



UNIONE EUROPEA



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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

# Megalithic circles of Li Muri

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Archaeological and historical-artistic description of the asset

The necropolis of Li Muri (fig. 1) is located in the countryside of Arzachena and belongs to the megalithic burial architecture. The uniqueness of the site has even led to the birth of a culture in its own right: the "culture of megalithic circles", also called "Arzachena" or "culture of Gallura" (second half of the fifth millennium BC).



**Fig. 1** - The site (from Moravetti, Alvito 2010, p. 21, fig. 6).

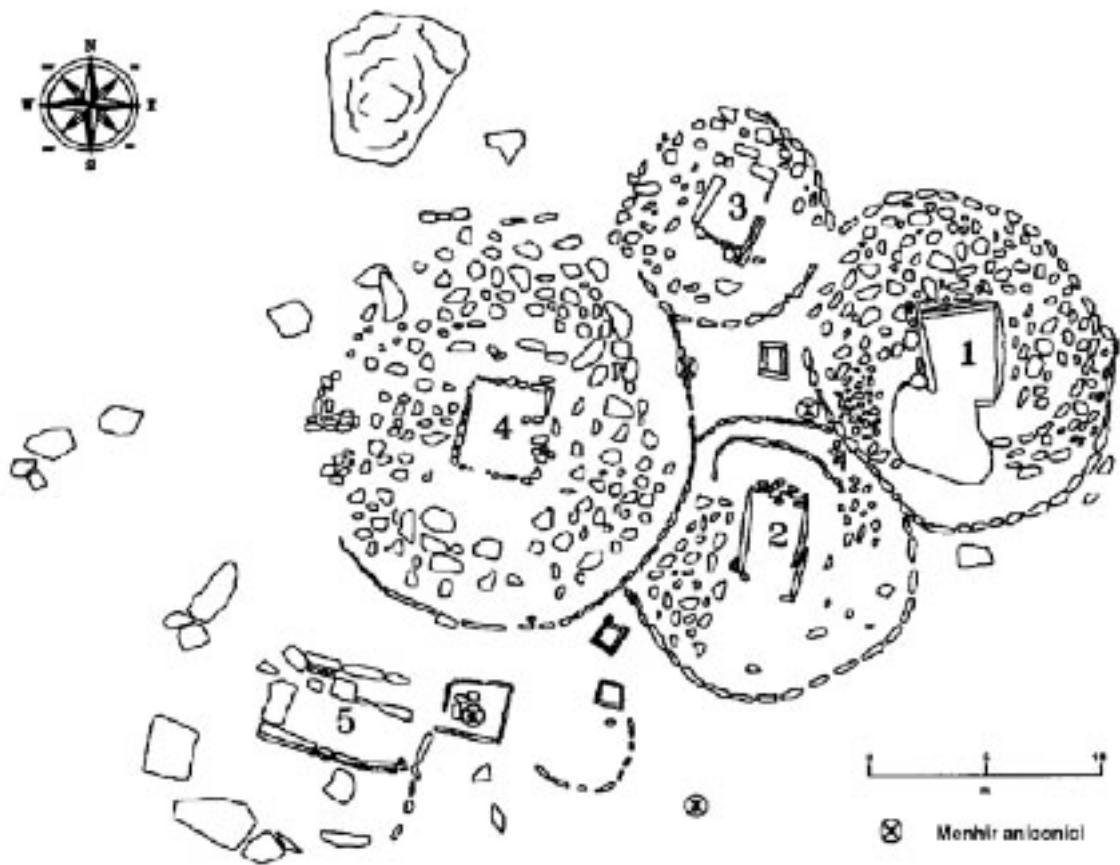
Discovered in 1939 by the local primary school teacher, Michele Ruzittu, and excavated between 1939 and 1940 by Salvatore Puglisi and Francesco Soldati, affiliated to the then Superintendent of Antiquities of Sardinia (fig. 2), it contains a group of four dolmen cists and a small chamber tomb, which due to its characteristics is very similar to the *allées couvertes*, dislocated in an isolated position where there was an earlier burial mound.



**Fig. 2** - The archaeological excavation (from Antona, Ceruti 1992, p. 22, fig. 1).

The reading of the data obtained from the archaeological evidence shows that each circular tomb, built in local granite and oriented along the NS axis, consists of a series of external perimeter rings of granite slabs stuck in the ground, with a variable diameter ranging between 5 and 8 metres, designed to contain a mound of earth, enclosing a central square lithic cista (fig. 3).





**Fig. 3** - Plan (from Antona, Lo Schiavo, Perra 2001, p. 242, fig. 1).

Regarding the latter, the walls are made of lithic slabs stuck vertically in the ground; a horizontal slab rested on them as a roof, of which no trace remains today (fig. 4).



**Fig. 4** - Funerary circle no. 2 (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Editta Castaldi assumes that in the past the necropolis looked like a series of hills placed one next to the other (fig. 5).



**Fig. 5** - 3D reconstruction of funerary circles (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

As mentioned, the chamber tomb is located to the SW in relation to the group of circles, which also differ as their orientation is along the EW axis of the burial chamber. The latter, with a rectangular plant and basically U-shaped, is buried compared with the floor; internally it is covered by roughly shaped blocks, placed edgeways. The bottom wall is closed by a single block (fig. 6).



**Fig. 6** - Chamber tomb (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The structure of the mound only develops on three sides; fragments of slabs similar to those of the cista of the adjacent circles can be seen between its stones. This detail, together with the recovery of several soapstone necklace beads outside the tomb, leads us to hypothesise that the chamber tomb may have been built over a previous cista. The discovery of a common ceramic bowl near the entrance, could easily refer to its inhabitation during the Middle Bronze Age.

A quadrangular bethel, placed inside an enclosure delimited by small slabs positioned edgeways, seems related to this tomb (fig. 7).





**Fig. 7** - Bethel next to the chamber tomb (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The offering boxes and the *menhirs* placed near the circles and in the space between their points of tangency recall their ritual and symbolic aspects (fig. 8).



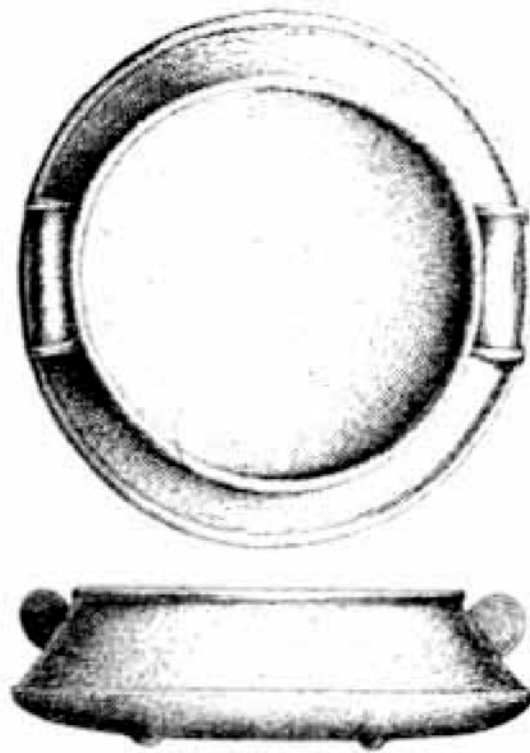


**Fig. 8** - Menhir and Lithic box for ritual offerings (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The quality and quantity of the few unearthed skeletal remains, along with the same enclosed floor plan of the megalithic circle, would lead to the hypothesis that the funeral ritual included single burials in a primary deposition.

An exception may be found in tomb no 4, as is evidenced by the excavation ledger prepared by Soldati, where two levels of deposition were identified and discovered, separated by granite slabs laid flat, as well as a group of apple-shaped spheroids which would indicate the presence of a greater number of skeletons.

The excavations undertaken have revealed refined objects, now partly displayed at the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari and at the Archaeological Museum A. G. Sanna of Sassari, which strongly characterise the social role of the deceased. Amongst them a carenated cup with soapstone spool-shaped handles (fig. 9), green soapstone apple-shaped spheroids, stone axes, and necklaces with soapstone beads of various shapes (fig. 10).



**Fig. 9** - Carenated cup with spool-shaped handles in soapstone (from Lilliu 1999, fig. 336, p. 340).



**Fig. 10** - Lithic axe, apple-shaped spheroid and soapstone necklace (from Antona 2013).

Among the mentioned findings, the carenated soapstone cup has a kind of spool-shaped handle which may easily be compared with a type of handle found for example in lithic vessels from Cyclades (ancient Cycladic age), Crete (Knossos), the Diana Culture in Lipari, Malta (Tarxien Phase) and from southern Italy in general.



The apple-shaped spheroids may also be considered as belonging to an extra-insular context, as these items were popular during the Neolithic period in Crete (Knossos), in Cilicia (Anatolian Chalcolithic), in Egypt, in the Italian and Iberian Peninsulæ and in France. The presence of stones with traces of red ochre, a strongly symbolic dye, suggests that the deceased may also have been painted with the colour of blood and regeneration. The remains of a hut village, found in the area of Pilastru, about 600 metres as the crow flies from Li Muri, may be those of the village pertinent to the necropolis. Based on the published data, we can say that the closest comparisons for this Gallura funerary phenomenon, both at a structural level and as a factual context, must be sought within similar findings in Corsica and in the Pyrenean area on one hand, and in the Aegean islands and the Balkans on the other: the whole may be sufficient to consider the culture of the circles in Arzachena as belonging to the complex phenomenon of European Megaliths.



## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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