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REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Giants' tomb of Thomes

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Site location

The site is located near Dorgali, in the countryside, and is easily accessible.

From the S.S. 131 (state road) towards Siniscola, after the crossroad for Nuoro turn off at the junction for Dorgali. After 4.1 km, the archaeological site is on the left, marked by a road sign. It is possible to access the megalith from the main road, where there is ample space for parking at the side of the road, from which there is an easy 400 metre path which leads you through a gate and allows you to walk to the site.

■ History of the site and studies

The first records, albeit generic and sporadic, regarding the archaeological evidence of the Dorgali area date back to the nineteenth century: the rich monumental heritage began then to enjoy a certain reputation within the archaeological literature of the island. A first analysis of the topographic area is inferred from the publications¹ by the Sardinian archaeologist and antiquarian Antonio Taramelli. Among these, the Archaeological Map in sheet 208 of the Military Geographic Institute² is particularly worth a mention; this contains synthetic information concerning the then known and mapped monuments. In 1933, Taramelli - in his introduction to his in-depth report³ to his research about the area of Dorgali, wrote: *"I must point out to scholars how greatly interesting and important Dorgali is; the beauty of its land with its superb Dolomites, the enchanting woods, the brilliantly blue gulfs, its mysterious underwater caves and the caverns where the most amazing stalactites march as candles in a procession."*⁴

The tomb of the Giants of Thomes, which belongs to the dolmen-orthostatic type with curved stele and is considered one of the oldest found in the island, is situated in the valley

¹ Taramelli A., *Relazione dell'attività svolta dalla direzione del Museo e degli scavi di Dorgali*, in *Bollettino d'Arte*, VII, 2, Roma 1928.

² Taramelli A., *Edizione archeologica della Carta d'Italia, Foglio 208 (Dorgali)*, Firenze, 1929.

³ TARAMELLI A., *Sardinia. IX.-Dorgali (Nuoro). Esplorazioni archeologiche nel territorio del Comune*, in *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, vol. IX, 1933, pp. 347-380.

⁴ Taramelli 1933, p. 347.

of Isalle, in the locality of S'Ena 'e Thomes, whose name recalls the underground spring water streams which flow nearby. The monument was certainly known at the beginning of the last century and was mentioned for the first time in 1967 by Giovanni Lilliu, the archaeologist who discovered the Nuraghic mansion of Barumini (fig. 1) about *Rapporti architettonici sardo-maltesi e balearico-maltesi nel quadro dell'ipogeismo e del megalitismo*⁵. Lilliu, writing about the unique and unusual double-element granite stele, with a door at the base which characterises the monument, supplies us with useful details regarding its substantial size: " 3.65 metres high, 2.10 metres wide (at one third of the height), 0.40 metres thick. It has a volume of 3.066 cubic metres and a weight of 7.051 tons. The door, on the outside, is 0.50 metres high and wide".



Fig. 1 - Arched stele of the Giants' tomb of Thomes (from Lilliu 1970, fig. 26, page 116).

⁵ Lilliu G., *Rapporti architettonici sardo-maltesi e balearico-maltesi nel quadro dell'ipogeismo e del megalitismo*, in *Atti del XV Convegno di Storia dell'architettura (Malta, 11-16 settembre 1967)*, Roma 1970, p. 115, p. 116 - fig. 26, p. 166 - note 86.

During the summer of 1977 (fig. 2) it was investigated and restored under the Scientific Direction of Francesco Nicosia, then Superintendent of the Archaeological Heritage for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro.



Fig. 2 - The Giants' tomb of Thomes before the excavation and restoration work
(By Moravetti 1998, fig. 22, p. 30).

As concerns the site activities, the notes taken in a notebook by Nicosia, the so-called excavation ledger, together with the finds registry, both kept in the archives of the Sardinian Archaeological Superintendence in Sassari, have been an important document source providing an improved understanding of the strategy which accompanied the work, which did not last very long (figs. 3-8)





Figs. 3-8 - A series of images of the 1977 archaeological intervention at the Giants' tomb of Thomes-Dorgali (from the Archive of the Archaeology Superintendence of Sardinia)

Before the intervention, the tampering of the tomb was quite obvious: the orthostats 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, had repeatedly been the subject of illegal excavations. The restoration works allowed recovering almost the entire structure (straightening of the stele, realignment of the orthostats of the exedra, partial reconstruction of the interior wall of the funeral corridor and rearrangement of its cover), built in local granite, and verifying the technical expedients used for its construction. 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.

Overall, the findings (documents in the items register compiled by F. Nicosia in 1977) 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 Turracula (1600-1500 BC), and its use until the Historic Period. There are in fact still traces of a settlement dating to the Roman and High Middle Ages partly leaning against the tomb itself.

The following year, in 1978, archaeologist Fulvia Lo Schiavo ⁶ managed to synthesise the archaeological intervention in a few lines, and because she considered the monument particularly important, a second operation which planned to complete the excavation and to restore the barrow and the ends of the exedra was announced.

In the same year, Ercole Contu in his article *Il significato della "stele" nelle tombe di giganti*⁷ also photographically documented the completed restoration of the imposing Thomes stele (fig. 9).

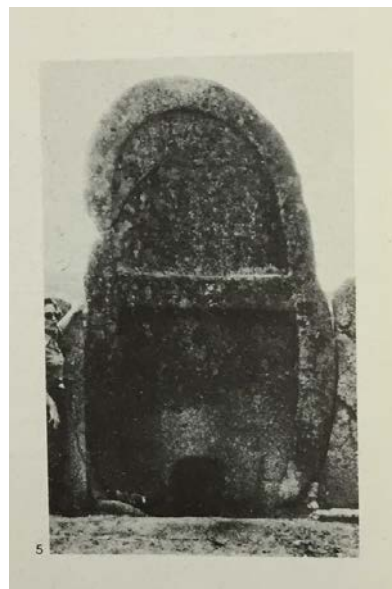


Fig. 9 - The stele of Thomes immediately after restoration (from Contu 1978, table II.5).

Meanwhile, in 1980, at the opening of the Civic Archaeological Museum of Dorgali, a

⁶ Lo Schiavo F., *Notiziario*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXXIII, 1978, p. 450.

⁷ Contu E., *Il significato della stele nelle tombe di giganti*, collana Quaderni. Archeologia e conservazione, a cura di Lo Schiavo F., Sassari 1978, p. 42, tab. II,5.

book edited by multiple authors ⁸, was published, in which all the archaeological data known thus far regarding local ancient antiquities from the Neolithic to the Early Middle Ages converged.

This presents inputs by Alberto Moravetti⁹, Francesco Guido¹⁰, Antonietta Boninu¹¹ e Roberto Caprara¹² which include the preliminary study of the finds from the 1977 excavation of Thomes. During the same year, the first archaeological survey of the Municipality of Dorgali began, curated by the Archaeological Superintendence for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro, whose preliminary results were published in 1985 by the then Archaeologist and representative Officer for the territory Maria Rosaria Manunza.¹³ The research, including the map positioning of the sites, the survey of several monuments and the excavation of some structures, continued until 1982 and was finally published by Ms. M. R. Manunza in the essay *Dorgali. Monumenti antichi*¹⁴ monograph published in 1995, where there is also a brief description of the tomb of Thomes.

In 1990 A. Moravetti¹⁵, once again deals with the Giants' tomb in a summary work concerning Nuraghic Sardinia.

In 1998 A. Moravetti's contribution¹⁶ can be noted, where in setting out the overall picture of the archaeological remains of Dorgali he also provides an overview of the tomb of Thomes (Fig.10).

⁸ AA.VV., *Dorgali. Documenti archeologici*, Sassari 1980.

⁹ Moravetti A., *Tombe di giganti nel Dorgalese*, in *Dorgali. Documenti archeologici*, Sassari 1980, pages 79-100.

¹⁰ Guido F., *Tomba di giganti di Thomes - Le monete*, in *Dorgali. Documenti archeologici*, Sassari 1980, pages 101-102.

¹¹ Boninu A., *Testimonianze di età romana nel territorio di Dorgali*, in *Dorgali. Documenti archeologici*, Sassari 1980, pages 221-240.

¹² Caprara R., *Documenti archeologici medioevali*, in *Dorgali. Documenti archeologici*, Sassari 1980, pages 247-264.

¹³ Manunza M.R., *Dorgali (Nuoro). Censimento archeologico: relazione preliminare*, in *Nuovo Bullettino Archeologico Sardo*, I, 1984, pages 371-373.

¹⁴ Manunza M.R., *Dorgali. Monumenti antichi*, Oristano, 1995, pages 111-112, figs. 144-148.

¹⁵ Moravetti A., *Le tombe e l'ideologia funeraria*, in *La civiltà nuragica*, Milano, 1990, pages 120-168.

¹⁶ Moravetti A., *Serra Orrios e i monumenti archeologici di Dorgali*, *Sardegna Archeologica. Guide e itinerari*, 26, Sassari 1998, pages 75-78, figs. 61-64.

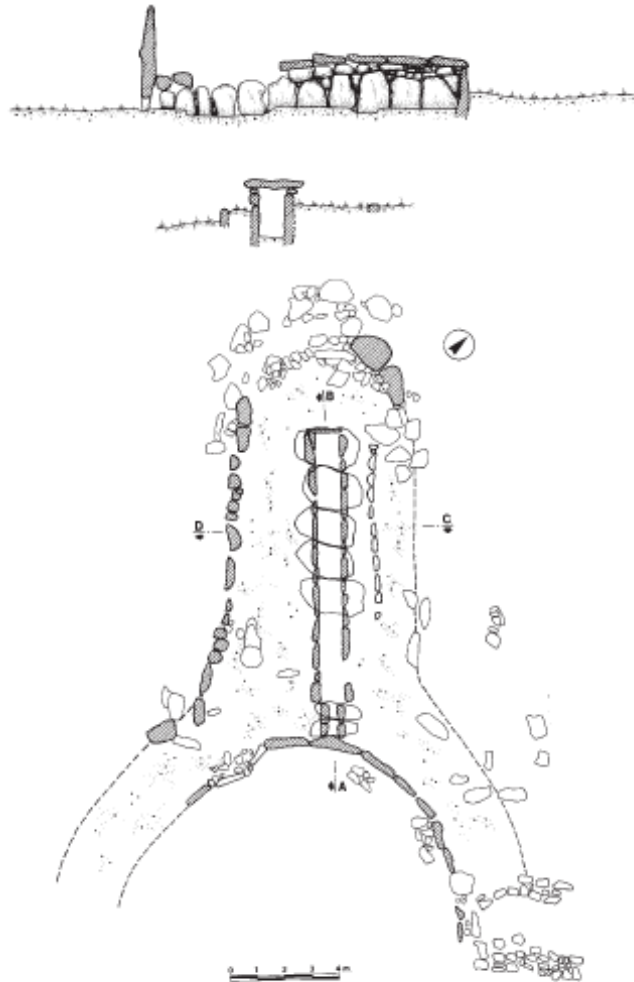


Fig. 10 - Plan and sections of the Giants' tomb of Thomes
(By Moravetti 1998, fig. 62, p. 76).

In the booklet published by Daniela Pulacchini in the same year concerning the Archaeological Museum of Dorgali¹⁷, which should be considered a summary work because of the amount of data it contains, within the general framework regarding the exhibits now on display at the aforementioned museum, there are some references to the findings from the multi-layered settlement of Thomes.

¹⁷ Pulacchini D., *Il Museo Archeologico di Dorgali*, Sardegna Archeologica. Guide e itinerari, 27, Sassari 1998.

There is also the recent contribution from the year 2011, once again by A. Moravetti¹⁸, concerning the tomb of Thomes, published by the local newspaper La Nuova Sardegna as part of the series about archaeology in Sardinia and directed by the author, in which an additional educational summary of the monument is represented as part of the accessible archaeological heritage in the territory of Dorgali.

¹⁸ Moravetti A. (by), *Carbonia-Fonni*, in *La Sardegna. I Tesori dell'Archeologia*, La Biblioteca della Nuova Sardegna, vol. 3, Sassari 2011, pages 90-91.

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Emanuela Atzeni





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Progetto cofinanziato dall'Unione Europea
Programma Operativo FESR 2007-2013

FESR - Fondo Europeo di Sviluppo Regionale - Asse I, Linea di Attività 1.2.3.a