. *"There are few remains of other Nuragic buildings, or only the name at the foot of the coastline (of the basalt plateau) remains, like Bruncu su Nuraxi, close to the road from Tuili to Barumini"*, wrote the archaeologist Antonio Taramelli in 1907. The most ancient photographs of Su Nuraxi, the nuraghe par excellence, which is in a state of collapse and looks like a small hill, dates to 1937 (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 - Archaeological area of Su Nuraxi, the nuraghe before the dig, in 1937 (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 6, page 24).

The first description of the monument dates to 1938, written by the archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu, that identifies the type and plans of the nuraghe (fig. 2).





Fig. 2 - The nuraghe before the dig, (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 8, page 28).

The archaeological area includes a large nuraghe, with towers and curtains, turreted walls, that stood majestically over the village of huts that extends all around it (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 - Aerial view of archaeological area (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The systematic dig of the settlement (fig. 4) carried out under the leadership of Lilliu from 1951 to 1956 with the help of workers recruited from among the village's hired hands and with extremely rudimentary tools of the time, allowed recognition of the various phases of life that bore witness to the occupation of the site from the mid 2nd millennium B.C. (1600 B.C. circa) until the times of Punic and Roman inhabitation (3rd century A.D.).



Fig. 4 - Archaeological area of Su Nuraxi, digs 1951-56 (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 10, page 29).

After the interventions of consolidation, preventive protection and restoration of the nuraghe and the barbican carried out by the Superintendency under the leadership of the archaeologist Giovanni Ugas in the 1980s, in and of Vincenzo Santoni in 2003-2004 and 2007-2008, there is currently a new dig campaign ongoing in the village of Barumini lead by the University of Cagliari (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 - The Su Nuraxi site (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The data emerging from the archaeological documents show different moments of life that correspond to different building phases, the result of material culture and type of social organisation. The first phase of life (16th-14th century B.C.) is focused on the construction of the central truncated cone shaped tower, built using large “dry” polyhedric blocks of basalt known by the name of “fortified tower” which was originally over 18 metres high. It comprised three chambers one above another. The bottom chamber was separated from the vertical axis of the tower as it was preceded by a deep foyer. There was a staircase that connected the various floors. The fortified tower still has two floors above each other, making a height of 14.10 metres and a base diameter of about 11 metres. Between the end of the 15th and the 13th centuries B.C. the quatrefoiled bastion was added attached to the more ancient nuraghe structure: four towers united by straight curtain walls placed at the top of a square figure. The end part of the tower comprised a terrace supported by large corbels, also made from stone. The entrance was in the south-east wall: a foyer with two opposite facing niches gave access to the open-air internal

courtyard, of a semi-moon shape, with a water spring well, and onto which the connecting entrances to the towers opened, and from where the rooms drew light and air (fig. 6).



Fig. 6 - The well in the courtyard (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Only the lower-floor chamber and a few rows of stones from the upper chamber remain in the perimeter towers, which originally had two chambers, one above the other. Two different wall techniques were used in the internal and external walls: the first one is polygonal, with large basalt stones from the Giara, associated with rare limestone marl; the second was isodomic, in rows of squared marl ashlar, that were alternated originally,

near the terrace, and with jutting marl corbels. Bulwark, curtain walls and towers were crowned by corbels that supported walkways-machicolations. The latter, which have now collapsed from their original position, are currently on show along the perimeter of the archaeological area (figs. 7, 8).



Fig. 7 - "T" shaped ashlars (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).





Fig. 8 - The corbels (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The bastion is surrounded by a bulwark, i.e. a turreted perimeter wall of which three towers remain. Between the 12th and 10th century B.C., the Nuraghe was seriously damaged, perhaps due to a geological settlement of the land, that caused damage and part collapse of the structures. The monument was fully surrounded again by a massive wall of large basalt stones. Following this work, the embrasures in the towers and original entrance were closed up. The latter was located in the north-east curtain wall, and raised a few metres compared to the ground level, from which a number of staircases start, leading to the top of the terraces. Four new towers were included in the bulwark for defensive reasons, making a total of seven, that now cover the entire circumference of the Nuraghe.

The oldest confirmations of the Nuragic village, of which more than 200 huts are known, date back to the 13th-12th centuries B.C. According to Lilliu, (Recent Bronze Age), as some material cultural elements from the Aegean area show that were found inside some huts "in the central courtyard", attributed to the Mycenaean III C Era (1210-1110 B.C.). During the final Bronze Age, most of the houses in the village were built. They were circular comprising a single room and a wooden conical-shaped roof (fig. 9).



Fig. 9 - The village (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

One of the most important structures in the Nuragic village dating back to this era is the so-called “meeting hut” with a circular bench and niches in the walls, covered with wooden beams and rushes. Inside, several items were found that can be connected with the sacred and ritual area, such as a small model of the Nuraghe made from limestone, which suggests the place was used for civil and religious meetings.

In the Iron Age (9th-6th centuries BC), Su Nuraxi was almost entirely destroyed and a new settlement was built close to the bulwark and the Nuraghe during the early decades of the 7th century B.C. The new dwelling places, “huts around a central courtyard” or “sector courtyards”, which were larger and more functional than the previous ones, had a circular perimeter wall and more rooms that were mostly square, probably with a wooden roof that converged in a central ray around a round paved courtyard, a kind of internal courtyard. The most significant area was the “rotonda”, a small room that probably originally had a false dome roof, with a low bench and a central basin that was used to contain water, probably used for ritual purposes (fig. 10).



Fig. 10 - The "rotonda con bacile" (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

During the Punic and Roman Eras, human presence of the Nuraghe areas is well documented, used not only to preserve perishable foodstuffs but also as a burial place, as the discovery of pottery, wine amphorae, ointment holders, lanterns and several skeletons has proven. Other precious materials found in some areas of the dwelling places and inside tower C have suggested the presence of an active worship context from the 4th to the 2nd-1st centuries B.C. In this long period of time, many structures in the previous phase of the village were re-used and/or altered, and new ones were also built, mainly grouped together in the North-West sector of the residential area. There was a sporadic presence during the Imperial Roman Age, up to the 3rd century A.D. and the High Medieval Age (6th-7th century A.D.). The collapse of the top parts into the courtyard and external areas, the overlapping of items from various periods, and the accumulation of natural deposits have brought the monument to be abandoned, hidden beneath a neglected and isolated artificial hill. UNESCO recognised Su Nuraxi as part of World Heritage in 1997 (fig. 11).

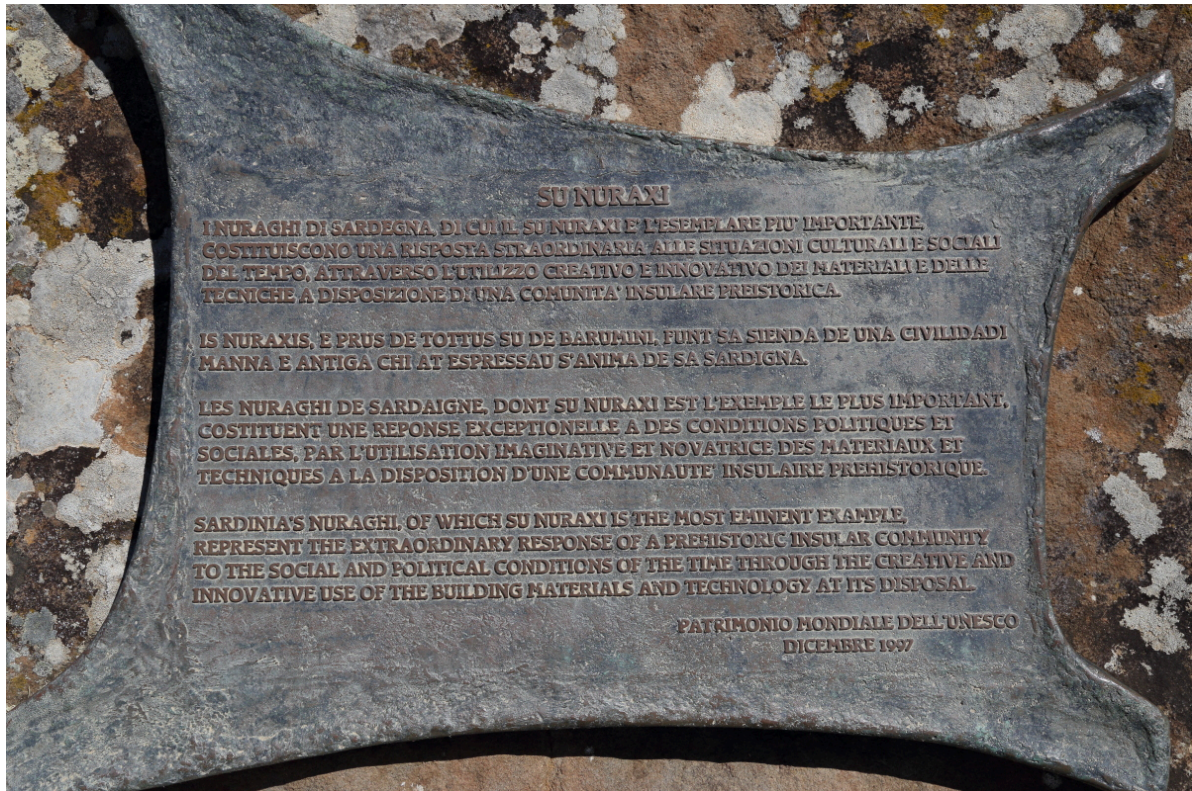


Fig. 11 - The plaque at the entrance to the complex that describes the reasons for this prestigious acknowledgement (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

It was therefore no surprise that the “fallen giant”, as Lilliu called it, received the prestigious UNESCO acknowledgement for the unique nature of the monument, a masterpiece of human creative genius and exceptional proof of a civilisation that disappeared. Today, in spite of the fact that modern digs have brought to light other imposing Nuraghi, Barumini remains “the nuraghe” par excellence, an ancient but modern symbol of the island.

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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