

A NEW INSCRIBED STELE FROM THE TOPHET OF NORA. A NOTE ON THE PUNIC VOTIVE STONE MONUMENTS REUSED IN THE CHURCH OF SANT'EFISIO (PULA, SARDINIA)

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Abstract: The paper presents an inscribed Punic stele reused in the church of Sant'Efisio di Pula (Sardinia). The typological analysis of the stone monument and the votive formula of the inscription indicate that the stele was primarily dedicated as an ex voto in the tophet of Nora, located near the church. The paper also takes stock of the re-use of Punic stelae from the tophet of Nora in the church of Sant'Efisio and the adjacent structure, known as the "Casa dell'Alter Nos".

Keywords: Phoenician and Punic Sardinia; Tophet; Votive Stelae; Northwest Semitic Epigraphy; Re-Use of Ancient Monuments.

1. THE OBJECT OF THE STUDY AND THE CONTEXT OF THE FINDING (S.F.)

The object of this paper is an inscribed Punic stele, as far as is known, hitherto unknown and unpublished, reused in one of the central pillars of the church of Sant'Efisio a Nora (Pula, Sardinia).¹

Although the existence of Punic² and Roman³ monuments reused in the church of Sant'Efisio in Nora has been known to scholars for a long time, it has never been the object of systematic studies so far. That's why the discovery of the new stele led the writer to start an ongoing investigation project aiming at bringing new knowledge on the tophet of Nora starting from the review of the monuments reused in the nearby church of Sant'Efisio and in the buildings adjacent to it. The study has involved the re-examination of the monuments reused in the structure of the church and which are visible, through the analysis of archival documents and the execution of new drawings of the documents still in sight.⁴

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1 I would like to express my deep gratitude to the officials of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le province di Oristano e Sud Sardegna who authorized (prot. n. 11693, 06/04/2021 and n. 27719, 27/07/2021) and made possible the research. I also thank the Municipality of Pula and the Municipality of Cagliari for authorizing access to the facilities. My gratitude goes also to the Confraternita di Sant'Efisio of Pula and in particular to its President Mr Emanuele Piddu and to the brothers Mr Giulio Piddu and Mr Ignazio Abis for the availability with which they made possible accessing to the church and facilitated the execution of the documentation.

2 One of the best known documents is certainly the stele with an anthropomorphic figure reused in the southern wall of the church, well known to the inhabitants of Pula and visitors, very often photographed and reproduced in the works dedicated to the church of Sant'Efisio (see e.g., Coroneo – Serra 2004, fig. 253; Pala 2018, fig. 3). The first mention of the stele, drawn by Gaetano Cara in 1845 (Zucca 2011, pp. 122-123, fig. 6), is in a letter published by Vittorio Angius in 1835 (Angius 1835, p. 44; see also Zucca 2018, p. 52, note 32). For the stele, see Tore 1985, pp. 50-51, fig. 8; *infra*, § 1.2., figs. 9-12.

3 See, e.g., the epigraph (*CIL* X 7542) reused as a step near the altar, which commemorates the restoration of the aqueduct of Nora, between 425 and 450 CE (Pergola *et al.* 2010, p. 384; for the inscription see Zucca 1994, p. 876 and note 59; for the aqueduct, Ghiotto 2004, pp. 146-148). Also this document was mentioned by Vittorio Angius in 1835 (Angius 1935, p. 44; see also Zucca 2018, p. 52, note 32) and analyzed by Giovanni Spano and Gaetano Cara in 1845 (Zucca 2011, pp. 122-123).

4 A second part of the project aims to identify, through the execution of thermographic shots, the exact arrangement of the stelae reused, between the end of the 800 and the beginning of the 900, for the construction of the first floor of the structure immediately north of the church, known as "house of the pastor" or "Casa dell'Alter Nos".

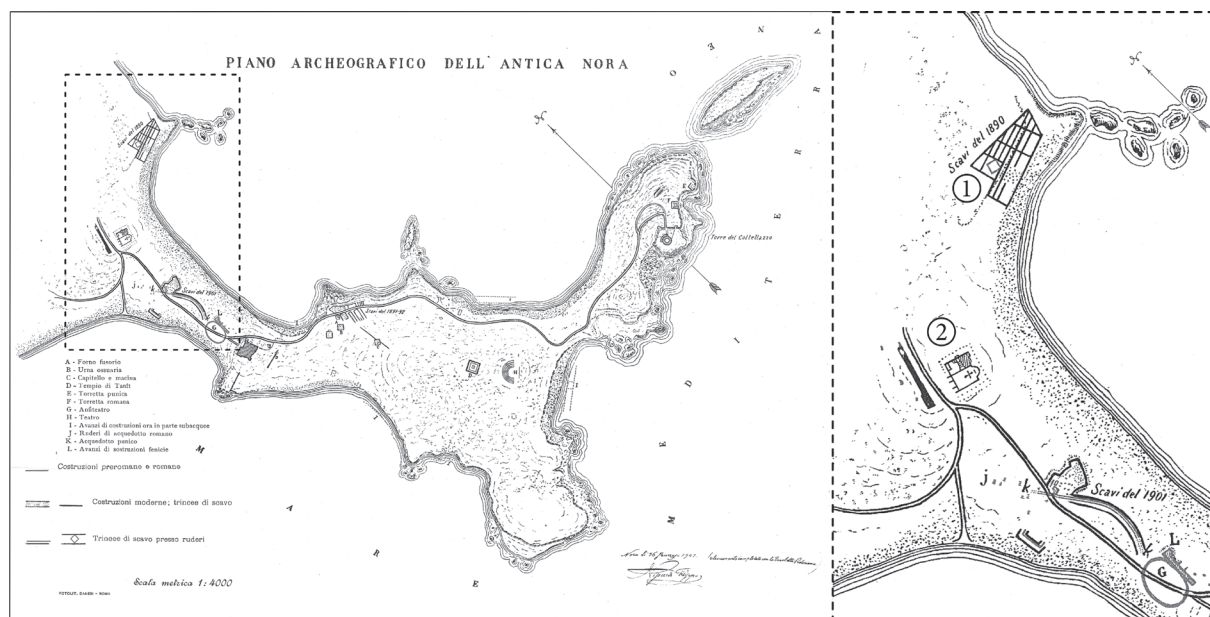


FIG. 1. Archaeological map of Nora with indication of the excavations carried out between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century: 1) Tophet; 2) Church of Sant'Efisio (re-elaborated by S. Floris from Patroni 1904 [Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg/„monant1904"/„0494"]).

Despite the inscription of the new stele not being in an optimal state of preservation – probably due to the removal of the plasters that covered it until the 70s – its reading allows the recognition of the votive formula⁵ of the type widely documented in central Mediterranean child cremation Punic sanctuaries known as *tophet*.⁶ The epigraphic data, as well as the typological analysis of the monument, make it plausible to hypothesize that the stele was originally voted in the tophet of Nora,⁷ located near the place chosen for the construction of the church of Sant'Efisio.

1.1. *The Stela's Original Archaeological Context: The Tophet of Nora (S.F.)*

The tophet of Nora is located by the sea, at the northern end of the isthmus leading from the mainland to the peninsula on which the ancient city was founded (FIG. 1).

5 See the contribution of Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo, *infra*, § 2.3.

6 It is well known that the biblical term “tophet” is conventionally used to designate a particular type of sanctuaries attested, starting from the 8th century BCE, only in certain Phoenician and Punic sites of the central Mediterranean (North Africa, Sardinia, Sicily and Malta), being at present unknown in the Phoenician homeland and in the colonies of the western Mediterranean. The most important archaeological feature of these sanctuaries is the presence of an open-air area, in the studies being referred to as “urn-field”, designated for the deposition of ceramic urns containing the remains of children (mostly newborns) and/or animals also at an early age (mostly lambs) and stone votive monuments (stelae and cippi), sometimes inscribed (for the archaeology of the tophet see Ciasca 2002). The literature on the subject is very consistent and, therefore, it is necessary to refer to some general works to which we refer for the previous bibliography: González Wagner – Ruiz Cabrero 2002; Xella 2013; D'Andrea 2014; Melchiorri 2016a; 2016b; D'Andrea 2018; Ribichini 2020; Xella 2020; Garnand 2022.

7 On the tophet of Nora see Vivinet 1891; Patroni 1904, coll. 157-165, 180-183, 228-248; Barreca 1961; Guzzo Amadasi 1967, pp. 104-107, Sard. 25-30; Moscati – Uberti 1970; Pesce 1972, pp. 22-26; Chiera 1978, pp. 33, 53-54; Moscati 1971; 1981; Tore 1985; Bonetto – Carraro – Minella 2016; Melchiorri 2016a, pp. 272-273; Del Vais 2019.

Initially believed to be a necropolis,⁸ the sanctuary was excavated under the direction of Filippo Vivanet between May 19 and June 21 of 1890, a year after his fortuitous discovery following a storm of exceptional violence.⁹

The excavation report published in 1891¹⁰ and the typological study of the materials constitute the primary sources of information on the sanctuary, operative between the 6th and at least the 4th/3rd century BCE.¹¹

Under the field direction of Filippo Nissardi,¹² a total area of 1679 sqm was investigated, bringing to light an open-air area used for the deposition of urns and some structures for which a functional connection with the sanctuary has been hypothesized (FIG. 2).

On the coast, about 40 m east of the depositional field, a semicircular area bordered by a wall (H. max. preserved 2 m circa)¹³ showing traces of prolonged and repeated fire action was found and interpreted as *ustrinum*.¹⁴

A further structure, found almost on the edge of the «necropoli»¹⁵ – that is, of the sanctuary – was described as a building [...] of which remain the foundations of a nearly square compartment (m. 7.50 x 6.80) formed by large stones.¹⁶ It has been proposed that this structure could have been a “ceremonial building”¹⁷ or a *sacellum*¹⁸ within the Punic tophet.

At about 15 m from the stake and over 20 m from the «funebre recinto»¹⁹ – that is, the limit of the deposition field – another structure was found, whose only remains were a wall with a mosaic floor nearby, which covered the beaten floor of a room accessible by some steps.²⁰ The construction of this structure has been attributed to a restructuring dating to the Roman age.²¹

To deal specifically with the depositional field, it consisted of an open-air area of about 200 sqm. A total of 209 ceramic urns²² were found in this area, laid in a soil formed by compact, reddish sand to be con-

8 Despite the fact that an archival document published by Sabatino Moscati in 1981 (Moscati 1981, pp. 157-160) shows that Filippo Vivanet realized that he was facing a special type of sanctuary (which today in literature is conventionally referred to as “tophet”), the discoverer of the tophet of Nora published the archaeological context as an incineration necropolis (Vivanet 1891), followed by Giovanni Patroni (Patroni 1901; 1904). The context was instead recognized as a “tophet” sanctuary by Louis Carton (Carton 1908, pp. 149-152), followed by Pierre Cintas (Cintas 1950, p. 4), Gennaro Pesce (Pesce 1957, pp. 24-26; 1972, pp. 26-28), and Ferruccio Barreca, who definitely demonstrated the nature of the sanctuary with a study dedicated to the inscriptions found in it (Barreca 1961).

9 Vivanet 1891, p. 299.

10 Vivanet 1891.

11 This chronological framework is mainly proposed on the basis of the typological study of the urns (Chiera 1978, pp. 155-156) and stelae (Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 43-45) and of the dating for the inscriptions found in the tophet (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 25-30; Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 44-45). Nonetheless, a frequentation of the sanctuary in the Hellenistic-Roman phase (4th/3rd century BCE-1st century BCE/1st century CE) has been hypothesized thanks to other finds from the sanctuary, including some terracotta figurines and lead artefacts found in the depositional field inside some urns or near them (Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273).

12 Patroni 1904, col. 158; Moscati 1981, p. 160.

13 From a long unpublished archival document, subsequently published by Sabatino Moscati in 1981, we learn that Filippo Vivanet interpreted this structure as a retaining wall (Moscati 1981, p. 158).

14 Vivanet 1891, pp. 300-301. See also Chiera 1978, p. 54; Ribichini 2002, p. 426; Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273; Del Vais 2019, p. 334.

15 Vivanet 1891, p. 302.

16 Vivanet 1891, p. 302.

17 Vivanet 1891, p. 302.

18 D’Andrea 2018, p. 11, note 20.

19 Vivanet 1891, p. 302.

20 Vivanet 1891, p. 302.

21 Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273.

22 Patroni 1904, col. 159.

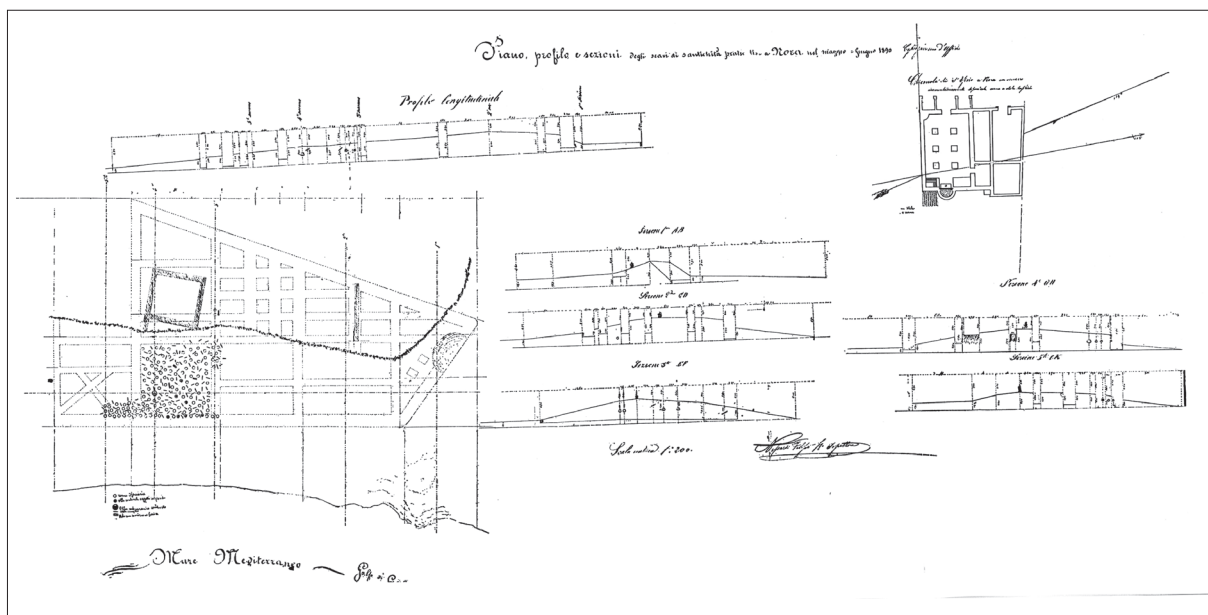


FIG. 2. One of the plates prepared by Nissardi in 1890, with plan and section of the excavations in the tophet of Nora and the positioning of the group of stelae placed next to the church of Sant'Efisio (from Moscati 1981).



FIG. 3. Nora, the excavations of the tophet in 1890 (from D'Andrea 2019; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).



FIG. 4. Nora, stelae exposed in front of the church of Sant’Efsio at the time of the excavations of the tophet (from Del Vais 2019; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).

sidered as virgin soil.²³ The urns mainly consisted of low, bellied, and two-handled cooking pots,²⁴ systematically closed with the lid overturned,²⁵ containing burnt human and/or animal bones²⁶ and, sometimes, artifacts alone²⁷ or associated with osteological remains.²⁸

In the depositional field, 157 stelae and one base-altar²⁹ were also found (FIGS. 3-4). Other kinds of artifacts associated with the depositions were documented less frequently, such as terracottas – including lamps, “à bougie” plates, double paterae,³⁰ clay figurines³¹ –, lead objects³² and a stone whorl.³³

23 Vivanet 1891, p. 300.

24 Vivanet 1891, p. 300; Patroni 1904, col. 158. The urns of the tophet of Nora have been referred to two main types and ascribed to a time span ranging from the 6th to the 4th century BCE, with a concentration of attestations in the 4th century BCE (Chiera 1978, pp. 155-156). The clear predilection for cooking forms found in the tophet of Nora has parallels in the homologous sanctuaries of Sulci and Monte Sirai and attests to a practice that has been proposed to recognize as a typical local expression of the region of Sulcis (Melchiorri 2016b, p. 161).

25 Vivanet 1891, p. 300.

26 For an urn containing the remains of two animals of which one identified as “sheep”, see Vivanet 1891, p. 300.

27 Patroni 1904, coll. 59-160. These include the seven urns containing exclusively miniaturized lead objects – including, plates, tripods, lamps, spoons and spatulas, knives, a disc and a circle (Patroni 1904, coll. 180-183, fig. 20; Chiera 1978, pp. 131-134, pls. XIV-XXII, XIII, 1-5; Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273, fig. 2). This kind of findings, also found in the depositional field outside the urns (Vivanet 1891, pp. 301-302), finds comparison in similar artifacts from the tophet of Tharros (Acquaro 1976, p. 199, pl. LII.1; Floris 2021, p. 97) and Sousse (Cintas 1947, pp. 26-27, figs. 54-56; D’Andrea 2014, p. 86, fig. 3.13).

28 See, for example, the indication of an urn containing burnt bones and, mixed with them, a crude ox head, in red terracotta, bearing the signs of an ancient fracture in the horns, which made it difficult to understand whether it was a part of a vase, or other (Vivanet 1891, p. 301).

29 Patroni 1904, col. 159.

30 Chiera 1978, pp. 149, 152-153; Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273.

31 The attestations are variously dated between the 4th and the 3rd century BCE (Patroni 1904, col. 189, Tipi I-III; Chiera 1978, pp. 62-66; Melchiorri 2016a, p. 273).

32 See above, note 27.

33 Vivanet 1891, p. 300.

As regards the analysis of the layout of the urns and the stelae, and the relationship between them, the only source available is the brief description provided by Filippo Vivanet in 1891. From the report it is possible to learn some essential information about the small size of the urnfield, the high density of the depositions and the possibility of recognizing a certain complexity in the stele-urn relationship, since in addition to the ratio of 1:1 presented by the author as the more recurrent scheme, cases in which a stone monument was associated with a group of urns³⁴ were also documented.

As for the stelae of the tophet of Nora,³⁵ their reordering is problematic for the phenomenon of reuse as building materials of these monuments – e.g., in the church of Sant’Efsio ad its annexes³⁶ – and for the dispersion of some materials both before and after the excavations of the sanctuary.

At the end of the campaign of 1890, only 82 stelae³⁷ and the base were brought to the Museum of Cagliari and were published in the first study and catalogue dedicated by Giovanni Patroni to the stone monuments from the tophet of Nora.³⁸

The same Giovanni Patroni informs us that the remaining 75 stelae, considered duplicates or scraps, were with reckless advice left on the spot, buried into a ditch near the church of Sant’Efsio. Shortly before he arrived in Sardinia, these monuments were extracted from a contractor from Pula and used as a building material for the new upper floor of the “Casa dell’Alter Nos”, attached to the previously mentioned church.³⁹

The stelae from the tophet of Nora then at the Museum of Cagliari – including also other specimens found before the excavations of 1989⁴⁰ – were studied and published by Sabatino Moscati and Maria Luisa Uberti in 1970.⁴¹ Their catalogue is still the reference point for the studies on Punic stone production in Nora.

The *corpus* was later enriched with the addition of a stele from the Don Armeni collection presented by Sabatino Moscati in 1971⁴² and three stone monuments reused in the structures of the church of Sant’Efsio and its annexes published by Giovanni Tore in 1985.⁴³

Another stele was fortuitously found by a private and is currently kept at the Museum of Pula.⁴⁴ Previously known only on a photographic basis,⁴⁵ the latter stele was presented in 2020 by Alessandro Mazzariol together with 18 other monuments – belonging to the group of 75 stelae buried in the back of the church of

34 Vivanet 1891, p. 300. The complexity that characterizes the depositional contexts – a trait that unites all the tophets – reflects articulated ritual practices whose outlines appear difficult to define on an archaeological basis. This is due both to the lack of data related to excavations conducted with non-stratigraphic methodologies and to the generalized phenomenon of ancient reuse of the stelae, more or less markedly documented in almost all the known tophets. For the problems related to the study of the stelae and their relationship with the urns cf. in general D’Andrea 2018, pp. 105-107.

35 For the stelae found in the tophet of Nora see Patroni 1904, coll. 228-248; Moscati – Uberti 1970; Moscati 1971; Tore 1985; Mazzariol 2020.

36 See *infra*, § 1.2.

37 Among them were 5 inscribed stelae (Patroni 1904, col. 159; for the inscriptions see Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 26-30).

38 Patroni 1904, coll. 228-248. See also Moscati 1981, pl. II.

39 Patroni 1901, p. 367. The Alter Nos is a leading figure in the Feast of Sant’Efsio, representing the religious and civil tradition as it embodies public thanksgiving to the Saint. Today a delegate of the Municipality of Cagliari, at the time of the Spanish monarchy (and later the Savoy) the Alter Nos was the Viceroy and paraded on behalf of the king in the procession that, starting from the Church of Sant’Efsio in Stampace (Cagliari) leads the effigy of Sant’Efsio up to Nora, where the Saint was martyred according to tradition. For Sant’Efsio and the feast and procession in his honor, see lastly Concas – Marras – Puddu 2018.

40 On these stelae see Mazzariol 2020, p. 13, with previous bibliography.

41 Moscati – Uberti 1970.

42 Moscati 1971.

43 Tore 1985.

44 Mazzariol 2020, pp. 15, 25, n. 19, pl. II.19.

45 Cuccuru 2002, pl. II.2; Bartoloni 2017, fig. 61; Bondi 2017, fig. 291, in the middle.

Sant’Efsio –, identified by the comparison between two famous photoshoots dating back to the excavation of the tophet (FIGS. 3-4) and the published monuments.⁴⁶

1.2. *The Punic Stelae Reused in the Church of Sant’Efsio and in the Adjacent Structures*

Located about 200 meters south/west of the tophet (FIG. 1), in an area used for funerary purposes in Roman and early Christian times,⁴⁷ the church of Sant’Efsio⁴⁸ was built from scratch, with a three-nave plan and French-Catalan proto-Romanesque forms, in the 11th century CE (FIG. 5), after the judge of Cagliari Constantine-Salusio II de Lacon-Gunale donated the title of Sant’Efsio of Nora to the abbey of St. Victor of Marseille in 1089.⁴⁹

The proto-Romanesque church was probably erected on the site of a previous early medieval *martyrium* arose on the place of martyrdom of the Saint. The dating and plan of this previous building are uncertain, although the semi-hypogeous room with a barrel-vaulted ceiling extending under the presbytery and ending with a small dome in correspondence with the north aisle (FIGS. 5-6) is commonly ascribed to it.⁵⁰

Over time, the church underwent major renovations. Among these interventions are raising the floor, performed at a time no longer determinable, and the breakthrough of the church’s facade and the construction of a two-storey porch, dating back to the 17th-18th century CE.⁵¹

Since 1977 the church has been the subject of some restoration projects and consolidation works that led to the execution of some archaeological excavations under its pavement⁵² and the removal of the interior plasters.

This last intervention led to the exposition of the inscribed stele that constitutes the core of the present work. As shown below, it is a parallelepiped sandstone stele with an empty “niche” in the upper part of the main face.⁵³ The stele is reused as a building material in the third southern pillar of the church’s central nave, more precisely, the middle one of the 11th century structure (FIGS. 5-6). The front face of the stele faces the intercolumn towards the entrance of the church; the lower face of the base faces the central nave. The stele is placed in correspondence with a restoration of the pillar, built originally with large square blocks of sandstone. It is therefore possible that it could have been installed as part of a restoration work following the construction of the proto-Romanesque church.⁵⁴

Some photographs taken in 1977 (FIGS. 7-8), preserved in the archive of the *Soprintendenza* of Cagliari, allow us to recognize the state of the stele immediately after the removal of the plaster. In the upper part of the stele two small slabs of dark stone – today removed – can be seen, probably put in place in order to fill the cavity of the niche and obtain a flat surface before plastering the pillar.

46 Mazzariol 2020, pp. 16-33, nn. 1-18, pls. I-II.

47 Tronchetti – Bernardini 1985; Mureddu – Stefani 1986; Spanu 2000, pp. 79-80; Pergola *et al.* 2010, pp. 390-391.

48 For the church of Sant’Efsio cf. Angius 1847; Delogu 1953, pp. 54-55; Fois 1964, pp. 277-284; Botteri 1978, p. 113; Serra 1989, p. 336; Coroneo 1993, scheda 5; Spanu 2000, pp. 77-81; Coroneo – Serra 2004, pp. 248-249; Coroneo 2005, p. 100; Usai 2011; Bridi 2018; Pala 2018. For the figure of Sant’Efsio and his worship see Spanu 2000, pp. 61-81; Virdis 2016.

49 Coroneo 1993, pp. 38, 40-41. See also Pergola *et al.* 2010, pp. 384-393.

50 See Coroneo 1993; Spanu 2000, pp. 77-81; Coroneo 2004; Virdis 2016, pp. 459-460. It has also been proposed that the Middle Byzantine plutei found in the waters of the islet of San Macario may be referred to this sanctuary (Coroneo 2000, p. 105; Spanu 2000, p. 81; Coroneo – Serra 2004, p. 249; Martorelli *et al.* 2015, p. 43). See also Virdis 2016, p. 460 and note 21, with previous bibliography.

51 Usai 2011, pp. 138-142; Pala 2018, pp. 165-167.

52 Tronchetti – Bernardini 1985.

53 See *infra*, § 2.

54 The exact moment of its reuse as building materials cannot be precisely defined in the absence of an overall study of the building history of the church. I sincerely thank Arch Elena Romoli for the valuable advice on the subject.

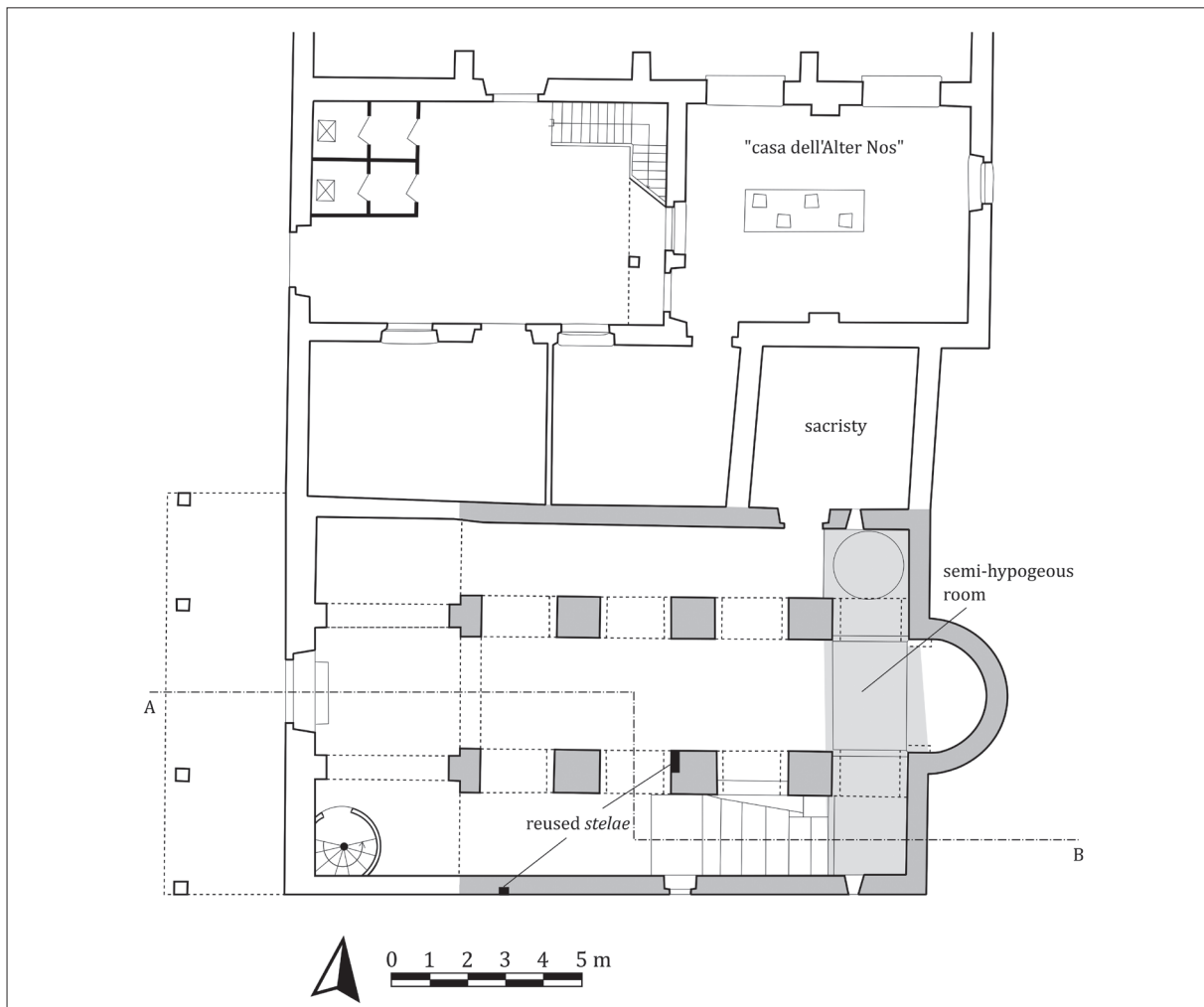


FIG. 5. Church of Sant'Eufisio, Nora. Plan of the church with indication of the reused stelae: the grey filling in the background indicates the structures of the church of the 11th century (re-elaborated by S. Floris from cadastral map and Coroneo 1993).

In the photos (FIGS. 7-8), abundant remains of plaster are visible immediately to the left of the stone slabs, namely in the epigraphic field, which occupies the upper part of the base of the stele. It is quite likely that the poor state of preservation of the inscription, which partially precludes its reading, is attributable to the removal of these substantial traces of plaster.

Further restoration works carried out in 1983 led to the identification of three other stelae, published by Giovanni Tore in 1985.⁵⁵

The first stele,⁵⁶ known to ancient scholars since 1835,⁵⁷ was placed in the church's southern external wall and is still *in situ* (FIG. 9).

55 Tore 1985.

56 Tore 1985, pp. 49-51, n. 3, fig. 8.

57 See Zucca 2011, pp. 122-123; cfr. *supra*, note 2.

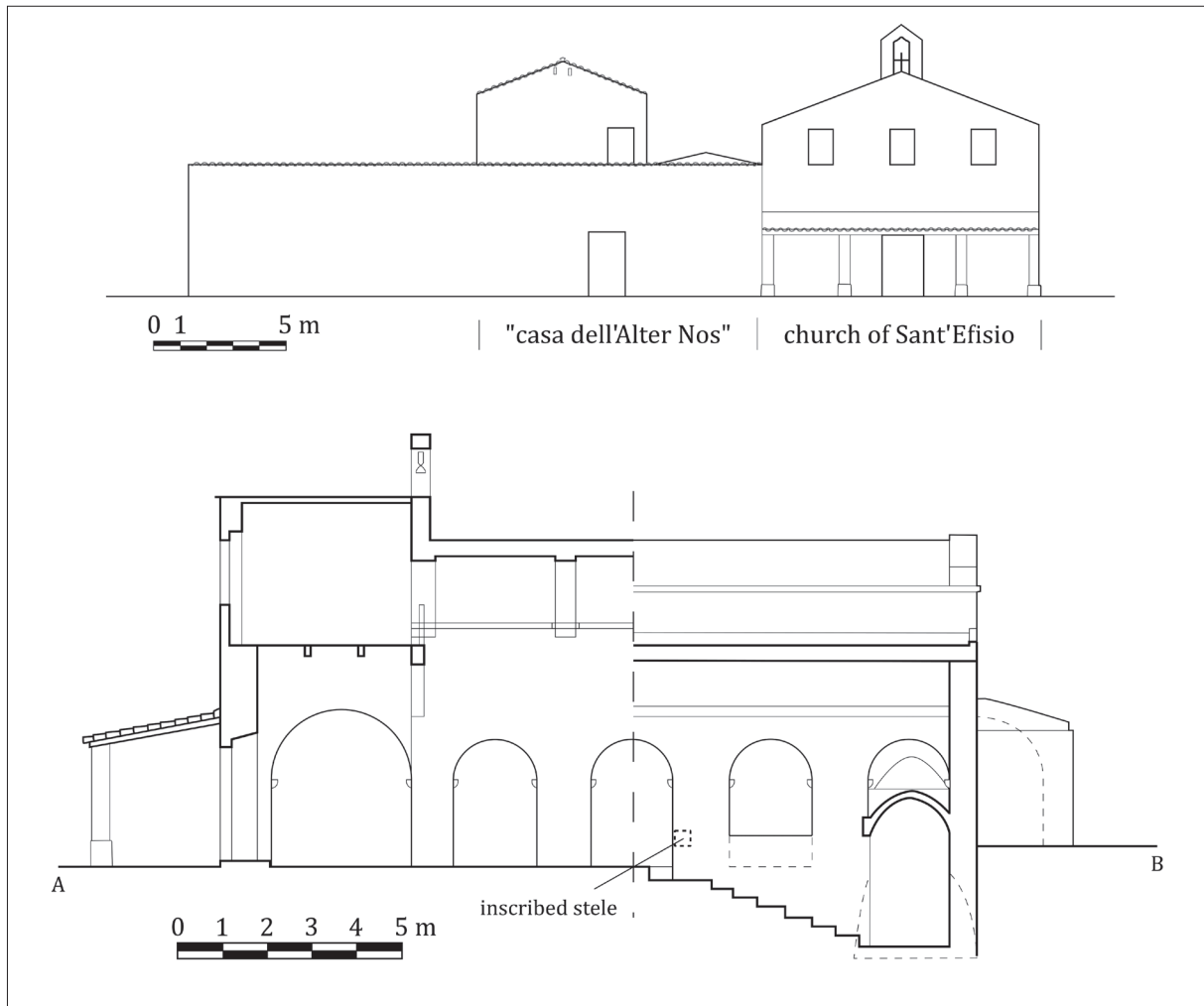


FIG. 6. Church of Sant'Eufisio, Nora. Above, west façade (elaborated by S. Floris); below, section A-B, see previous figure (re-elaborated by S. Floris from Fois 1964).

The reuse of the stele has sometimes been ascribed to the time of the reconstruction *ex novo* of the church after 1089,⁵⁸ but – as in the case of the stele reused inside the church – the location of the stele in correspondence of a restoration of the original structure of the wall⁵⁹ suggests caution in this regard.⁶⁰

At the moment of its reuse, the stele, carved from a reddish yellow⁶¹ sandstone, was deprived of its lower part and, perhaps, even of its upper part.⁶² Within the niche-shaped framing – perhaps reproducing the type of the simplified *naos* – is an anthropomorphic figure. Despite the surfaces of the figurine are rath-

58 See, e.g. Coroneo – Serra 2004, p. 249; Mazzariol 2020, p. 15.

59 See in this regard the hypothesis according to which the barrel vault of the south nave would be the result of a repair (e.g. Coroneo 1993, scheda 5; Coroneo – Serra 2004, p. 249).

60 See *supra* and note 54.

61 Munsell Soil Color Chart 7.5 YR 7/6.

62 Tore 1985, p. 50.



FIG. 7. Church of Sant'Eufisio, Nora. The photo shows the inside of the church during the restoration and research works conducted in 1977. The location of the inscribed stele, reused in the third pillar on the right, is indicated by the circle (with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna; photographic archive, n. 15868).



FIG. 8. Church of Sant'Eufisio, Nora. Detail of the restoration and research works conducted in 1977. The location of the inscribed stele is indicated by the circle (with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna; photographic archive, n. 15275).



FIG. 9. Church of Sant'Eufisio, Nora. The stele reused in the southern wall (photo M. Pilia; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).

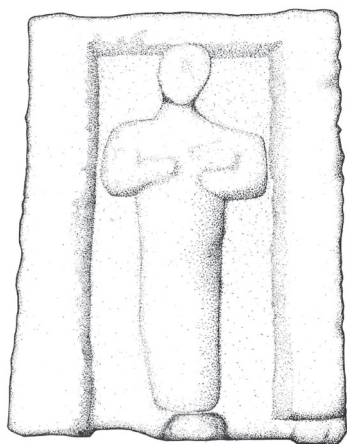


FIG. 10. Drawing of the stele reused in the southern wall of the Church of Sant'Eufisio published by G. Tore (drawing by F.S. Satta; from Tore 1985).



FIG. 11. Drawing of the stele reused in the southern wall of the Church of Sant'Eufisio by G. Cara (from Zucca 2011).

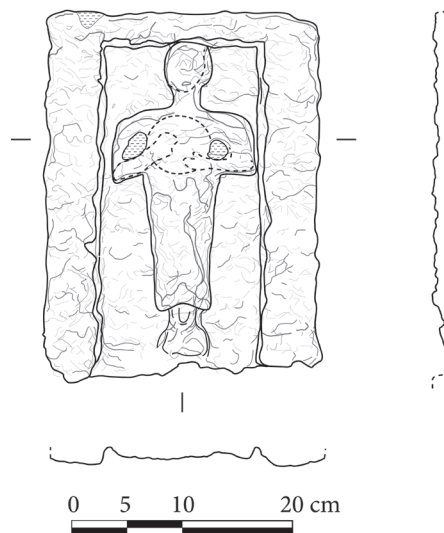


FIG. 12. New drawing of the stele reused in the southern wall of the Church of Sant'Eufisio (the dotted pattern indicates plaster residues; drawing by S. Floris).

er worn and its details – especially those of the face – are not legible due to consumption, Giovanni Tore proposed an interpretation as a deity standing on a truncated-pyramidal base, with a long robe, arms on the chest, perhaps holding the disc and a dating between the 5th and the 4th century BCE.⁶³

The hypothetical character of the reading advanced by the scholar was enhanced by the fact that the publication was accompanied by a drawing that reproduces a figure with hands folded to the chest, without disc (FIG. 10). A similar solution, although more cursive, characterizes a depiction of the same stele executed in 800 by Gaetano Cara, demonstrating that the difficulty of recognizing the characters of the human figure preceded the application and subsequent removal of the external plaster of the church (FIG. 11).

The validity of Giovanni Tore's interpretation finds however support in the creation of a new photographic documentation (FIG. 9) and a new drawing (FIG. 12), in which the contours of the disc are more clearly recognizable. In the stele we can therefore recognize a further example of the iconography of the female figure with a disc on the chest, in the frontally standing version. This iconography is attested in six others stelae from the tophet of Nora⁶⁴ and it is known in the repertoires of other Punic centers,⁶⁵ especially in Sulci, where the iconography finds an extraordinary diffusion.⁶⁶ Although the poor state of conservation prevents the appreciation of the details of the figure, some characteristics – the rendering of the arms with particularly protruding elbows, which give a trapezoidal physiognomy to the upper part of the body, the

63 Tore 1985, p. 50.

64 Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 37, nn. 64-68.

65 For Carthage, see Bartoloni 1976, p. 72, nn. 587, 589, 593, 595, 596, 598, 602, 606-607; Picard 1978, p. 80, s.v. *Personnages*, A.V; for Mothya, see Moscati – Uberti 1981, pp. 49-50, nn. 894-899; for Sulci, see Bartoloni 1986, nn. 211-212, 214-270, 280-433; Moscati 1986, pp. 65-61; for Monte Sirai, see Bondi 1972, p. 65, nn. 17-33. For the iconography of the female figure with a disc at the chest – generally interpreted as a tympanist (for a summary of the proposed interpretations see Modeo 2013, p. 49, with bibliography) – in the stelae from the tophets see Fariselli 2007, pp. 29-30, with previous bibliography.

66 Moscati 1986, pp. 61-65; 1988, pp. 37-40. For the possibility that a stele from the tophet of Nora depicting a female figure with a disc (Moscati – Uberti 1970, n. 69) was imported from Sulci, see Moscati 1981, p. 161.

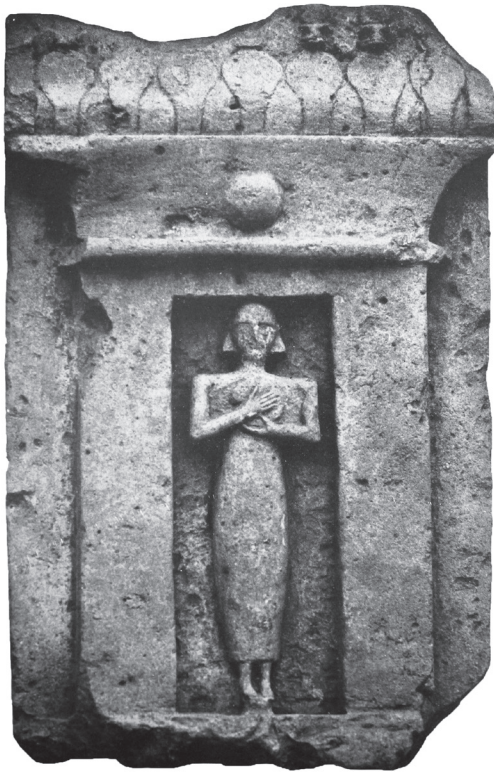


FIG. 13. Stele n. 265 from the tophet of Sulci (from Moscati 1986).



FIG. 14. Stele n. 317 from the tophet of Sulci (from Bartoloni 1986).

long dress that leaves the feet uncovered, the small base on which the figure stands – allow to compare the stele from Nora to some specimens from the tophet of Sulci,⁶⁷ dating between the middle of the 5th and the middle of the 4th century BCE⁶⁸ (Figs. 13-14).

In the same works carried out in 1983 other two stelae,⁶⁹ recovered and transferred to the Museum of Pula, where they are currently exposed,⁷⁰ were found reused in an annex of the sacred building.⁷¹

Giovanni Tore does not provide further information about the circumstances of the discovery, so it is difficult to verify whether the stelae belong to the group of 75 buried specimens at the time of the discovery of the tophet and then unduly used as building material for the first floor of the “Casa dell’Alter Nos”.⁷²

The two stelae, having on their main face a simplified *naiskos* framing and, respectively, the iconography of the betyl triad (FIG. 15) and the so-called “sign of Tanit” (FIG. 16), have been attributed to the 4th-3rd century BCE.⁷³

67 See e.g. Bartoloni 1986, nn. 265, 317.

68 Moscati 1986, p. 83.

69 Tore 1985, pp. 49-50, nn. 1-2, figs. 6-7.

70 Mazzariol 2020, p. 15, note 38.

71 Tore 1985, p. 49.

72 See *supra*, § 1.1.

73 Tore 1985, pp. 49-51.



FIG. 15. Stele with betyl triad reused in an annex of the sacred building (with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna; photographic archive, n. 23433).



FIG. 16. Stele with “sign of Tanit” reused in an annex of the sacred building (with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna; photographic archive, n. 23434).

2. THE NEW INSCRIBED STELE FROM THE TOPHET OF NORA (S.F.; M.G.A.G.)

2.1. *Description (S.F)*

Object: aniconic stele

Location: Church of Sant’Efsio, Nora, placed in one of the southern pillars of the median nave, more precisely, the central one of the 11th century structure. The stele is located in correspondence with a restoration of the pillar, built originally with large square blocks of sandstone.

The front face of the stele faces the intercolumn towards the entrance of the church; the lower face of the base points towards the central nave.

Size: H. max. 58 cm; L. max. 24 cm; base 23 x 23 cm.

Material: Lithology refers to a quaternary beach sandstone⁷⁴ with a medium to fine granulometry and pale brown color.⁷⁵

74 It is a lithology referable to sea-coast deposits in facies of “Panchina Tirreniana” *Auct.* belonging to the Subsintema of Calamosca (PVM₁). For a deepening of the features of the deposits of the clastic succession see Barca *et al.* 2017. For the stone materials used for the realization of the stelae of Nora see Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 18-20. For the sandstone quarries present in Nora and its territory see lastly Previato 2016. Near the area of the tophet, some cuts in the “Panchina Tirreniana” outcrops facing in sea, towards south-east and bordering towards the inland, are, however, a possible indication of the likely use of this site for the purpose of obtaining material for the realization of the stelae and/or blocks for the sacred buildings of the sanctuary. I sincerely thank Claudio Floris for the help provided for the geological framing of the stele.

75 Munsell Soil Color Chart 7.5 YR 6/3.



FIG. 17. Inscribed stele reused in one of the pillars of the church of Sant'Efisio (photo S. Floris; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).



FIG. 18. Inscribed stele reused in one of the pillars of the church of Sant'Efisio (the dotted pattern indicates plaster residues; drawing by S. Floris).

Figures: FIGS. 17-18.

Observations: Decent state of preservation. The stele does not appear to have been cut for placement in the pillar at the time of its reuse.⁷⁶ However, it is not possible to exclude *a priori* that for such purposes it may have been deprived of the right portion of the base or its upper portion.

The surfaces, originally discreetly smoothed despite the granulometric characteristics of sandstone, are now slightly abraded and grooved by aligned marks left by a chisel probably at the time of removal of modern plaster during the restoration work started in 1977. Traces of modern plaster still cover large portions of the base and, to a lesser extent, the front face of the stele.

Because of these manipulations, the reading of the epigraph is largely impaired.

There are no traces of paint or ancient plaster.

2.2. Typological and Iconographic Remarks (S.F.)

From a typological point of view, the stele proposes characteristics that allow easy additions to the corpus of the stelae of the tophet of Nora.

⁷⁶ For example, the stele n. 70 of the catalogue of Sabatino Moscati and Maria Luisa Uberti has very similar proportions between the base and the simplified *aedicula*, which however has an anthropomorphic motif within the main panel (Moscati – Uberti 1970, n. 70).

The stele belongs to the type of the parallelepiped stele with an empty niche-framing carved in the upper part of the main face.⁷⁷

The stele has a square section base (23 x 23 cm) overhanging at least on the left side,⁷⁸ but perhaps originally also on the right side.⁷⁹

As for the parallelepipedon that constitutes the main body of the stele, the front face presents a width almost equal at the base (22 cm) and on the top (21 cm), as happens in Nora in most cases.⁸⁰ The parallelepipedon has a flat crowning.⁸¹

The lateral, posterior, and upper faces of the stele are not visible and the sections are therefore not evaluable,⁸² as is the rear of the crowning.⁸³

From a dimensional point of view, with its 58 cm of height, the stele is placed without problems within the stone production of Nora, where the monuments have an average height of about 50 cm,⁸⁴ and in which small monuments prevail from a numerical point of view,⁸⁵ since only 11 stelae have a height of more than 80 cm.⁸⁶

However, it is from the iconographic perspective that the new stele represents an important update of the repertoire of stone monuments from the tophet of Nora.

The stele reproduces the iconography of the empty niche, whose edge has no decoration and is obtained by



FIG. 19. Inscribed stele reused in the church of Sant'Efisio (photo S. Floris; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).

77 For these characteristics the stele could be assigned to the fourth of the five groups identified by Anna Maria Bisi for the stelae of the tophet of Nora (Bisi 1967, p. 161).

78 The overhang of the base on the left side is attested in Nora (see e.g. Moscati – Uberti 1970, pl. XXXVIII, n. 75).

79 The overhang of the base is a common feature in the repertoire of the stelae of the tophet of Nora: the overhang may cover all four faces of the base – conformed therefore as well as a hoof –, on the front and side faces, on the front and rear faces, on the side faces or on the front face (Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 26). It is worth recalling that Sabatino Moscati pointed out that the particular character of the lateral overhang appears as a clear reflection of the iconography of the Egyptianising stele (Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 26).

80 Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 26. However, because of the mortar that binds the stele to the other blocks of the pillar and hides the upper right corner of the main face, it cannot be excluded that it presented a slight tapering upwards, characteristic, this too, well attested to Nora (Moscati – Uberti 1970, nn. 5, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 33, 35, 36, 44, 50, 51, 56, 59, 72, 74, 82).

81 The flat one is the most common crowning in the stelae of Nora, but curved crowning are also attested (Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 26-27, n. 34).

82 At Nora the lateral longitudinal section is, in most cases, rectangular, with the thickness at the base almost equal to that at the top; but it can often be trapezoidal, with the thickness at the base greater than that at the top (Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 26).

83 In the repertoire of the stelae of the tophet of Nora, the back of the crown may present different trends, among which the most recurrent is the one with flat top cut and depression with concave section (Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 27).

84 Mazzariol 2020, p. 26.

85 Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 27-28.

86 Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 27-28; Mazzariol 2020, pp. 25-26. The stelae nn. 10, 26, 46 and 49 of the catalogue of Sabatino Moscati and Maria Luisa Uberti exceed the meter of height (Moscati – Uberti 1970, nn. 10, 26, 46, 49). The numbers 14, 23, 37, 40, 67, 75 of the above mentioned work (Moscati – Uberti 1970, nn. 14, 23, 37, 40, 67, 75), and stele n. 4 of the catalogue of Alessandro Mazzariol (Mazzariol 2020, n. 4), have dimensions between 80 cm and 1 m.

“cavata” of the figurative field (H. 28 cm; L. 14,5 cm; D. 2,3 cm) which is devoid of decoration too. Given the proportions of the mirror, this framework can be interpreted as a “simple type *aedicula*”, that is, as one of the outcomes of the process of simplifying the Egyptian-inspired *aedicula* or *naos*.⁸⁷

The motif of the empty *naos*,⁸⁸ whose architectural elements can be rendered with varying degrees of accuracy, is well known to the iconographic repertoire of the votive stelae of the tophets of Carthage,⁸⁹ Tharros,⁹⁰ Sulci,⁹¹ Monte Sirai⁹² and Motya,⁹³ and its Eastern funerary antecedents⁹⁴ – both in the simple version and in multiple framing – are well-known too.⁹⁵

In the tophet of Nora, the *naos* without figurations is documented in only one of the stelae so far published.⁹⁶ The provenance from Nora of this last document was, however, questioned because it is made of a material (trachytic tuff) different from the three main lithological types attested in the site. Furthermore, while having an inventory number applied to it,⁹⁷ the stele does not appear in the catalogue drawn up by Giovanni Patroni in 1904 and, finally, constituted then – and until today – the only attestation of the motif of the empty *naos*.⁹⁸

2.3. *The Inscription (M.G.A.G.)*

The inscribed stele reused (Figs. 17-19) in one of the pillars of the church of Sant’Efsio, although very damaged, is interesting because it is one of the few examples of inscribed monuments from the Nora tophet. Leaving aside, for the specific questions raised, the famous “Nora stone” (*CIS I 144 = KAI 46*) and the “Nora fragment” (*CIS I 145*),⁹⁹ two of the most ancient inscriptions from the Phoenician West, only five inscribed stelae from the tophet are known among the ones entered in the Museum of Cagliari.¹⁰⁰ The cited inscriptions had already been published in the work of Giovanni Patroni, and even before in that of Astorre Pellegrini,¹⁰¹ and are all dis-

87 In general, for the framing of the stelae of tophet of Nora see Moscati – Uberti 1970, pp. 29-34.

88 It is likely that the empty *aedicula* was itself a possible solution to the figurative field of the stele or the basis for further elaborations (Moscati – Uberti 1985, p. 49; see also Pisano 2009, p. 40). However, it is not possible to exclude that, in some cases, the stelae were originally equipped with painted figurations then vanished (Moscati – Uberti 1981, p. 40) or integrated with different materials, perishable as hypothesized for some stelae of Carthage (Bénichou-Safar 2004, p. 183) and Motya (Ciasca 1992, p. 134), or lithic, as proposed, e.g., for two specimens from Tharros (Moscati – Uberti 1985, pp. 42, n. 33, 48). As regards the specimen under examination, there is no concrete evidence to support neither the first nor the second of the last two hypotheses.

89 Bartoloni 1976, nn. 184-191, 193-217, 291, 535; see also Bénichou-Safar 2004, p. 183.

90 Moscati – Uberti 1985, pp. 41-42, figs. 2-3, pls. XI-XVIII, nn. 33-48.

91 Moscati 1986, p. 49, pl. I; Bartoloni 1986, pls. X-XII, nn. 70, 76, 77, 81, 82, 83, 85.

92 Bondi 1980, p. 52, pl. IX, nn. 1-2.

93 Moscati – Uberti 1981, p. 40, pls. XXXI-L, nn. 225-318.

94 Cfr. e.g. Sader 2005, pp. 136-137.

95 See Pisano 2009, pp. 40-42, with previous bibliography.

96 Moscati – Uberti 1970, n. 1.

97 For the application of which Sabatino Moscati did not exclude the possibility of an error (Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 19).

98 Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 19. Although the stele presented here does drop one of the reasons for the uncertainty about the provenance from Nora of the stele number 1 of the catalogue of Sabatino Moscati and Maria Luisa Uberti, the nature of its lithic material leaves open the possibility that the stele had come in ancient times from Sulci, where it was probably produced (cf. Del Vais 2019, p. 335).

99 Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 1 and 3.

100 Patroni 1904, coll. 159-161, cited by Moscati – Uberti 1970, p. 16: «Ne (= le stele) furono trovate 157, delle quali molte in frammenti e solo 5 con iscrizioni o tracce di iscrizioni puniche...; 77 stele figurate anepigrafi, le 5 iscritte e la base furono trasportate al regio Museo di Cagliari».

101 Pellegrini 1893, nn. 1-5.

cussed in the *RÉS*.¹⁰² They were later restudied by Ferruccio Barreca,¹⁰³ Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and are finally present in the catalogue by Sabatino Moscati and Maria Luisa Uberti.¹⁰⁴ Their chronology is based only on the analysis of the letter shape and of the monument typology and had been placed in *ICO* in the period 3rd-2nd century BCE; however, their date could be raised now in the 4th-3rd century BCE.¹⁰⁵ From the tophet area comes a dedication to Tinnit, attributed also to the end of the 4th-3rd century BCE; it is engraved on the rim of the fragment of a black glazed vessel (*RÉS* 1222),¹⁰⁶ and is the only evidence of the cult of that



FIG. 20. Detail of the inscribed stele *RÉS* 2019 from *ICO* pl. XXXVII, Sard. 26.



FIG. 21. Inscribed stele reused in the church of Sant'Eufisio (side lighting) (photo S. Floris; with permission of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per la città metropolitana di Cagliari e le provv. di Oristano e Sud Sardegna).

goddess in Nora, having furthermore, the epithet of GD.¹⁰⁷ One more text, perhaps votive, but most probably from a different sanctuary/temple, had been originally engraved on a marble slab and was reused to shape a roman *oscillum*.¹⁰⁸ The stele englobed in the church adds a further example to this small *corpus*; its horizontal position in the pillar shows that it was used just as a stone block, needed for a restoration.¹⁰⁹

As already expounded by Stefano Floris, the letters of the inscription have been erased almost completely and only traces of them can be detected (FIG. 19); this damage was only partly due to the removal of the plaster that covered the text, spoiling the original surface. The text was probably already damaged at the moment of the reuse: as it is shown by some of the previously known Nora inscribed stelae, their material, a kind of sandstone,¹¹⁰ is particularly friable, so that also the letters engraved on the five already published stelae are in some cases difficult to detect (FIG. 20). Regarding the Sant'Eufisio monument, photographs taken with different techniques and lights (FIG. 22) have not allowed to read the original text. Even the number of the lines engraved, two or perhaps three, is not ascertained.

102 *RÉS* 1217-1221.

103 Barreca 1961.

104 Moscati – Uberti 1970, nn. 10 (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 26), 14 (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 27), 25 (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 28), 84 (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 29), 85 (Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 30).

105 However, the shape of the letters attested is not clear enough for a precise chronology.

106 Already cited by Vivanet 1891, p. 301; cfr. Guzzo Amadasi 1967, Sard. 25.

107 Grottanelli 1982, pp. 109-112. See also Garbati 2021; Marín Ceballos 2021.

108 Amadasi Guzzo – Zara 2018. The object was found in 1952 during the excavations directed by Gennaro Pesce in the Roman forum zone.

109 Cfr. here Floris, § 1.2.

110 Cfr. here Floris, note 74.

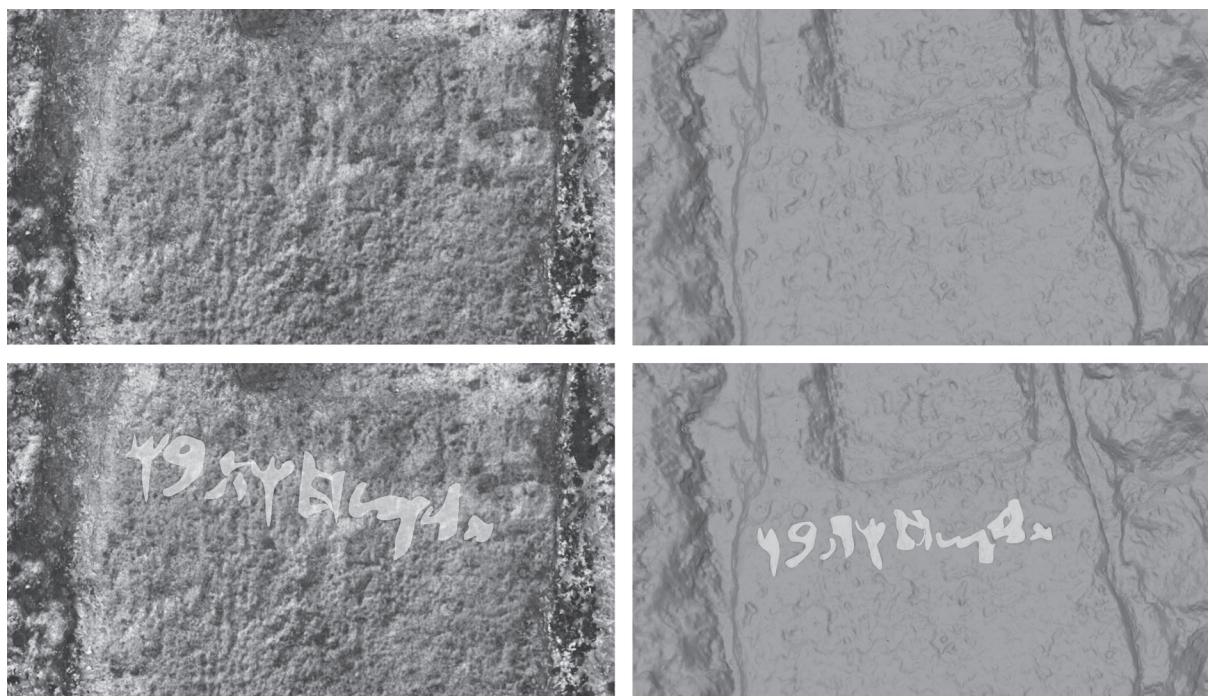


FIG. 22. Reworked images of the inscription on the stele reused in the church of Sant’Eufisio (elaborated by S. Floris from 3D model by M. Pilia).

Among the traces of letters recognizable on the stone surface, two signs at the end of the first line are clearly readable (FIG. 21): they form the word BN “son” that most probably followed the name of the dedicator of the stele and preceded his father’s name, beginning the second line of the text. Before this word, the surface available for the written text is quite short; however, no letter’s trace is clear enough; for a hypothetical reconstruction of the text, a comparison with the inscriptions already known is needed. All the texts of the five inscriptions in the Museum of Cagliari display the same formulary, beginning with the word NDR followed by a personal name, “vow of PN” or “PN has vowed”. Therefore, it is likely to reconstruct the same wording on our stele, whose inscription probably began also with NDR, a noun or the 3rd person singular of the perfect of the root *ndr*, with the meaning “vow (of)” or “he vowed”. The personal name following the probable NDR (traces of letters still visible might agree with that reconstruction) is not readable. Judging from the space at disposal before BN it was quite a short name, consisting of three or four letters. According to a drawing executed, a letter Ḥ seems to be possibly present after the supposed NDR (FIG. 22): in that case the very common name ḤN’ can be possibly proposed.¹¹¹ However, the photographs do not support a clear identification of the letter Ḥ; furthermore, the traces visible on the stone surface seem to show another letter following NDR and preceding Ḥ.

Most probably, in line 2 there originally was the patronymic of the donor. Judging from the traces of the letters and from the space at disposal, the line had between 6 and 10 letters (FIGS. 21-22), it contained either a long personal name or two names. This last case, however, is not yet attested by the already known inscriptions from the tophet: three of them have the name of the donor and the patronymic (*RĒS* 1217,

111 Attestations in Benz 1972, pp. 117-122. The other stelae too, except *RĒS* 1221, show very popular personal names.

1218,1221); only two (*RÉS* 1219-1220)¹¹² have only the donor's name. Very hypothetically, some traces on the stone allow to propose the original presence of a name beginning with 'BD. It is not possible to ascertain if the inscription continued with a third line: some traces on the left side (looking at the stele) could originally be rest of letters. This case seems, however, very doubtful. The hypothesis that the inscription could finish with the common formula K ŠM' QL "because (the deity) heard to his voice" is to rule out because the kind of formulary probably present does not mention a god and because the inscribed space seems too short for this reconstruction.

The few traces of the present inscription allow to conclude that it exhibited the same votive formulary as the already known inscribed stelae from the Nora tophet, being probably contemporary with them (4th-3rd century BCE). It is probable that it included the common expression of dedication (root *ndr*), the donor's name and his patronymic, according to most of the already published texts and in agreement with one of the well-known formularies of the inscribed Carthage dedications.

A possible reconstruction of the formulary can be the following (underlined letters are very hypothetical):

NDR HN' BN
'BD
 (?)

3. CONCLUSIONS (S.F., M.G.A.G.)

The new stele gives, as illustrated above, an important contribution to the study of the repertoire of the stelae of the tophet of Nora. On the one hand, it enriches the poor corpus of the inscriptions of the sanctuary and on the other hand, it unequivocally attests to the presence of the iconography of the empty shrine in its iconographic repertoire.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1863 sgg.

CISI = *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars prima inscriptiones phoenicias continens*, Paris 1881 sgg.

ICO = Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo, *Le iscrizioni fenicie e puniche delle colonie in Occidente*, Roma 1967.

KAI = H. Donner – W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, I-III, Wiesbaden 1966-2002 (I⁵ 2002; II² 1966; III² 1969).

RÉS = *Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique publié par la Commission du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Paris 1900-1905 sgg.

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¹¹² From the photograph (FIG. 20) it seems possible that some letters now erased were present and followed the donor's name in *RÉS* 1219.

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