



# The area of the Cornus basilicas

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Cemetery Basilica

In the north-eastern sector of the Columbaris dig (fig. 1), there are the remains of the structure named “cemetery church”. After the Church Peace, this building was then used for funeral purposes, going on to hide, and sometimes cut the tombs already in the same area.



**Fig. 1** - Map of the Columbaris complex indicating stages and sectors: the area in violet corresponds to the cemetery basilica (drawing C. Cocco, F. Collu from *Cornus* I. 1, p. 200, tab. II).

The cemetery basilica has two concentric apses to the north (fig. 2, B-C; figs. 3-4) and one long nave divided into five adjacent environments (fig. 2, D-H); the eastern limit of the room was built against the filled area created to terrace the eastern burial area. The chambers could have been created at a later date because they were in different building techniques, using the materials of pre-existing structures and phonolite pieces. Inside other tombs were placed on a earthen floor.

The two apse hemicycles are the result of static problems found by the first and larger hemicycle, hence the need to build a second smaller internally. The first apse housed five

sarcophaguses, four of which were arranged around a central one: Addis interpreted the latter tomb as previous to the others, which surrounded it as it was venerated or privileged. This hypothesis was not supported by proof and for this reason, in light of later investigations, experts like P. Testini and R. Serra did not think it was appropriate to share it. The two apses are the only parts of the structure to be built with square limestone blocks, like in the adjacent patrician tomb (fig. 2 A) but in this case the material is clearly re-used.

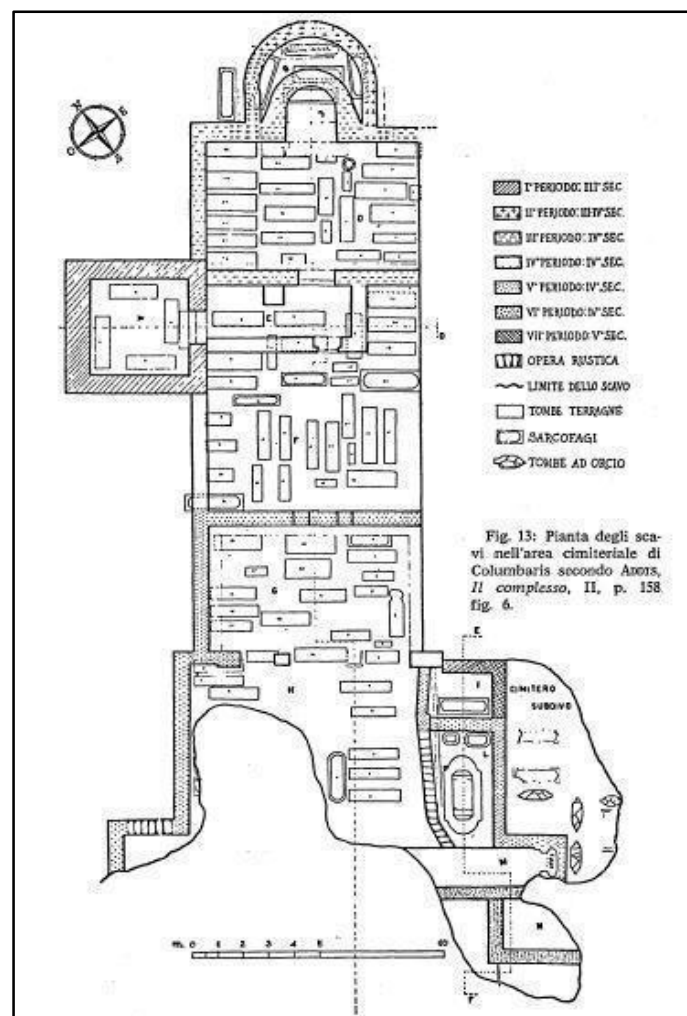
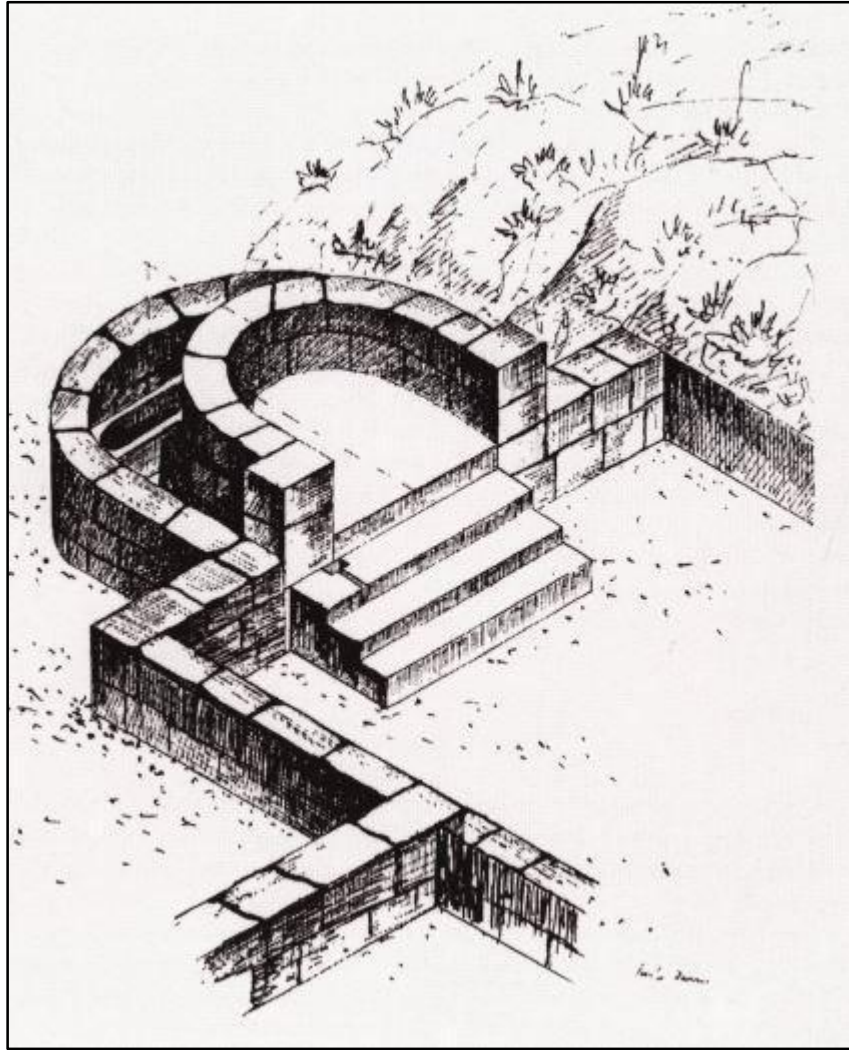


Fig. 13: Pianta degli scavi nell'area cimiteriale di Columbaris secondo Anon., *Il complesso*, II, p. 158 fig. 6.

**Fig. 2** - Map of the cemetery basilica (MASTINO 1984, p. 98, fig. 13).



**Fig. 3** - Axonometry of the double apse (from FARRIS 1993, p. 65, Tab. 4).



**Fig. 4** - Cemetery basilica, apse area, North-East view of the area  
(photo by C. Cocco).

Room D (fig. 5) was occupied by seventeen rectangular limestone sarcophagi: Besides its funerary function, the space was probably used for liturgy purposes. Several tombs have slabs on top to cover them with recesses and were probably similar to hollows for offers. During the digs, Addis recovered two fragments of libatory pipes, one bronze one and the other terracotta, to pour liquid food into the tombs. A door in the same direction as the apse leads to room F, in which the floor is partly higher and and there are both floor tombs and sarcophagi recessed into the rock. During a moment of intense building activity, at the beginning of the 6th century, inside the same room, a foyer was created, "E", in stonework (fig. 6), to connect the room and room A.



**Fig. 5** - Space D of the cemetery basilica with sarcophagi on site, to the right of the apse. Viewed from the East (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).



**Fig. 6** - Corridor between the funerary basilica and the noble sepulchre, viewed from the East (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

In the next chamber G, partially preserved seats were found on three sides. And the remains of a meal and numerous fragments of plates, bowls and glasses in pottery and glass were found spread amongst the depositions. This showed that the space was used for the Agape feasts. Another element of interest is the presence of a seat on the south side of the same room (figs. 7-8) next to a limestone dice. The pulpit was an upturned sarcophagus, then adapted and shaped. It probably had a symbolic meaning of the deceased taking part in the funerary banquet held in his/her honour. A burial place without the remains of the deceased but filled with soil was at its base, as if it was a cenotaph. A supporting pillar was set in the limestone nut; this and the seat described by Addis are no longer *in loco*.

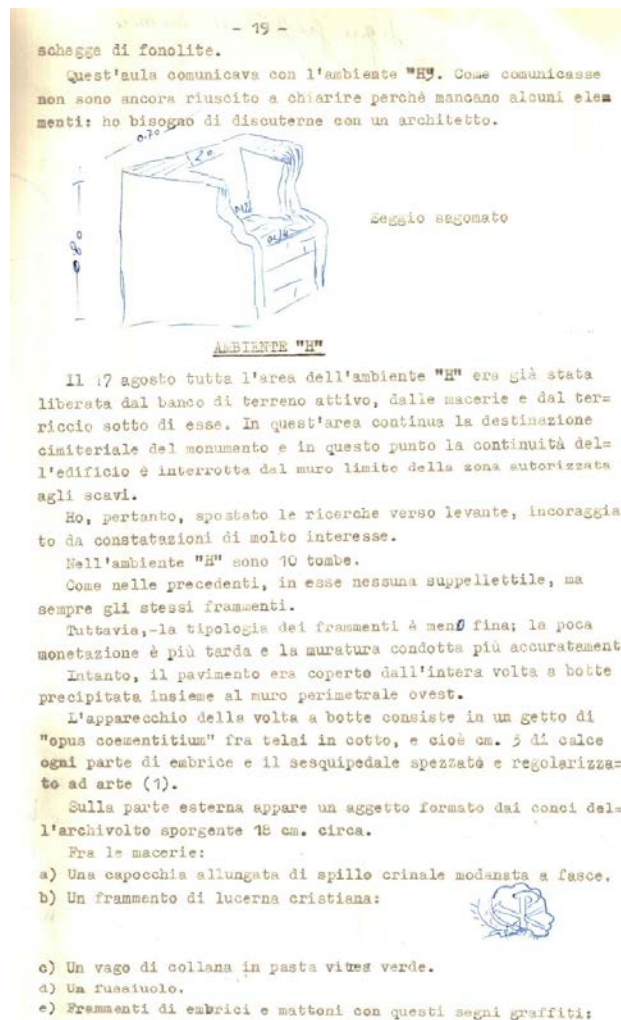
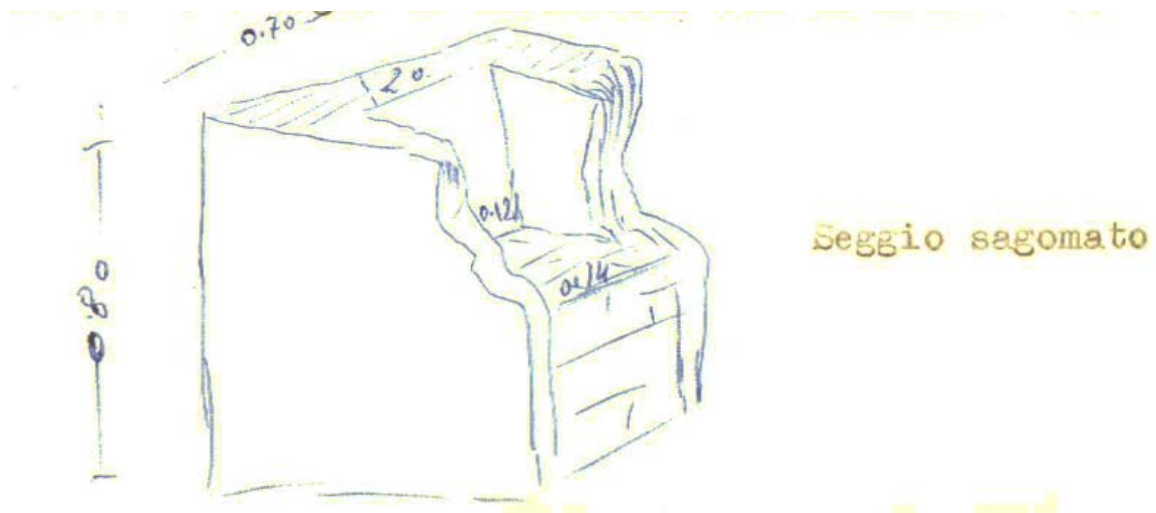


Fig. 7 - Autograph page (from Relaz. Addis 1962, p. 19).



**Fig. 8** - Detail of the autographed sketch by O. Addis (from *Relaz. Addis* 1962, p. 19).

The fifth room, named H, was dug out over several times by O. Addis and L. Pani Ermini: twenty pit burials and three sarcophagi were brought to the light. In one case, a table was annexed to the burial to celebrate the *refrigerium*. This room must have had a vaulted ceiling, which, when under investigation, was on the floor due to the collapse. To the South-East of H, there was an area (M) identified as a large courtyard, connecting the funerary basilica with the bishop's complex. In this area an oven and a well, for cooking and preparing food and drinks have been found. Also, there may have been a portico further south than the room, as a few elements discovered have seemed to indicated, that was a connection with the path between the eastern cemetery area and the episcopal complex further south. At a later date, on the eastern side of H, a room (L) was created with a wall section that contained a tub that was perhaps for baptisms with three steps on the north and south sides. On the northern wall of this room, a boundary was later built (I) where the walls were a continuation of those of room L. A larger sarcophagus than the others was found here, covered by a tomb stone and only preserved in part.

These various environments have returned a group of Christian burial epigraphs related to an period of time between the IV and V century. The inscriptions show a formula that reveals pertinence to the Christian environment, while no references are made to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The life of the cemetery basilica probably ended because of a fire that spread between the end of the VII and the VIII century.

## ■ Credits

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

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