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Giants' tomb of Thomes

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Archaeological description of the asset

The collective megalith burial site of S'Ena 'e Thomes is a large example of Nuragic funeral architecture (figs. 1, 2).

It was dug and restored by Francesco Nicosia, who was Archaeological Superintendent at the time for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro, during the summer of 1977. As concerns the site activities, the notes taken in a notebook by Nicosia, the so-called excavation ledger, together with the finds registry, have been an important document source¹ providing an improved understanding of the strategy which accompanied the work, which did not last very long (figs. 3-8).



Fig.1 - View of the tomb from above (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

¹ Currently preserved in the Sardinian Archaeological Superintendency Archive in Sassari.



Fig. 2 - Hypothetical reconstruction of the monument (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Before the intervention, the damage to the tomb was quite obvious: the orthostates of the façade were uneven and the stele appeared strongly inclined. The burial corridor, partly uncovered and without some of the cover slabs which had been moved from their original location during illegal excavations. The restoration works allowed recovering almost the entire structure (straightening of the stele, realignment of the orthostates of the exedra, partial reconstruction of the interior wall of the funeral corridor and rearrangement of its cover) and verifying the technical expedients used for its construction. The front of the funeral monument, made entirely from local granite, has a semi-circular exedra, with orthostates. It consists of a series of slabs which decreases in height starting from the central stele to the outside (figs 3-4).



Fig. 3 - Profile of the exedra of the giants' tomb of Thomes (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The central orthostat coincides with the entrance and the crowned stele. There is no bench. It has a 10.20 metre chord and a 4.20 metre sagitta².



Fig. 4 - Exedra (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

² In geometry, the chord is a segment that joins two separate points of a curve, while a sagitta is the height of the circular segment.

In the centre, there is a large crowned stele, carved from a single sub-oval block, it is 3.65 metres high, 2.10 wide, 0.40 m thick and weighs approximately 7 tons; it shows a profiled arch, surrounded by a frame in relief and a transverse listel (fig. 5). It is slightly wider in the lower half on the right-hand side and is thicker in the central portion, while it becomes progressively thinner towards the outer parts.



Fig. 5 - Crowned stele (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The right pillar of the stele is shorter than the other one and leans on a carved block, supported by a pile of small stones. There is also a side hollow, that was used to move the slab; the two orthostates arranged to the right and left are stele shaped so that they fit perfectly with it at the sides.

The square entrance door opens on the lower part of the crowned stele, with rounded corners, facing South, through which it was possible to enter the long rectangular chamber (length 10.9 m; width 0.80 m; height 1.5 metres). It was built with orthostates that are fixed vertically into the ground, topped by a row of different sized stones crowded together carefully (fig. 6).





Fig. 6 - Inside the burial chamber (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The megalith chamber is covered with large granite slabs, close together, in spite of the irregular appearance. Three slabs were still in their original position, while another two were found upside down at the side of the tomb and perhaps another two were destroyed. The burial corridor becomes narrower closer to the entrance, until it almost forms a small foyer (length 1.52 metres), covered by two smaller slabs and a much lower level than the others used for the roof (figs. 7, 8, 9).



Fig. 7 - Funerary corridor, view from the back (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



Fig. 8 - Side view of the monument which shows the detail of the cover (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



Fig. 9 - Detail of the large granite roof slabs (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

From reading the dig magazine, it can be seen that the floor, which was affected over time by previous illegal digs, held traces of the original granite slab flooring. A mound also covered the Giants' tomb in Thomes so that, at the same time, it was hidden but highlighted: in fact, it also served to lend an effect of monumentality and visibility to the tomb (fig. 10).

Overall, the grave is more than 16.20 metres long and 7 metres wide.



Fig.10 - Hypothetical reconstruction of the monument (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

The excavation, which affected the exedra, the burial chamber and the stone plinth on which the barrow stood, yielded a rather simple stratigraphic sequence, marked by a substantial tampering of the original situation especially in the exedra and the chamber. In the complex, the items which were unearthed during the excavations (such as pottery fragments, a bronze pin, tiles, roof tiles, coins), including those from the surface survey probes, allow hypothesising construction and use of the tomb during the facies of the Middle Bronze Age of Sa Turricula³ (1600-1500 BC), and its use until the Historic Period. In fact, there are in fact still traces of a settlement dating to the Roman and High Middle Ages partly leaning against the tomb itself (3rd century B.C. and 6th/7th century A.D.).

³ From the same name living environment in Muros (SS).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni

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