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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Archeological area of Sant'Eulalia

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Fictile ante-fixes

At a time that is difficult to date, between the 5th and 6th century A.D., a part of the portico roof was dismantled; following that its architectural elements ended up in the cistern, where they were then found¹. Some terracotta antefixes were found mixed among the ruins (fig.s 1-3).



Fig. 1 - Fictile ante-fix with *gorgoneion* on acanthus bush (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



Fig. 2 - Fictile ante-fix with *gorgoneion* on acanthus bush (photo by AFS).

¹ Pinna 2002a, pages 39, 41; Pinna 2003a, pages 380; Mura 2008, pages 279-281.

These are decorative elements placed to frame the roof. Based on these style comparisons, the Sant'Eulalia ante-fixes were attributed to Roman workshops active during the first imperial era: they have decorative motives such as the *gorgoneion* on acanthus heads ² (figs. 1-2), the leonine protome (fig. 3) and the Phoenician palm ³ and, to the back, show a tenon to be inserted in the tile's recess.



Fig. 3 - Fictile ante-fix with leonine protome on acanthus bush (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

² The *gorgoneion* is the representation of the head of a Gorgon. According to legend, the Gorgons were three female monsters, Medusa, Sthenno and Euryale, born from Phorcys and Ceto (Vernant, 1987, page 53) A legend was created around the first: Medusa turned to stone anyone who dared to look at her, until Perseus arrived and cut off her head. Her effigy was sculpted on shields and breastplates (aegis) but an even older use was to place her on doors and walls, with an apotropaic function, to keep away evil spirits. The icon is often depicted with snakes as her hair and a tongue coming out of her mouth Giuliano 1960, s.v. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gorgone_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Antica%29/). In this case, the figure has a headcover where the snakes motif was abandoned in favour of two spirals, with a tiara with pearls in three rows on her forehead; her round face shows big eyes and a calm expression.

The **acanthus bush** refers to a bush of branches and large leaves that were often used in architectural decoration (Matthieu 1958, s.v. acanthus http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/acanto_%28Enciclopedia_dell%27_Arte_Antica%29/).

³ **Small Phoenician palm** is a decorative plant element, widely used in Phoenician times. It has a varying, but always odd, number of lobes or petals, fan-shaped and set in a base (a button or small arch) between two volutes. The ornamental motive comes from the Cretan culture of the II millennium B. C. During that millennium it was borrowed from the Near East, enjoying particular success in Assyrian, Phoenician and Cypriot art.

(Andr n 1963, s.v. Phoenician Palm [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/palmetta_\(Enciclopedia-dell'-Arte-Antica\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/palmetta_(Enciclopedia-dell'-Arte-Antica)/)).

The term comes from the Latin *antefixum*, from *ante* (before) and *figere* (affix). In ancient times the term had a more general meaning indicating a fictile, that is terracotta item, affixed to the entablature ⁴ and roof of a building. According to a tradition preserved for us by Pliny,⁵ these architectural decorations were invented by the potter *Boutades* from Sicyon, who in his *figlina*⁶ in Corinth adorned the extreme ends of VIII century B.C. roof tiles with masks.⁷

⁴ **Entablature** is a group of horizontal elements placed on top of columns, piers and pillars. In classical orders it consists of architrave, frieze and cornice (Dorfles et al. 2001, *s.v.* entablature, p. 473).

⁵ Pl. *Nat. hist.*, XXXV, 152.

⁶ Latin word indicating the potter's workshop.

⁷ Andr n 1958, p. 404-405.

■ Credits

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