

SARDEGNA ISOLA MEGALITICA

Dai menhir ai nuraghi: storie di pietra nel cuore del Mediterraneo



Berlino / San Pietroburgo /
Salonicco / Napoli

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PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, St. Petersburg, Thessaloniki and Naples will be the stop-offs of an extraordinary exhibition dedicated to the ancient megalithic cultures of Sardinia, including the Nuragic culture, which will be the focus of international attention for the first time.

Sardinia, an island at the heart of the Mediterranean, a crossroads of relations, has developed unique and original civilisations that are still the subject of scientific debate and research.

The Autonomous Region of Sardinia continues its multiannual Heritage Tourism project dedicated to archaeology, with a major exhibition travelling around Europe.

Exceptional loan of one of the Mont'e Prama warriors from the National Museum of Cagliari.



Small head of Mother Goddess,
marne, Meana Sardo,
Middle Neolithic
Cagliari, National Archaeological
Museum.

Warrior with rapier
and shield,
bronze, Padria,
Iron Age
Cagliari, National
Archaeological
Museum.



The ancient megalithic cultures of Sardinia, and in particular the Nuragic culture, will be the focus, for the first time starting from July, of **an exceptional international event, which will visit four major European cities and their prestigious museums**, bringing to the public fascinating and unique stories and material evidence, landscapes and civilisations, many of which are still shrouded in mystery and the object of research.

From mid-June 2021 to September 2022, **Berlin, St. Petersburg, Thessaloniki and Naples** will turn the spotlight on the **domus de Janas tombs** from the Neolithic and Eneolithic period and the **iconic statuettes of "mother goddesses"**, some of which are true art masterpieces; the impressive **architecture of the nuraghi**, which characterised the Bronze Age on the island, and the collective graves known as **"giants' tombs"**; on the contacts between distant civilisations and the exceptional **Nuragic bronze statuettes depicting women, men, warriors and animals**; votive swords, scale models of buildings and ships, and the extraordinary, imposing **Mont'e Prama Warriors: self-representations of the mythical past set in the apogee of the Nuragic Age**, but created well into the Iron Age. Exceptionally, under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Culture and the management of the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari, **one of these fascinating, large sculptures, never loaned before, will be the guest of honour at the exhibition.**

"Sardinia, megalithic island. From menhirs to nuraghi: stories of stone in the heart of the Mediterranean" is the exhibition and event promoted by the Region of Sardinia-Tourism Department with the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari and the Regional Directorate of Museums of Sardinia - in addition to the four museums hosting the exhibition

- under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and the Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC), with the collaboration of Fondazione di Sardegna and with organisation and general coordination entrusted to Villaggio Globale International.

The exhibition has received the Medal of the Presidency of the Italian Republic.

This is the last output of a comprehensive **Heritage Tourism project** on Sardinian archaeology in the context of the Mediterranean area, financed by European Union, **opened in 2017 by a major international conference** on the subject, which was **followed in 2019 by the exhibition in the city of Cagliari on "Civilisations and the Mediterranean"**, organised with the collaboration of the museums that will now host this new major exhibition: the **National Museum of Prehistory and Early History of Berlin**, the **State Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg**, the **National Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki** and the **National Archaeological Museum of Naples**.

Sardinia is an island set in the heart of the Mediterranean, which today is increasingly recognised by international scholars as having **played a major role in the prehistoric and protohistoric contacts and exchanges between civilisations**, both in the **Mare Nostrum** and in relations with **Central and Northern Europe and with the Levant**. The island witnessed the development, thousands of years ago, of **original cultures and civilisations**, which have left us **unique monumental structures and remains** that characterise the Sardinian landscape to this day. These vestiges have fascinated and challenged many generations of visitors and scholars who have tried to interpret their meaning and purpose and to reconstruct the customs and rituals of the ancient Sardinian peoples.

Myth and legend have often crossed paths with history when interpreting the ancient Sardinian civilisations; **communities without a state structure and without writing, which are still today the focus of studies, excavations and research**. But today we know much more about their adventure spanning the millennia.

The exhibition will provide an overview of the present state of knowledge, **through important finds from the archaeological museums of Cagliari, Nuoro and Sassari** and through detailed **educational and multimedia aids**, scale models and **3D reconstructions**, which will allow visitors to explore and deepen their understanding of the historical and geographical context of the exhibition.

Moreover, in every location, **through the collections of the Museums, will be suggested a comparison and dialogue with the contemporary civilizations** developed in Europe and the Mediterranean, in order to show connections, contacts, differences. Same thing in the catalogue that will accompany the exhibition, **a coedition Skira / Il Cigno GG Editori**, published in 5 different languages: Italian, English, German, Russian and Greek.



Feathered head of Nuragic Age
bronze, Decimoputzu,
Iron Age
Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.



Dagger with gammata hilt,
bronze, Su Benatzu,
late Bronze Age/Iron Age
Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.



Sitting woman with her son,
bronze, Santa Vittoria di Serri,
Iron age
Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.



Megalithism - the practice of constructing buildings with massive stones - is the common theme chosen to trace the history of Sardinia by the exhibition's scientific directors, Federica Doria, Stefano Giuliani, Elisabetta Grassi, Manuela Puddu and Maria Letizia Pulcini, coordinated by Bruno Billeci and Francesco Muscolino, and joined in the scientific committee by Manfred Nawroth, Yuri Piotrovsky, Angeliki Koukouvou and Paolo Giulierini. This practice characterised the island over a long stretch of time, from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, and **still marks the Sardinian landscape through the legacies of the Nuragic civilisation, including the around 7000 towers known as "nuraghi"**.

THE EXHIBITION'S PATH

Thus, the exhibition starts **from the late and final Neolithic**. This period is characterised by chamber tombs cut into the limestone rocks, known in the Sardinian language as "**domus de Janas**", meaning the "**homes of the fairies or the witches**" – subsequently, many of which monumentalized in the façade. Another feature of this period was the **spread of the dolmens**. Later, in the Copper Age, we find **a monumental altar, the sanctuary of Monte d'Accoddi, unique in the Mediterranean** - but with parallels in the ziqqurath of the Near East - **as well as monumental walls on Monte Baranta**.

Next, the exhibition moves **on to the heart of the Nuragic civilisation**, the true symbol of Sardinia's uniqueness. The impressive **nuraghi, built in huge numbers from around 1600/1800 BC** onwards with blocks of basalt, trachyte and granite, with a variety of forms and functions but all sharing the same design of towers with **tholos** (corbelled ceiling), have been the focus of important debates and interpretations that have identified **their multiple functions, witnessed in the exhibition by the artefacts on display: food storage, farming and livestock raising, control of the territory, craft production. In many cases, villages of various sizes grew around the nuraghi**, some of them enclosed in turn by equally imposing defence walls, also interspersed with towers.

In the same period, **megalithic architecture is also found in burials and religious sanctuaries**, throughout the evolution of religious rituals that took place over the long Nuragic period. **The "giants' tombs"**, popularly known as such because of their imposing size, **which in popular folklore led to the belief that they were built for giants**, were actually collective burials, **which could contain up to hundreds of individuals** and were possibly connected to the veneration of ancestors. Rituals and offerings were practised in the areas fronting these monumental tombs, often marked by representations of deities (betyls). Similarly, **places of worship and sanctuaries** comprise a variety of building forms, all marked by Megalithism:



Su Nuraxi, nuragic Village of Barumini

The giants' tomb of s'Ena 'e Thomes in the territory of Dorgali (1800- 1600 a.C.)

Pyriiform amphora, sardara, ceramics, Iron age Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.

Necklace made of amber, Su Romanzesu (Bitti), amber, Iron age Nuoro, National Archaeological Museum G. Asproni.



well **temples, sacred fountains and megaron** temples are widespread all over Sardinia from the Late Bronze Age onwards, and often the different types coexist within the same sacred complex.

An impressive testament to the religious life of the Nuragic peoples is the enormous number of **votive bronze statuettes** - the so-called "**bronzetti**", **a fine selection of which is presented in this exhibition** - reproducing human, male and female figures with various social roles, but also animals, objects and even buildings. The large number of bronze statuettes offers us a rich insight into Nuragic society, comprising their clothing, body language, weapons and food systems. The presence of amber **necklaces and beads**, from excavations carried out over the past 30 years in many Sardinian sanctuaries, **is evidence of the island's close links** not only with the **Mediterranean world**, but also with the **trade and cultural networks of mainland Italy and central Europe**. In the subsequent Iron Age (1st millennium BC), in a society with deeply changed social, economic and architectural practices, although the building of nuraghi had ceased centuries earlier, the existing nuraghi continued to be central to the collective imagination as a symbol of a mythical past to which the island's people traced their identity.

Thus, after the time of the ingenious and audacious builders of Nuragic towers, miniatures of the nuraghi started to be made, in stone, ceramics, bronze and even perishable materials. They were probably used as altars in collective rituals, as suggested by the fact that they have been found in the centre of megalithic buildings that served as "meeting huts".

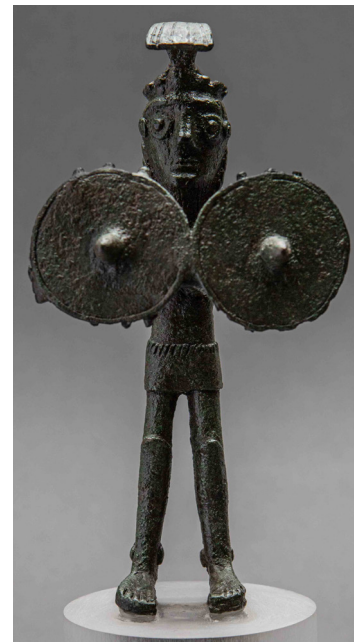
In this period, **some groups prevailed over others**, and the first **aristocracies** were formed. **At Mont'e Prama, one of these aristocracies portrayed and celebrated itself with a unique series of sculptures**, consisting of almost **40 imposing stone statues of warriors**, archers and boxers, as well as models of nuraghi and betyls. For the new society, the distant past of the heroes was an object of veneration and was associated with the community's identity. The National Archaeological Museum in Cagliari has exceptionally loaned one of these statues for this exhibition - that known as the "Boxer" 190 cm tall and weighing about 300 kg: **a once-in-a-lifetime event**. The statues of Mont'e Prama were found in fragments starting from the early campaigns of 1975-1979 and have been reassembled through exceptionally delicate restoration work with surprising results (the first in 2007-2011). With their schematic representations in a conventional geometric style, they are unparalleled in the varied artistic and monumental heritage of Sardinia and are still open to different interpretations. But one thing is certain: **the Nuragic civilisation was coming to an end**. Despite this, **its heritage continued to be visible through the centuries despite the superimposition of new cultures**, first with the arrival of the Phoenicians, who established settlements along the coast of Sardinia from the 9th century BC, then with the conquest by Carthage at the end of the 6th century, and later still with the arrival of the Romans.

Even after the Roman conquest (238 BC), the Nuragic heritage remained alive, as shown by the objects of material culture on display and in some cases by epigraphic sources that include pre-Latin personal names.

As late as the Middle Ages, the nuraghi and even the domus de janas were still in use, and several medieval villages developed around the ancient Nuragic towers. An evolving world that has not forgotten its origins.



Neolithic female statuette,
Montessu, terracotta,
Late Neolithic
Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.



Warrior with two shields,
Abini, bronze,
Iron age
Cagliari, National Archaeological Museum.

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