

Megalithic circles of Li Muri

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ The "colours of death": the use of red ochre in the funerary rituals of the Neolithic Age

Ochre is an earth mineral (an earthy variety of Hematite) used for preparing dyeing substances (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 - Red Ochre (from http://www.kremer-pigmente.com/media/images/popup/11576_1.jpg).

Within the funeral ritual of Li Muri, the discovery of pebbles with traces of this dye is an element which may be attributed to ritual practices linked to finds of red ochre pulverisation, of which traces of use remain, a pigment with a strong symbolic value linked to the regeneration of the deceased and to the colour of blood. This substance was also found in Sardinian Neolithic burials and it has a precise meaning in the funerary rituals documented for example in the tombs of the underground necropolis of the Middle Neolithic age (4800-4450 B.C., through calibrated C14 analysis conducted on the skeletons) of Cuccuru S'Arriu in Cabras: in grave no. 387, the deceased was lying in a foetal position with the statuette placed in his right hand; the grave goods were arranged all around the body; inside a bowl there were two open shells encrusted with red ochre, traces of which were also present on the skeleton and on the funerary objects (fig. 2).

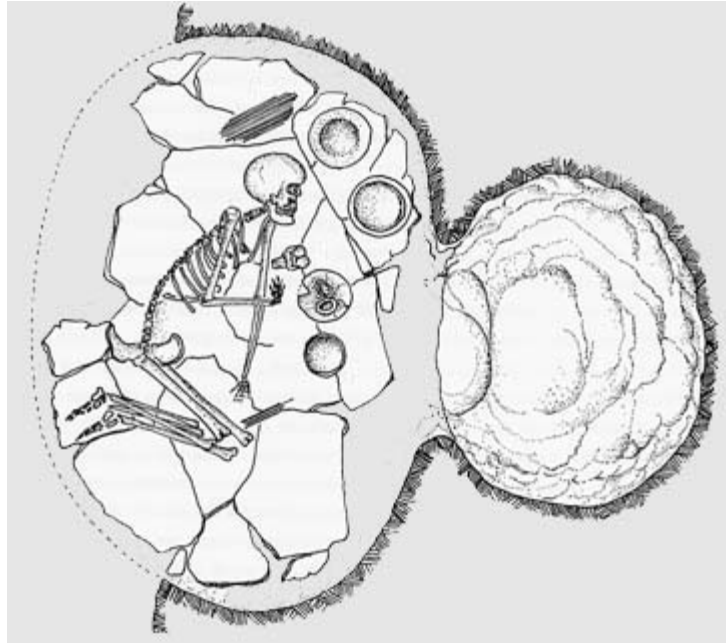


Fig. 2 - Underground grave no. 387 of Cuccuru S'Arriu in Cabras (from Santoni 1988).

Paintings obtained through the use of ochre are also preserved on the walls of numerous *domus de Janas* of Sardinia (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 - Painted tomb of the *domus de janas* necropolis of Mandra Antine in Thiesi (from Tanda 1985, fig. 30b, p. 151).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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