

## SU NURAXI DI BARUMINI

### Introduction

Located west of Barumini, in the southern inland part of Sardinia, the protohistoric village of Su Nuraxi is one of the most representative of the Nuragic culture typical of the Tyrrhenian island. The *nuraghi*, whose first specimens appeared in the early Bronze Age, in the XVII century B.C., were towers that had the function of surveillance of crops and flocks, defence of the population against enemy assaults, and perhaps also astronomical observation. The Nuragic sites, whose dating is still widely debated, were linked together within a system that covered the whole island: it is estimated that there was a nuraghe about every 3 km<sup>2</sup>. The Nuragic civilisation was divided into five chronological phases, starting from a clan structure, and developing with the progressive affirmation of the local aristocracies, carried out in the 9th-6th centuries BC. Far from being isolated, the Nuragic civilisation had political, economic and cultural relations with the main contemporary Mediterranean civilisations.

### History

Built in the final Bronze Age, between the 12th and 11th centuries BC, on a hill that culminates at an altitude of 238 m and dominates a wide and fertile plain, the nuraghe of Su Nuraxi was built entirely in large blocks of basalt. The first structure consisted of a central conical tower, 18.60 m high, equipped with three overlapping vaulted chambers connected by a spiral staircase. This first structure was later joined by four towers connected by a curtain wall with an upper gallery, which formed an internal courtyard to which gave access only a narrow door, later walled up: it was no longer possible to access the fortress except by a staircase, controlled from the inside. In the Iron Age (9th-8th century BC), at the time of the beginning of the Phoenician, then Carthaginian invasions, the whole site was further fortified by a new wall. From the thirteenth to the sixth century BC, a Nuragic village had developed around this fortification, with 50 to 200 circular huts whose interior plan, initially simple, was later divided into various functional spaces. Built in dry-stone, they were covered with a conical roof; one of them, for its size and its articulation, seems to refer to the head of the community, or to the assemblies of the inhabitants, who celebrated their cults there. The village, whose population was estimated between 100 and 1000 inhabitants, was equipped in the 9th-8th centuries BC with internal roads and a sewer system. Partially destroyed by the Carthaginians in the VI century B.C., the village and its fortress were later reoccupied until the Roman conquest in the II century BC, before being definitively abandoned in the 3rd century, at the end of an almost continuous occupation lasting about 1500 years.

### **Rediscovery and restoration**

Until 1940, very few remains of the Nuragic site, which had been used for a long time as a quarry for the recovery of building materials, were visible; the remains of the Nuragic village were then completely buried. The whole archaeological complex, revealed in 1940 after torrential rains, was systematically excavated from 1950 to 1957. From 1990 to 1994, an extensive campaign of structural consolidation and preventive maintenance work was carried out in order to allow public access to the site; these interventions, even if completed with modern materials (in addition to wood, concrete and metals), were carried out in such a way as not to compromise the authenticity of the site. The upper part of the Nuragic tower, destroyed, has not been reconstructed. The archaeological site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997, covering an area of 3.2 hectares. It is considered one of the most important and complete manifestations of megalithic architecture in Sardinia, witnessing the flourishing of Sardinia in the Bronze Age, and its subsequent history, for a long period marked by Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman invasions. Its early urban development demonstrates the ingenuity of a Mediterranean island community in the use of the few materials it had available, from the protohistoric age onwards.