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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Nuraghic village of Su Nuraxi

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Site location

The archaeological site of Su Nuraxi is located in central-south Sardinia, on the border between Marmilla and Sarcidano. The complex stands visible from a distance for those coming from Cagliari, or from western Marmilla, on a small plain at 238 metres above sea level, located on the edge of the provincial road from Barumini - to the Turri exit for Oristano, about 1 km from the residential area of Barumini.

■ History of excavations and studies

Already known since 1834 thanks to a brief article written by Vittorio Angius in the historical-geographical dictionary by Goffredo Casalis: *"It was larger than the others, and less destroyed seen from a distance of a quarter of an hour by the people on the road to Tuili, distinguished by the general name of nuraji; it deserves consideration"*. In 1862m the priest Giovanni Spano also named it, together with other three Nuraghe, using the name *"Suraxi"*. *"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 first to notice the presence of archaeological structures in the rise of "Bruncu Su Nuraxi" (the hill of the Nuraghe) were farm labourers working the land for Oreste Sanna, the owner of the estate.

The oldest photos of the artificial hill dating back to 1937 shows the stones from the collapsed archaeological complex spread around the slopes (fig. 1).





Fig. 1 - 1937, archaeological area of Su Nuraxi, before the digs (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 6, page 24).

The young archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu understood there to be a buried Nuraghe on the high plain. The land above was ploughed and barley and runner beans were planted. Not wheat, however, as the land was shallow, not suitable for wheat. In 1938 Lilliu wrote the first description of the large ruins of the monument, for which he recognised the layout, given by four perimeter towers that surround the central tower (fig. 2).





Fig. 2 - 1937, Su Nuraxi before the dig. Right, tower C of the bastion, left the courtyard
(from Lilliu 1988, fig. 8, p. 28).

Exploration of the Nuragic site of Su Nuraxi in Barumini began in the summer of 1940, with a test carried out at the base of the artificial hill, limited to the opening up of a trench near the Southern tower of the bastion. The chamber in the latter, with six rows in view, was known as "Sa Funtana" (the well) and had already been partly freed in the past during a collapse during illegal digs, allegedly aimed at searching for treasure. In 1949 some preliminary tests were carried out paid for by the land owner. The dig, taken to ground level, on the South-East and North-East sides of the bastion, stopped at the height of the raised door-window of the Nuraghe. A stretch of the bulwark was found to the South-East. The courtyard was emptied by the collapse up to the level reached outside and showed up the foyer between the courtyard and the door-window, which was found full of human skeletons from the Historical Age. The Eastern tower C of the quatrefoil body was also brought to light, the top of which was filled with limestone marl ashlar, for renovation purposes, which created a chromatic contrast with the basalt façade.

In the 1950s, together with the Superintendent of Sardinian Antiquities of the time, Genaro Pesce, Lilliu decided to commence a systematic stratigraphic archaeological dig campaign to bring to light the Nuraghe structure, which was almost completely covered by soil, stones and vegetation that had kept and saved it from destruction for thousands of years. The dig, funded by the Sardinian Region, and which involved about one hundred workers from the village, continued almost continuously from 1951 to 1956 (figs. 3, 4, 5, 6).



Fig. 3 - 1951, Su Nuraxi the dig. Foreground, the bulwark, and behind tower D of the bastion (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 11, p. 32).



Fig. 4 - 1951: the ongoing dig (from Murru 2000, p. 21).



Fig. 5 - 1954, Nuraxi, worksite operations (from Murru 2000, p. 41).



Fig. 6 - 1954, Su Nuraxi, the dig of the village near the bulwark (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, fig. 14, page 35).

The results of the archaeological investigation were published in the scientific publication *Il nuraghe di Barumini e la stratigrafia nuragica*. Lilliu wrote: *Large amounts of funding and men rich with enthusiasm and generosity, workers from the dig, borrowed from working in the fields, worked on the "stone giant", to bring to light the relative secrets of the architectural and building structures and, therefore, of the respective material contents.*

There is a quatrefoiled bastion at Su Nuraxi, from which the central tower (keep) rises, which is a truncated cone and dates back to the first phase of construction of the architectural complex (Middle Bronze Age). The bastion is in turn included inside a bulwark, reinforced by five towers and transformed in the Recent Bronze Age into a septfoil perimeter. This is a true "palace" where life was unwound between the staircases, intramural passageways, a semi-circular courtyard with a spring well that was 20 metres deep. At the foot of the Nuragic "fortress", there is a large village that stood during the Final Bronze Age: hut

135, that revealed a foundation ritual, and hut 80, also known as “del Consiglio” belong to this period. The village underwent further development in the early Iron Age. In fact, alleys and water channels appear; the multi-cell dwellings of the “a corte” type also had a central foyer. Basins were discovered in some rooms that can also be attributed to a worship of waters. At the end of the Iron Age, the village was devastated, and then reoccupied during the Punic and Roman Age (5th century B.C. - 3rd century A.D.) for dwelling, burial and worshipping purposes. The archaeological findings show sporadic occupation during the High Middle Ages too, between the 5th and 7th centuries A.D. (fig. 7).

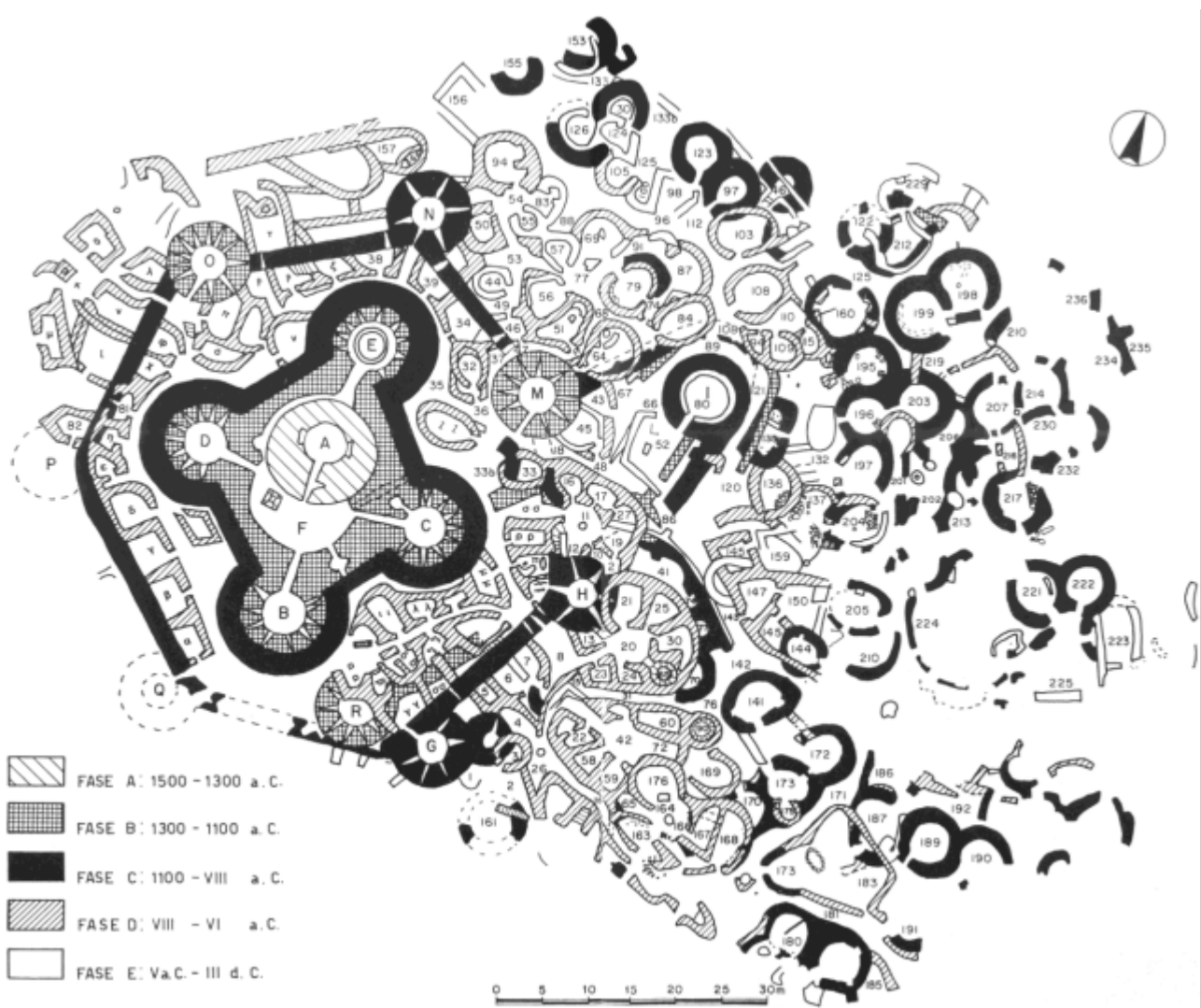


Fig. 7 - Su Nuraxi, layout from 1988 (from Lilliu, Zucca 1988, figs. 25-29, pages 48-50).

After the stratigraphic surveys carried out by Giovanni Ugas in the 1980s and in 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 by Vincenzo Santoni, a new campaign of digs is currently ongoing in the village of Barumini, lead by the University of Cagliari, in close collaboration with the Archaeological Superintendency of Sardinia, funded by the Municipality of Barumini and the Fondazione Barumini Sistema Cultura, that involves the area North-East of the Nuragic village, the so-called "tower-hut" and hut 197 (fig. 8).



Fig. 8 - A film of the site digs by the University of Cagliari (from <http://www.sardiniapost.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DSCF2763.jpg>).

One of the several scientific and popular publications that have appeared in the last fifty years about the archaeological area of Su Nuraxi, is a guide by Giovanni Lilliu and Raimondo Zucca, that contains lots of information about archaeology in the area of Barumini, its history and the results of digs at the Nuraghe and the village, the items found

in each phase; the book also includes a rapid itinerary around the Nuraghe and the village.

Su Nuraxi is now the best-known Nuragic monument in the world, also thanks to its inclusion in the list of World Heritage Sites in 1997 (fig. 9).



Fig. 9 - Aerial view of archaeological area (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni





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