



UNIONE EUROPEA



REPUBBLICA ITALIANA



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

The area of the Cornus basilicas

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Inscription of three emperors

During the 1964 investigations of the basilica used for baptisms (fig. 1)¹ sixteen fragments of marble inscription have been found in the floor². It was only noted that the items were opisthographic when recovered³: the engraved text is difficult to read on the side walked on by worshippers who moved around the basilica and seems to refer to the renovation or the building of town walls⁴, in fact in the fourth row, the word *moen[ā]*, «walls», preceded by *ant*, a probable final part of a verb can be clearly seen, that may be [fecer]ant, «they had done» (fig. 2). According to L. Pani Ermini this reference is a confirmation of the renovation that the walls of the baptistery underwent⁵.



Fig. 1 - Baptistery basilica, view from the East (photo by C. Cocco).

¹ ADDIS 1966, p. 189; TESTINI 1972, p. 556.

² The fragments of stone measure 70x41.5 cm, are 3 cm thick with the letter 5.5 cm high on average (TESTINI 1972, p. 556).

³ This inscription, being opisthographic, had text engraved on both sides of it.

⁴ SOTGIU 1990, p. 209; ZUCCA 2006, pages 88-89; FANTAUZZI, DE VINCENZO 2013, pages 14-15.

⁵ Studies have compared it with an engraved slab found in the basilica of Sant'Ippolito nell'Isola Sacra where reference is made to *ampliata moenia*, regarding the expansion of the basilica (Pani Ermini 2003, page 902)



Fig. 2 - Graphic reconstruction of the inscription: side mentioning *moenia* (from Sotgiu 1990, p. 208, fig. 2).

The side hidden for several centuries in the ground (fig. 3) shows a text that can be dated⁶: *Salvis d(ominis) n(ostris tribus) Flaviis Gratiano, V[alentiniano / The]odosio, invictissimis princip[ibus. Thermae] / aestivae quae olim squalor[e et magna] / ruina fuerant conlabsae a [fundamentis (?)] / constitut[ae] nunc de fonte du[---]* i.e. In the period in which Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius (379-384) were emperors, the summer thermal baths that had fallen into ruin were restored⁷.

The restoration of a now ruined structure, not yet identified unanimously can be referred to the three emperors, for which three theories have been made about its location. The first hypothesis states the area as the same as the basilicas of Cornus, as the place where

⁶ The expression *Salvis Dominis Nostris* (*Salvis dd. nn.*) followed by the name of the reigning sovereigns holds, in addition to the traditional good wish meaning, the value of chronological indication and as such this is used starting from the Constantine era, in the inscriptions referring to interventions on public monuments made by imperial magistrates and officials (ORLANDI 1997, p. 31).

⁷ ADDIS 1966, p. 189; TESTINI 1972, p. 556; MASTINO 1984, pages 174-176; PANI ERMINI 1988, p. 62; MASTINO 1983, p. 198; MASTINO 1999, p. 276; ZUCCA 2006, pages 88-89; FANTAUZZI, DE VINCENZO 2013, pages 14-15. Another interpretation was proposed by L. Pani Ermini, that would identify the building of the first baptismal font with an integration of «*constitut[ae] nunc de fonte du[- - -]*» (verbal form of *ducere*), in order to place the erection of the bishop's hall at the end of the 4th century (PANI ERMINI 2003, p. 902).

the summer thermal baths that the inscription refers to stood, due to the presence of tubs lined with hydraulic plaster that is prior to the religious use and later reused⁸.

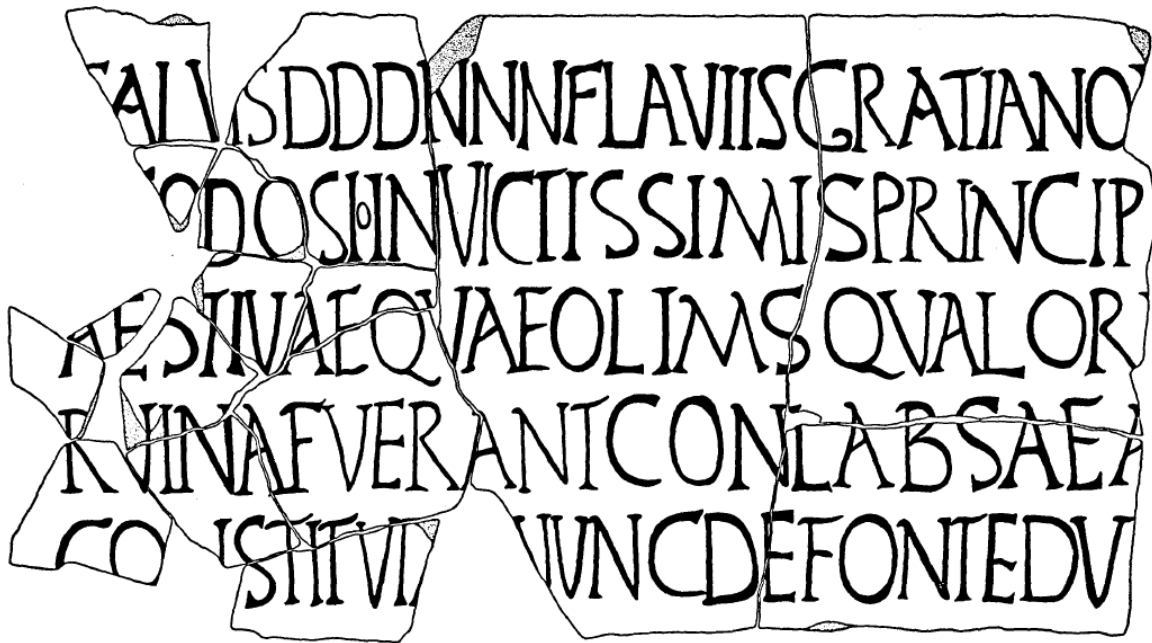


Fig. 3 - Graphic reconstruction of the inscription: side mentioning the three emperors (from Mastino 1984, p. 175, fig. 26).

A second identifies the Località Lenaghe, Is Bangius as the thermal area: Taramelli confirmed the presence of the ruins of a Roman building where there are still floors with a thick layer of opus signinum, stretches of large walls with arches and vaults⁹.

Finally, the recent investigations in the area of hill in Corchinas brought to light a structure comprising two walls arranged at a right angle (fig. 4) made in cement and blocks with mortar and bound on the outside by large limestone ashlar

⁸ PANI ERMINI 1988, pages 61-63; *Cornus* I.1, p. 45. According to L. Pani Ermini, the same baptismal font was a tub connected to the thermal spa complex (PANI ERMINI 2003, pages 901-902).

⁹ TARAMELLI 1918, p. 308; MASTINO 1984, p. 57; GHIOTTO 2004, p. 126; MASTINO 2005, p. 268.



Fig. 4 - Corchinas, north-east sector of the hill, thermal bath structures
(from Fantauzzi, De Vincenzo 2013, p. 12, fig. 16).

The size of the stone wall coverings and the finding of the several *tegulae mammatae*¹⁰ in this sector brought the finders to interpret the structure as a thermal bath area, that can be identified by the words *thermae aestivae* mentioned in the inscription; the traces can be dated to the last quarter of the 4th century A.D. based on the materials found, a time compatible with that of the inscription of the three emperors. A further element supporting this interpretation is the integration of *du[ctus aquae]*¹¹ «aqueduct» (fig. 5), the remains of which were found along the south-east border of the ridge to the east of Corchinas, a short distance from the thermal bath area¹². The construction of public works - like the aqueducts or walls - were completed by wish of the emperors: this work had to be remembered and associated with the name of the emperor on the inscriptions¹³.

¹⁰ ADAM 1989, pages 291-295.

¹¹ ZUCCA 2006, p. 88.

¹² MASTINO 1984, p. 57; FANTAUZZI, DE VINCENZO 2013, pages 14-15.

¹³ DONATI 2002, p. 33.



Fig. 5 - Stretch from the aqueduct (from Fantauzzi, De Vincenzo 2013, p. 3, fig. 3).

The finding of summer thermal baths are extremely rare and the integration proposed for the Cornus inscription ([*Thermae*] / *aestivae*) may come from a passage by *Historia Augusta* according to which Gordian III has one built *sui nominis* in 240 circa¹⁴. As the structures interpreted as thermal baths at Columbaris are placed in the 3rd century, similar to the ones the emperor had built, a diffusion of this type of building could be hypothesised in the same century¹⁵.

¹⁴ *HA, Gord.* 32, 7; MASTINO 1983, p. 198. The words *aestivus*, *aestivalis*, referring to thermal spa buildings, are found in several inscriptions. Some examples are: *opera thermarum aestivalium restituit* (*CIL* X, 5348; BALL PLATNER 1917, p. 195); *solium estibaliu therm[arum]* (*CIL* VIII, 948); *thermae aestivae* (*CIL* VIII 25845); *thermae extivae in sordentibus ac ruina conlapsae* (*CIL* X, 5349); *thermae aestivales* (*AE* 1911, 217), (MASTINO 1984, p. 174).

¹⁵ The writer of *Historia Augusta* is thought to have worked from the end of the 4th century and would have been familiar with the African environment where, starting from this century, most of the restorations of *thermae aestive e hiemales* «winter» occurred (MASTINO 1983, p. 198).

■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Claudia Cocco and Dr. Francesca Collu

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- CPH** *Classical philology: a journal devoted to research in classical antiquity*, Chicago, I, 1906 e ss.
- MEFRA** *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, Rome-Paris, I, 1971 e ss.
- NSc** *Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1944- Già: *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1876-1920 (fa parte di *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Memorie della Classe di Scienza Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, Roma 1876). Poi: *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1921-1939. Poi: *Atti della Reale Accademia d'Italia. Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Roma 1940-1943.
- SS** *Studi Sardi*, Sassari, I, 1934 e ss.



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