

The area of the Cornus basilicas

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Baptistry basilica

In the southern sector of Columbaris, you have the baptistry or smaller basilica, connected and communicating with the cathedral (figs. 1-2) Built between the IV and V century, it had a longitudinal three-nave plant, perhaps already without the narthex, but with West facing apse (fig. 3). The basilica is 23 x 12 metres.

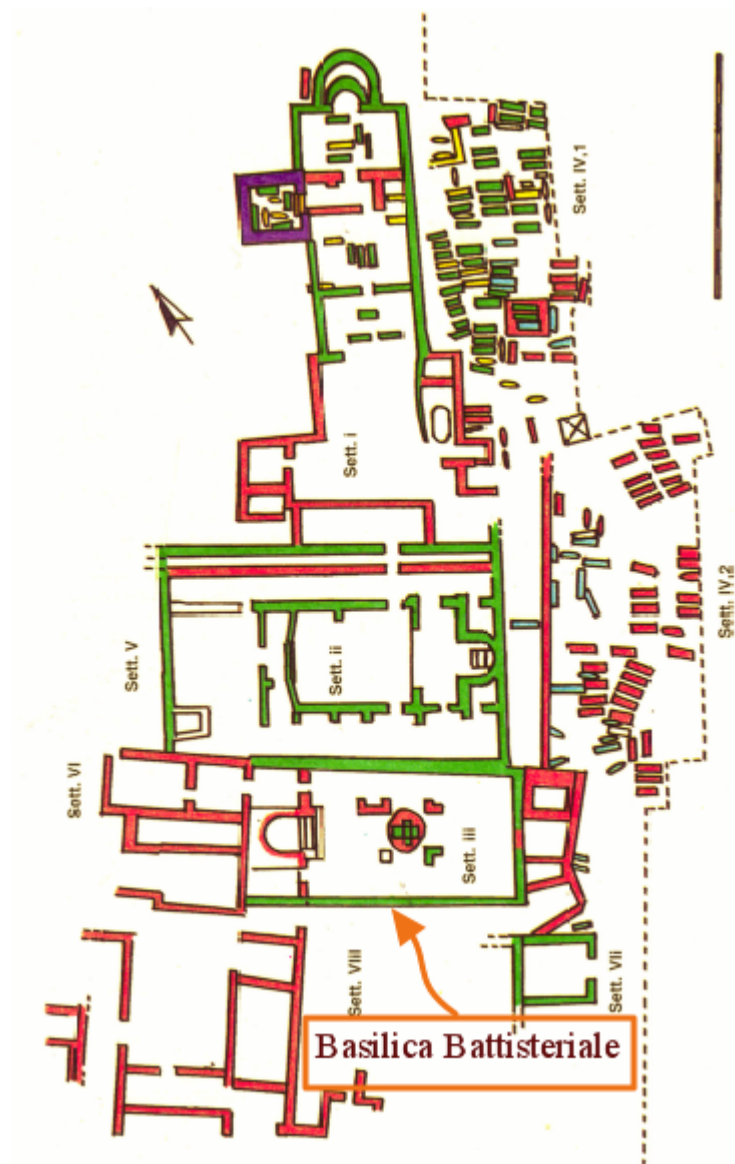


Fig. 1 - Columbaris basilica area with indication of the baptistry basilica (drawing C. Cocco, F. Collu, from *Cornus* I, 1, p. 200, tab. II).

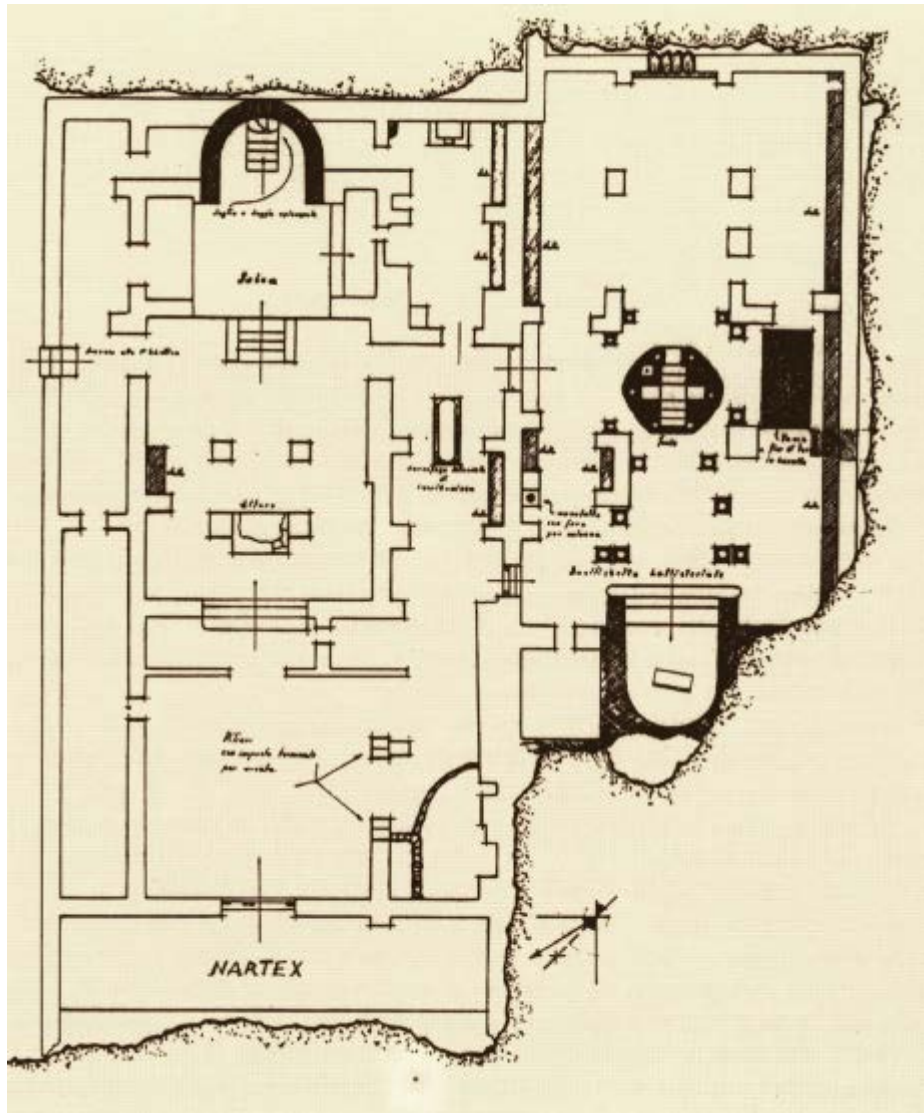


Fig. 2 - Map of the episcopal basilica (from FARRIS 1993, p. 100, Tab. 5).



Fig. 3 - Baptistery basilica, view from the East (photo by C. Cocco).

The cathedral was entered from the basilica through two doors and the internal divisions of the space was by pillars and columns. The brick font is in the centre of the middle nave; internally it is cross-shaped and externally a polygon. There was a canopy with six columns above the bath. In the left nave, almost next to where baptisms were performed, there was a large basalt cistern: It was probably needed for the pre-baptismal baths (fig. 4) The deep apse was raised by four steps (fig. 5): above there was a structure 36 cm high, placed obliquely,, and we still do not know what it was used for (fig. 6).



Fig. 4 - Pre-baptismal bath (photo by F. Collu).



Fig. 5 - Baptistery basilica: the baptismal font in the centre and the raised presbytery in the background (from FARRIS 1993, p. 36).



Fig. 6 - Raised apse (from FARRIS 1993, p. 51).

Over the centuries, the chamber and its surrounding area went through several changes: the eastern door was walled up, service areas were created to the sides of the apse and a cistern was built to the East of the church, supplying water to the baptistery. The southern *pastophorium* had benches on three sides, and a staircase that led to the apse and a small storeroom. Inside the storeroom, the remains of a large *dolium* were found, with a table and one of the columns that supported it, both in white marble (fig. 7). West of the northern *pastophorium*, buildings were identified that were used as places for preparing the people to be baptised, who, at the time of the ritual, moved to the basilica, passing through the *diaconicon*. The columns would have delimited the path of the neophytes. Inside the basilica, fifteen fragments of an opisthograph inscription were found mentioning the Emperors Gratian, Valentian and Theodosius (379-384), to whom the renovation of a «summer» structure that had fallen into disrepair had referred, perhaps the thermal baths present before the paleo-Christian area. In the opposite direction, the text is difficult to read, as it was used in the floor: it may refer to the renovation or building of walls. Between the end of the V and start of the VI century, the basilica was restructured and made cruciform, with a central cupola, at the intersection of the four arms, of which por-

tions of the angled walls around the font still remain. The dome stood on a square tholobate, proven by the finding of a conical section trumpet (fig. 8), an element that would have joined together the corners of the impost.

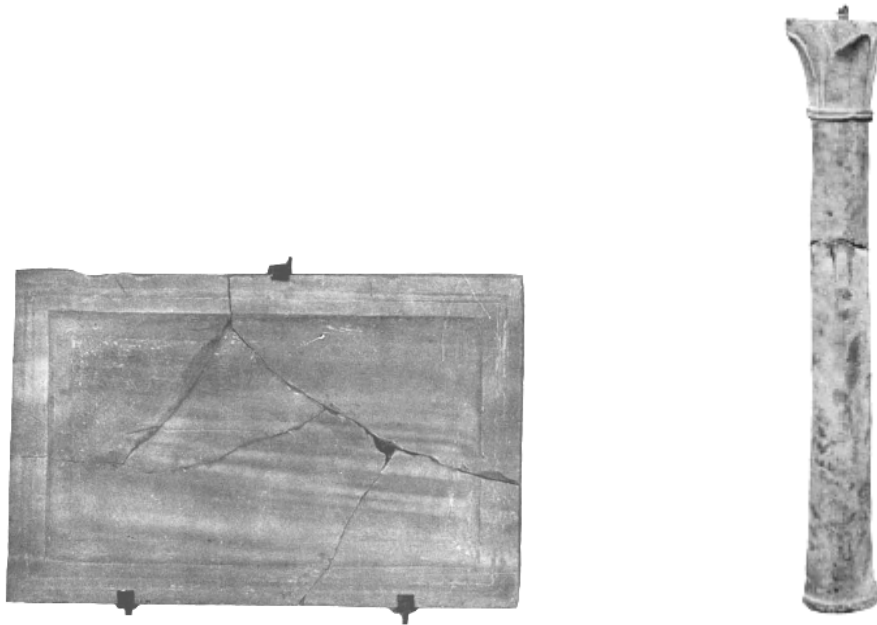


Fig. 7 - Table and marble column (from MASTINO 1984, table 89).



Fig. 8 - Cone-shaped trumpet (from FARRIS 1993, p. 127)

This data leads to a number of places of worship dated between the 6th and the 7th century, present in Africa (as in the case of Sbeitla, fig. 9) and in Sardinia, such as San Saturnino in Cagliari (fig. 10), San Giovanni in Sinis (fig. 11) and Sant'Antioco in the town of the



same name (fig. 12). The church was probably abandoned at the end of the VII start of the VIII century, as the structured collapsed because of a fire which affected all Cornus religious buildings (fig.13).



Fig. 9 - Basilica of San Vitale at Sbeitla (from <http://www.mmdtkw.org/CNAf009ChristianCarthage.html>).

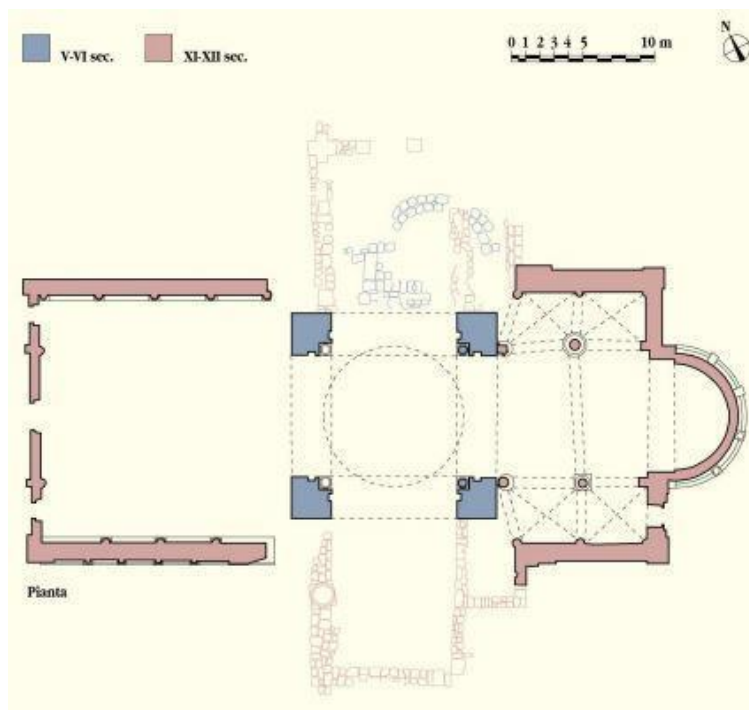


Fig. 10 - Cagliari: map of San Saturnino (from http://www.sardegna cultura.it/documenti/7_70_20060313174905.pdf).

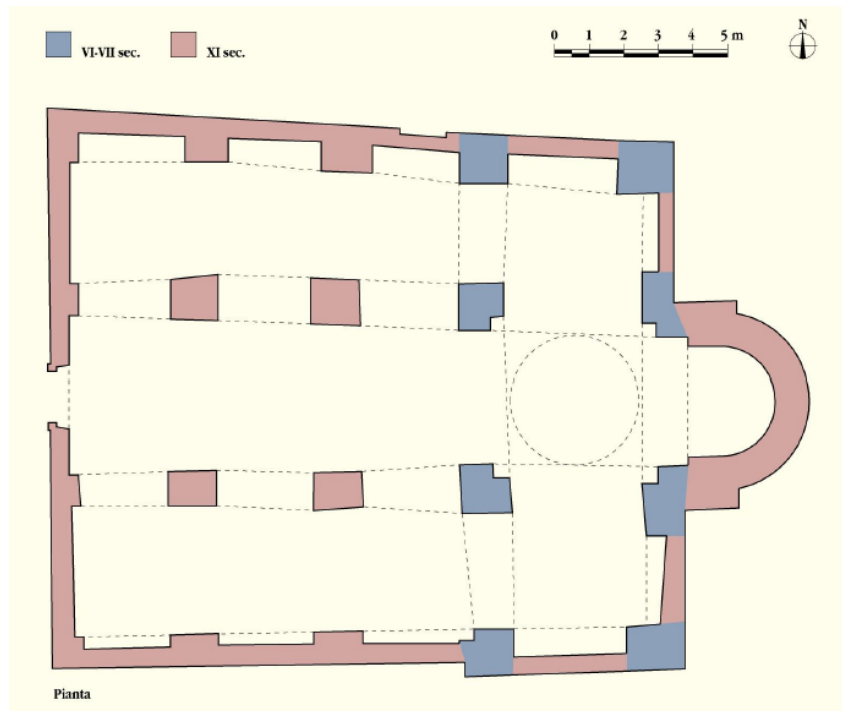


Fig. 11 - Cabras: map of the church San Giovanni of Sinis
 (from http://www.sardegnaicultura.it/documenti/7_70_20060321175531.pdf).

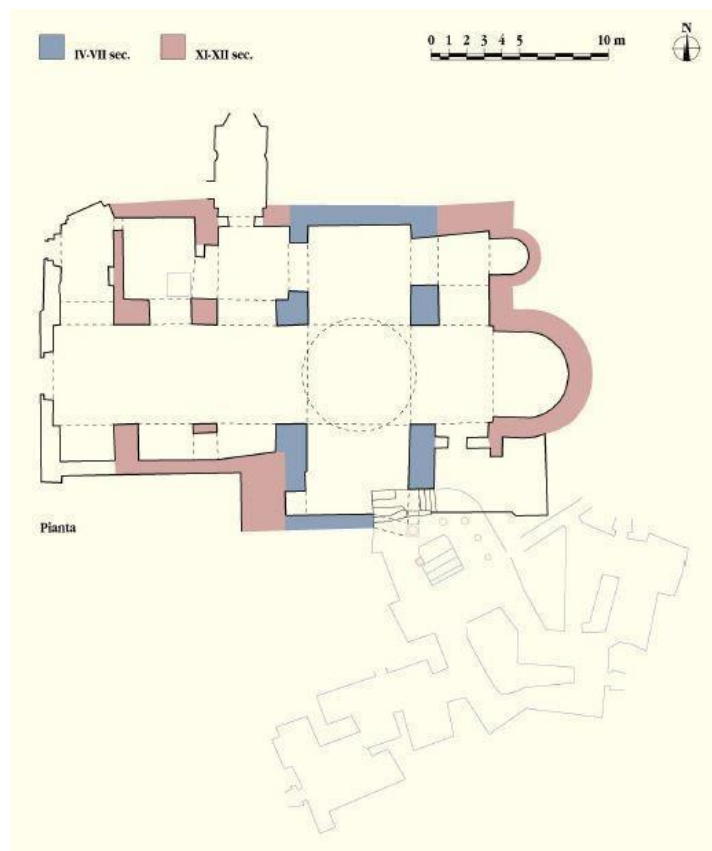


Fig. 12 - Sant'Antioco: map of the basilica of Sant'Antioco and underlying catacombs
 (from http://www.sardegnaicultura.it/documenti/7_70_20060313175501.pdf).

Regarding this structure, there are several hypotheses: according to R. Serra, the building of worship was built prior to the cathedral, explained by the direction of the apse, usually to the west in the 4th century and by the hiding of the eastern access, to allow the building of the larger basilica.

P. Testini saw the first plan as the catecumeneo, i.e. The place where the catechism was taught to the people about to be baptised. He hypothesizes that there were two phases: the first when the three nave basalt basilica room used for baptism was adapted and the font was introduced; the second with the cross shape made from limestone blocks, was the monumentalisation of the tub and the surrounding area.

Finally, L. Pani Ermini offers another view of the baptistery room right from its construction, built ex novo together with the northern cathedral. He also admits a monumentalisation phase in the 6th century, expressed in the whole complex.

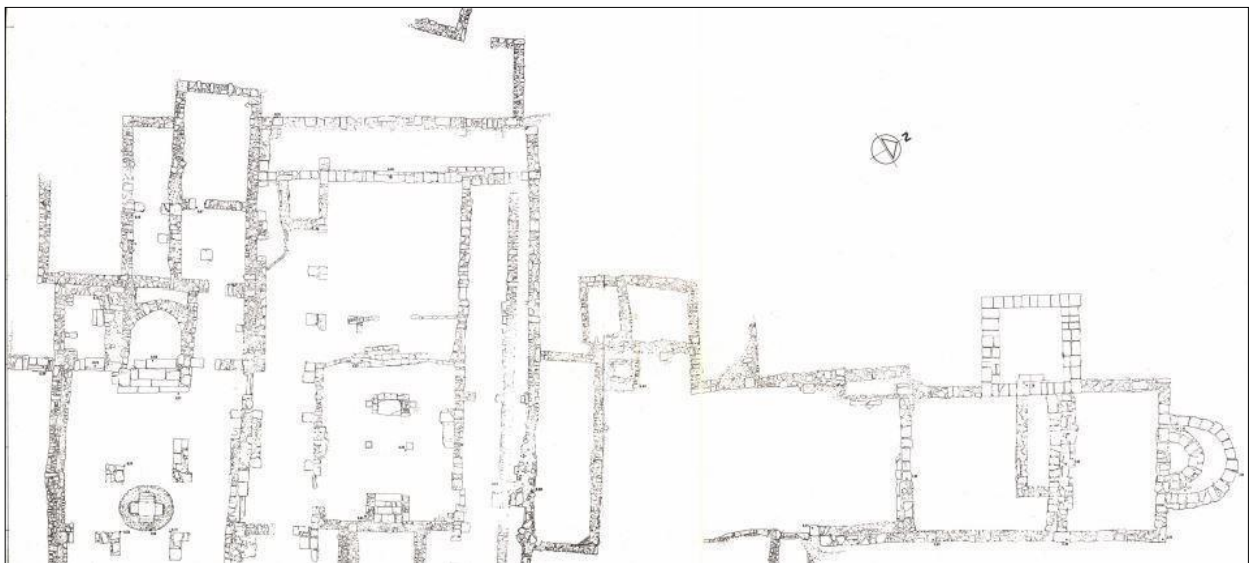


Fig. 13 - Relief of the three basilicas (from CUGLIERI I, Tab. B).

■ Credits

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

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