

STORIA SARDA

nella SCUOLA ITALIANA



SARDINIAN HISTORY
Pre-nuragic Age
for students aged 8-11 yo

ENGLISH
September 2018



Barumini, 1950s: first excavation around the nuraghe now known as 'Su Nuraxi'

OUR SARDINIAN HISTORY BOOK

This book is a present for everyone.

For us, who wrote it. For the teachers that are going to use it in their classrooms. For the kids, who are going to find out about the history of Sardinian people through these pages.

In here, we will discover the story of very ancient events: events about Sardinia and its people, from the beginning of our island until just before the Nuragic civilization. It's a very long, extraordinary and eventful time.

We are sure you are going to have fun while reading these stories, talking about them, and playing around them. It's our history, our past, our ancestors' lives and stories.

Enjoy it!

WHY DO WE STUDY SARDINIAN HISTORY?

You already know why we study History.

We study History because we are curious and we want to know about our **past**.

We don't know enough about it and want to find out more.

This way, we can understand why many things happened and how we became what we are now.

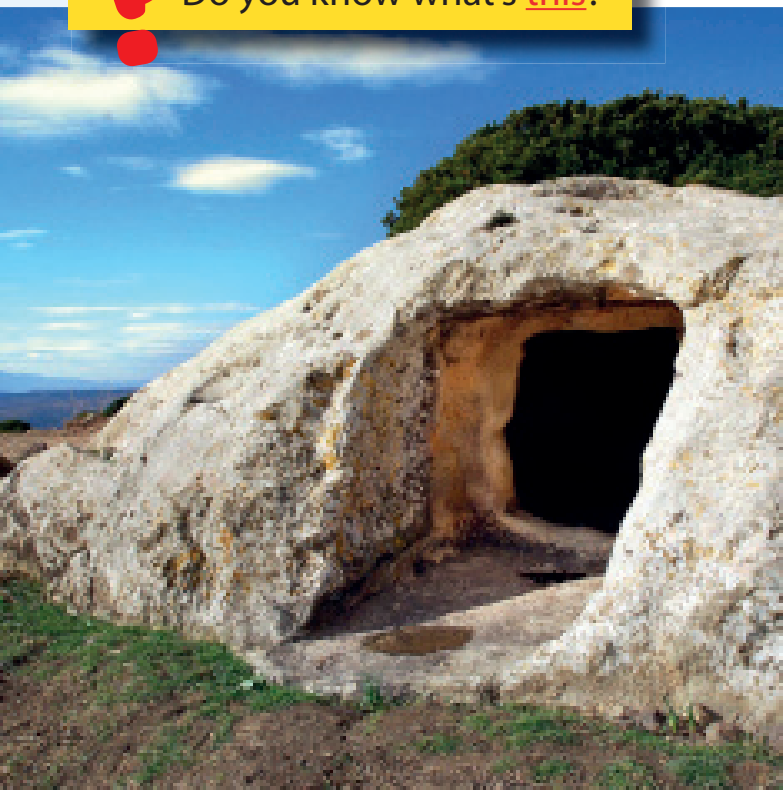
Our past, in short, is very important to understand our **present**.

What do you know about Sardinian History?

We want to study the History of Sardinia. It is very easy to understand why.



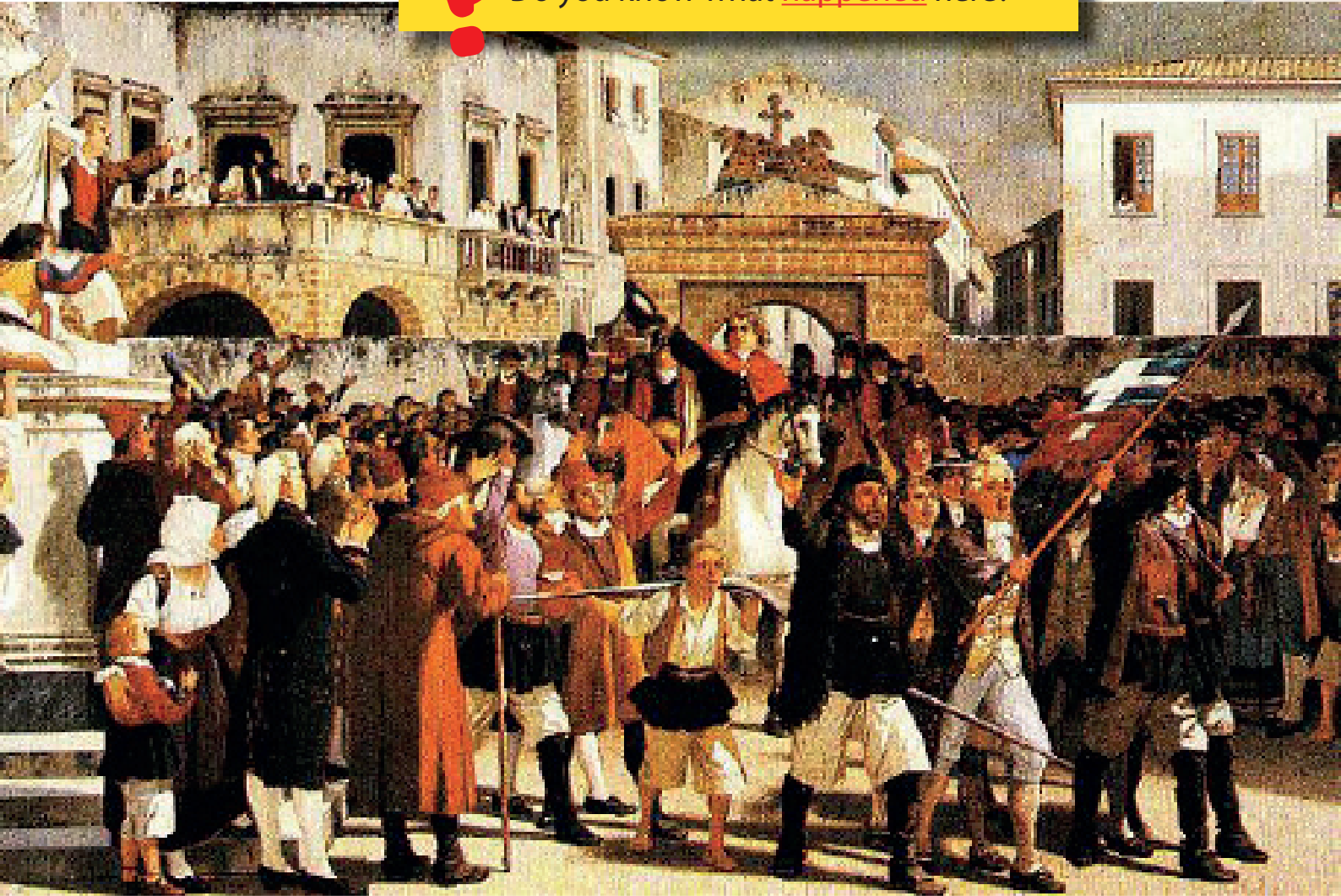
Do you know what's **this**?



Do you know who's the **woman** in this picture?



Do you know what happened here?



Do you remember this person?



Sometimes, we are not able to answer these questions.

Yet, we are Sardinians. We were born, we used to live or still live here. Not being able to answer these questions is a bit odd; don't you think?

Why do we study Sardinian History?

Here we go again.

You study History and you know why you do it. We want to study Sardinian History as well. All those questions we asked have surely helped you understand why.

We want to study the History of our island and our people.

This way, we will discover the places, the people, the events of Sardinia.

We will be able to understand:

- who we are as Sardinians
- what is our place in History
- what is our place in the world today.

We want to live better!

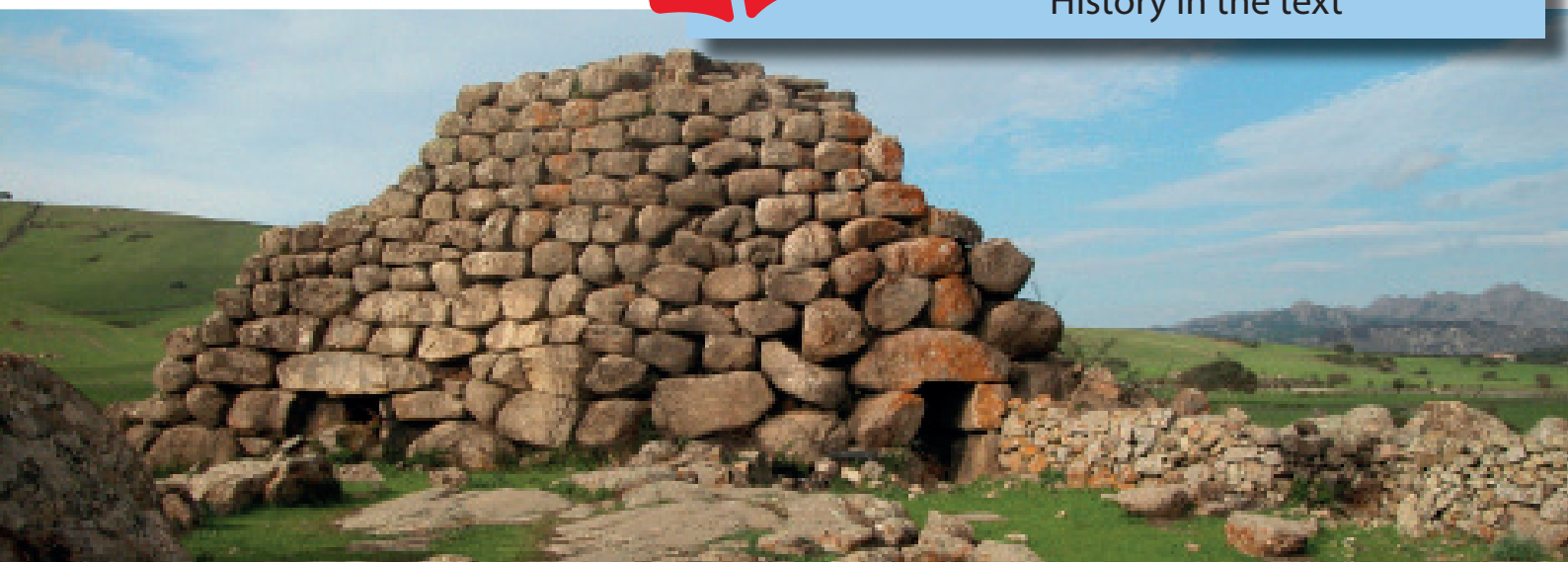
Knowing our past helps us understand the present better. Above all, it helps us face our future. So:

- we learn how to avoid repeating mistakes made in the past
- we can follow the good things done in the past.

Learning Sardinian History, in conclusion, helps us live better!



STUDY - Underline words and sentences explaining why we want to study Sardinian History in the text



SARDINIA'S BIRTH



Many millions of years ago Sardinia was not an island.

In ancient times, it belonged to a much wider land, which then became Europe.

Eventually, a portion of this wide land began to move towards the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, forming two islands:

Corsica and **Sardinia**.

It's been **30 million years** ever since.

Do you know how many they are?

30 million years is such a long time that we can't even imagine it.

That is how old our island is: Sardinia.

Look at it; isn't it beautiful?

PREHISTORIC CULTURES IN SARDINIA

The Pre-nuragic period

You know that before History there was Prehistory.

You also know that Prehistory is divided into Paleolithic, Neolithic, and the various metal ages.

In Sardinia Prehistory was a very long time, and it is commonly split into:

- Pre-nuragic (Paleolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age)
- Nuragic (Bronze Age and Iron Age).

The word “nuragic” refers to the “nuraghes”, whereas “pre-nuragic” means “before the nuraghes”.

Therefore, we are now studying the Pre-nuragic period: it comprehends everything that happened before the nuraghes. Again, it consists of Paleolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age in Sardinia.

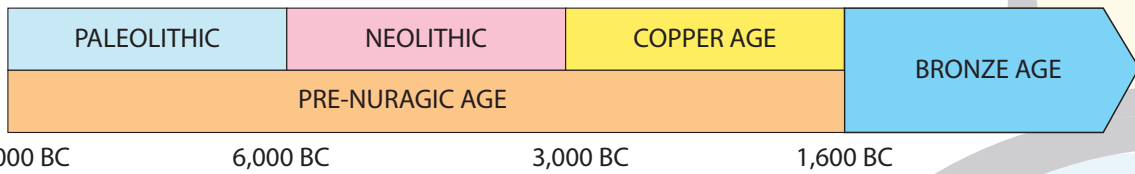
Four important events

For a very long time, during Prehistory, Sardinia was not inhabited by human beings. Then, the first hominids came to Sardinia, and some archaeologists discovered their remains; such as their bones, or the stone tools that they used.

Some events concerning human Prehistory in Sardinia are important.

Here is one: 450,000 BC. That is when evidence of human presence in our island starts. Around 6,000 BC, there is a first development in animal domestication and agriculture. There were also the first pottery wares: thanks to them, archaeologists understand a lot about neolithic cultures. Around 3,000 BC, in Sardinia the use of metals began to spread. Finally, there is 1,600 BC: that is when the first nuraghes were built.

The first and last date set the beginning and the end of the Pre-nuragic period. You can also find them in the timeline on the next page.



How did the Prehistoric people arrive in Sardinia?

A while ago, the Mediterranean sea water level was much lower than it is now.

Therefore, many lands that nowadays are submerged by the sea once were above the sea level.

On the map, in light green you can see the lands that were above the sea level at that time, but have now disappeared under the sea.

For example, Great Britain wasn't there, because it was attached to continental Europe.


Sicily wasn't there either, because it was part of continental Italy.

Sardinia was an island already, but it was joined with Corsica and it was very close to Italy.

This allowed humans to easily populate Corsica and Sardinia.

They crossed, with the help of small boats and canoes, a very narrow arm of sea and arrived to our island.



 LINKS - Geography: ask you teacher to explain why the sea levels were lower in the past than they are now

FROM *HOMO ERECTUS* TO *HOMO SAPIENS SAPIENS*

Homo erectus

The first human presence in Sardinia were men and women of the species known as *Homo erectus*.

Homo erectus used to live in small tribes, in natural caves or in huts made of branches. They used to settle in the proximity of water sources, in order to have access to all the water they needed.

They used **stone**, in order to make tools to work with, and hunting weapons. They knew and used **fire** to keep warm, protect themselves from wild animals, cook food and as a light source at night.

Homo erectus were **nomads**, hunters and gatherers: they used to move from one place to another and eat the fruits that nature offered.

At that time **Sardinia** certainly had plenty of **game and water**; it was a good place to live in.

In the photo, you can observe the first stone tools used by the Sardinian prehistoric populations: they are hundreds of thousands years old and were found in Perfugas.



STUDY - Answer the question: what do we mean when we say that *Homo erectus* had a nomadic life?

Homo sapiens sapiens

Researchers have not found yet evidence of *Homo sapiens*, also known as *Homo neanderthalensis*, in Sardinia.

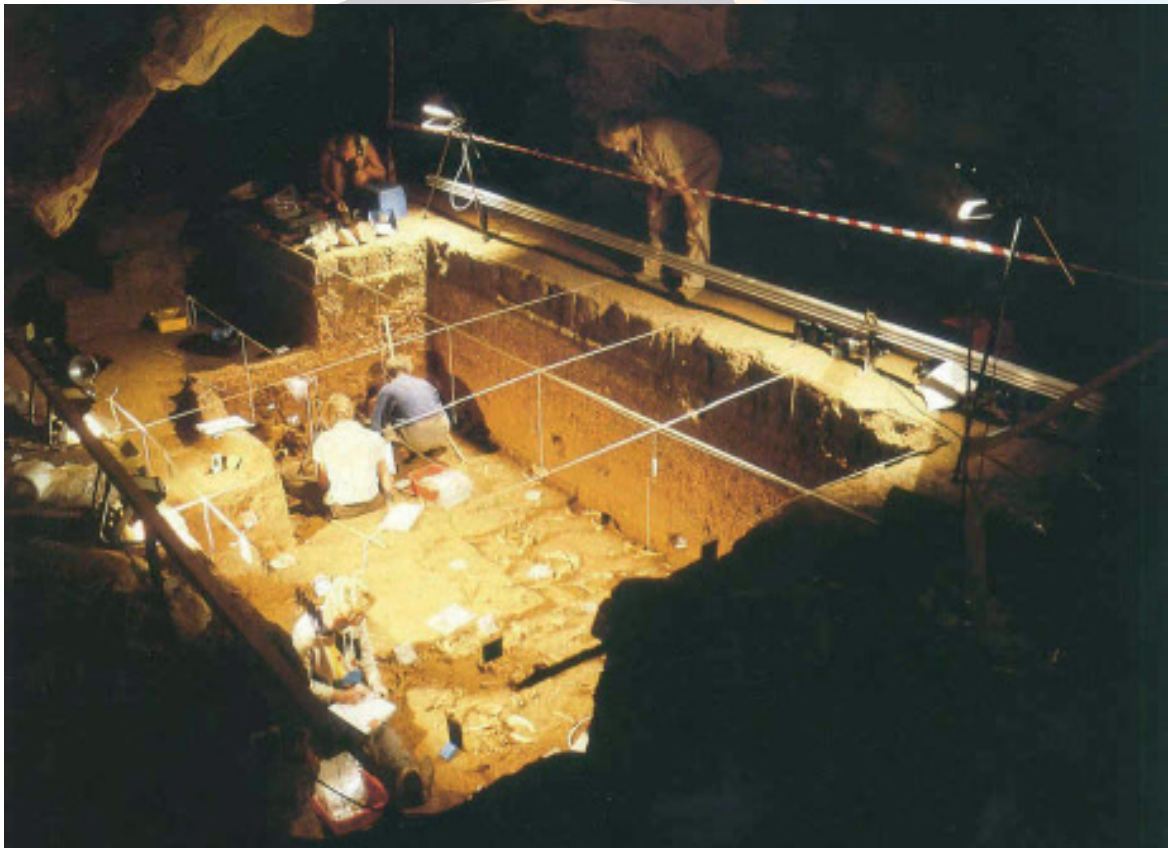
On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence of *Homo sapiens sapiens*: that is the human species we all belong to.

Homo sapiens sapiens followed the steps of *Homo erectus*. They lived in caves for a long time as well, hunting and gathering natural products.

Their tools and weapons, on the other hand, were a lot more sophisticated than the ones used by *Homo erectus*.

The most ancient remains of *Homo sapiens sapiens* in Sardinia go back to 35,000 years ago and were found in the Corbeddu cave, near Oliena. Here were found some human bones and bones of animals they used to hunt, and also tools in bone and stone.

The Corbeddu cave is a mysterious and fascinating place: archaeologists are still excavating to find its hidden treasures.



THE VILLAGE

Developments by *Homo sapiens sapiens*

Homo sapiens sapiens were responsible, during thousands of years, for very important developments. Over a period that, as you know, we call Neolithic, they learnt how to **breed** animals and **farming**.

They abandoned the caves and moved to more permanent settlements in **huts**.

Therefore, they abandoned the nomadic life in order to start a new society, the one that lives within a **village**.

Homo sapiens sapiens were the protagonists of the last phase of the pre-nuragic era, started around 6,000 BC.

The neolithic hut

Observe the picture. It is a reconstruction of a pre-nuragic hut.

The **hut** had a stone basement, which raised it from the ground and kept it dry, and a **wooden** skeleton. Its walls were made of **reeds** and **mud**, this one becoming really hard once left to dry. Its roof was made of wood, reeds and mud.

The smoke shows there was a fireplace inside, to cook and keep warm.



STUDY - Think carefully: when did the Sardinian Neolithic begin?

The village

Understanding how the pre-nuragic village was is easy.

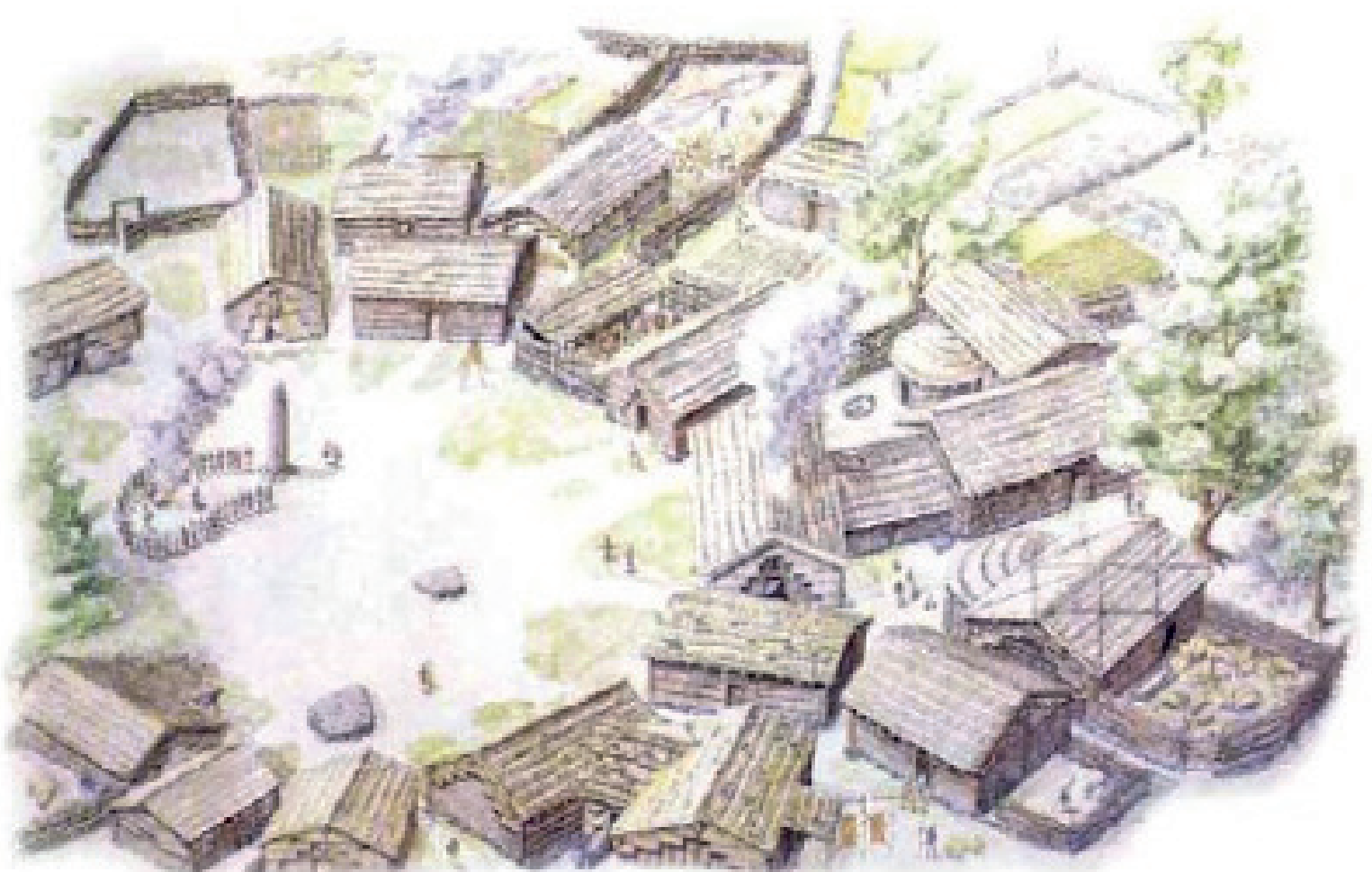
There were many huts, all of them looking similar to the one in the picture you've just observed.

Some of them had a fenced backyard: it's where sheep and goats were kept overnight. The domestication of some kinds of animals provided milk, meat, and leather. Outside the village, moreover, the land was cultivated. The crops provided wheat.

These were the activities that allowed the village population to survive. It's possible that some huts were bigger than others.

One of them was the meeting hut, where the villagers used to meet in order to discuss and make decisions on the most important matters.

Another one was the chief's hut. Then there was the priest-sorcerer's hut. Remains of these villages are very rare nowadays, as they were built with non-permanent materials.



THE EVERYDAY-LIFE TOOLS

Stone

For thousands of years, the pre-nuragic villagers had been using stone tools.

In Sardinia a very special stone can be found, called **obsidian**: it is particularly common in Monte Arci, near Oristano.

Obsidian is black and looks like glass.

It is very sharp and it was used to make **arrowheads** and spearheads, blades to treat animal skins and other **tools**.
In the picture you can see an ancient arrowhead.



Pottery

The pottery wares used in the pre-nuragic houses were many.

Pre-nuragic people particularly needed it. They needed **pots** for cooking, **bowls**, **mugs**, big plates from which everyone could eat with their hands, **containers** where they kept wheat kernels, then turned into flour and bread.

All these pottery wares were often richly decorated.

In the picture you can see a very particular one.

It comes from Monastir and is a

tripod: this word means “three feet”, as you can see in the image. It was put on the fireplace, and its “feet” prevented it from burning!



Loom

For weaving, there was the loom. Those ancient looms and clothes did not make it to us, for a simple reason.

Looms were made of wood, and clothes of fabric and leather. Wood, fabric and leather deteriorate over time, so they disappeared. We still have the small loom weights though: they were used to keep the thread straight during weaving and they were made of stone, like the one in the picture.



Metal

Around the end of the Pre-nuragic era also appeared the first metal tools.

As you know, human beings learnt how to use copper first, then bronze, and finally iron. Therefore, in Sardinia objects made of copper came first, too.

In the picture you can see some copper swords, found in Decimoputzu. This metal was much stronger than stone: that is why it was used to make weapons.



WORDS - Ask your teacher how to say stone, pottery, loom and metal in Sardinian

THE VILLAGE SOCIETY

Each one of the pre-nuragic villagers had their own roles.

Women took care of spinning and weaving. They also used to grind the wheat to obtain flour, used to bake bread. Men were farmers and shepherds. Their duties were to cultivate the land around the village and reap the harvest. They also used to bring the sheep and goats to pasture, so they could provide milk, meat and skins.

All the dishes and cutlery used in the kitchen and the house were manufactured by an expert artisan, the potter.

Some men were surely responsible for building the houses: these were the ancestors of our bricklayers and builders.

There were also the stonecutters, who were responsible for the stonecraft: as you know, before metals stone was the main tool used in the pre-nuragic daily routine.

When metals were discovered, some villagers became miners. Working with metals, on the other hand, was very complicated. According to the researchers, there were some experts who used to travel from village to village, in order to share their knowledge.

There were also some merchants, who used to travel with their goods in Sardinia and even beyond the island.

The priests took care of religion.

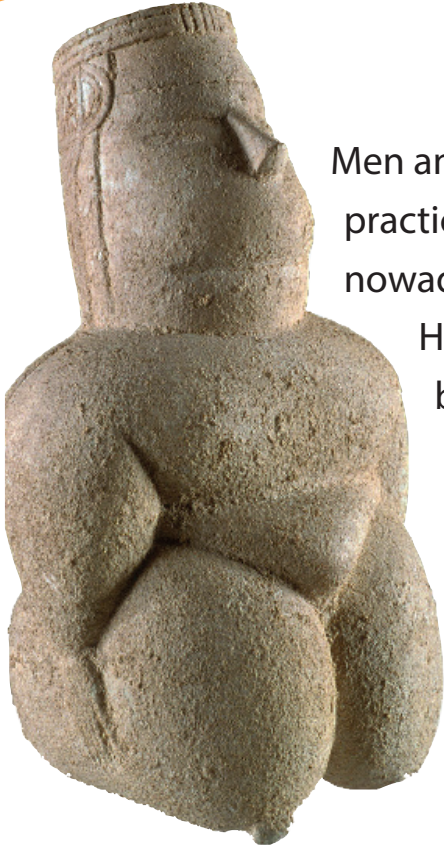
Finally there was the chief, who led the village and the villagers.



RELIGION: MOTHER GODDESS

Men and women who used to live in pre-nuragic Sardinia practiced a religion of which not many traces can be found nowadays.

However, researchers were able to find in neolithic burials many figurines of the Mother Goddess.

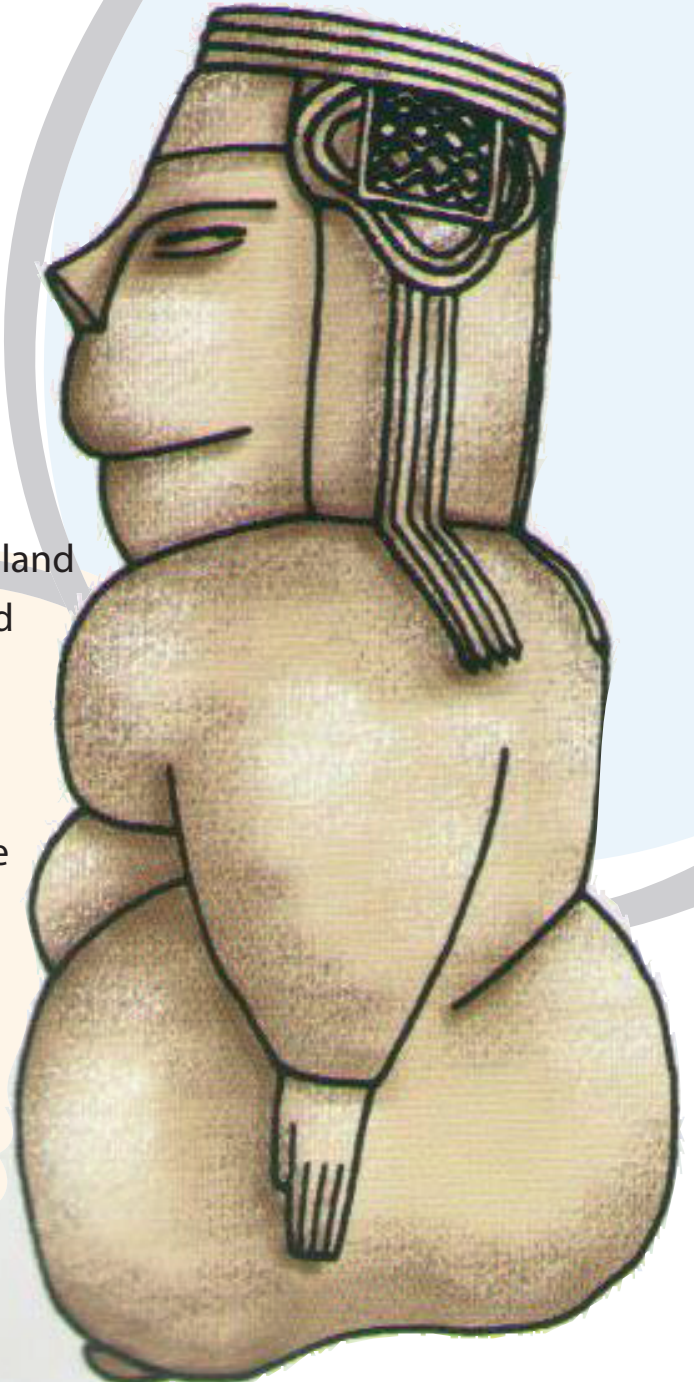


Mother Goddess

The Mother Goddess was a symbol of fertility of the earth: the products of the land allowed the Sardinian population to feed themselves and live.

However, the Mother Goddess was also a symbol of women' fertility: children, indeed, allowed humans to populate the land and its villages. Sardinian people have worshipped Mother Goddess for a very long time, back in the day.

The most famous Sardinian Mother Goddess was found in Cabras and is very curvy. you can see her in the two pictures: a proper personification of abundance.



LINKS - Geography: which Sardinian coast you can find Cabras on?

RELIGION: BURIALS

The men and women who lived in pre-nuragic Sardinia showed a great respect to death and their deceased family and friends.

We know that for a long time they buried their deceased in burial caves. They themselves, as we have previously stated, used to live in caves or in natural shelters provided by rocks.

The *domus de janas*

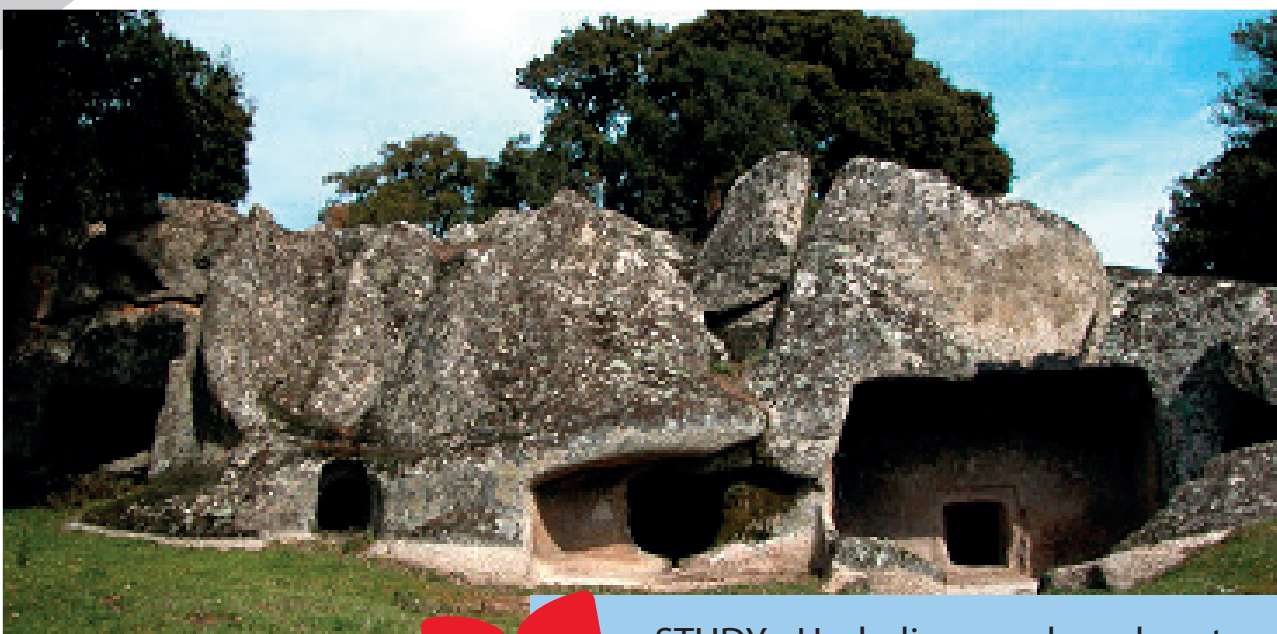
However, when our ancestors began living in villages, they introduced collective burials. In each one of them, then, there could be buried many people, for a long life span.

At the beginning, they used small caves excavated in the ground, vertically, similar to small wells.

Then, they started digging horizontally: these were the so-called *domus de janas*, or “fairy houses”.

The *domus de janas* were never inhabited by fairies: this name, coming from folk tales, was given by Sardinians over the millennia, a long time after they had been used as burial places.

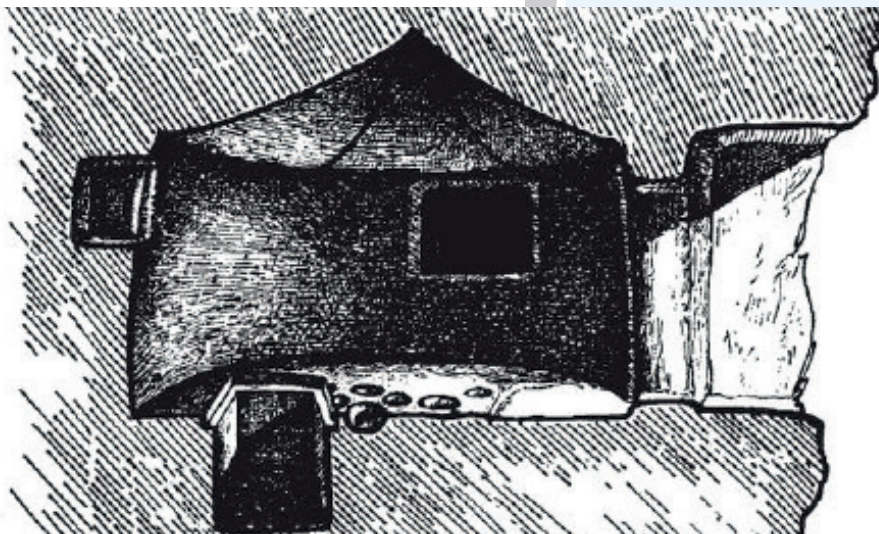
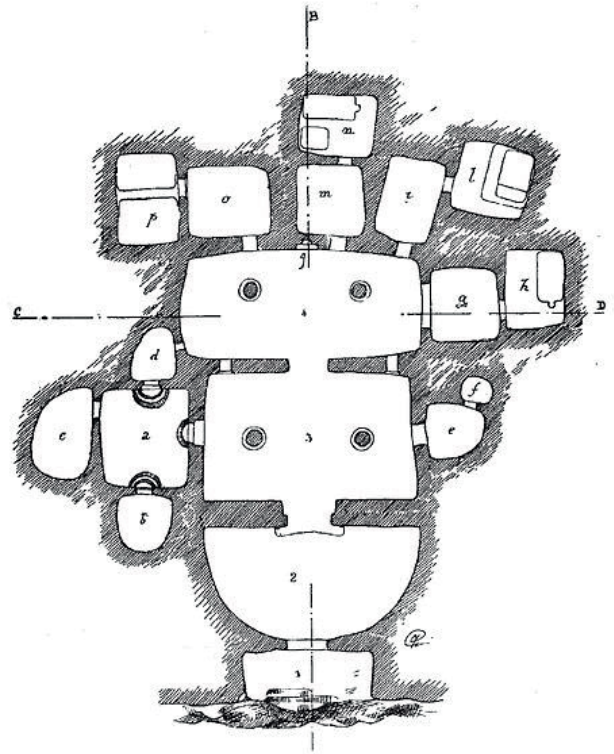
Those in the photo below are in Buddusò.



STUDY - Underline words and sentences that specify the function of the *domus de janas*

The shape of *domus de janas*

What shape did the *domus de janas* have? Check the image on the right. It's the [Chief Tomb](#) plan, in Bonorva. As you can see, the tomb was very big and consisted of [many chambers](#). In these chambers the villagers were buried. Now check the image below: it's another tomb in Bonorva. As you can see, it was carved into the rock and it had the same [shape of the huts](#) in the village.



Why were the *domus de janas* made like this?

Inside, the *domus de janas* were decorated, precisely like walls in a house are painted. The [house of the deceased](#) had to resemble as much as possible the [house of the living](#).

The *domus de janas* show, in short, that our ancestors thought life to have a very close relationship with death. It was such a close relationship that [the living used to often talk to the deceased](#): after all, the houses of the deceased looked exactly like the ones of the living!

THE FOLK OF THE BIG STONES

The megalithism

In the last phase of Prehistory, almost everywhere in Europe and also in Sardinia began the “megalithism”.

It's a difficult word and it comes from “megalith”, which means “great stone”. The megalithism was a way of building using large stones. This is the reason why we say that prehistoric Sardinian people were the folk of the big stones.

What did megaliths look like and what they were used for?

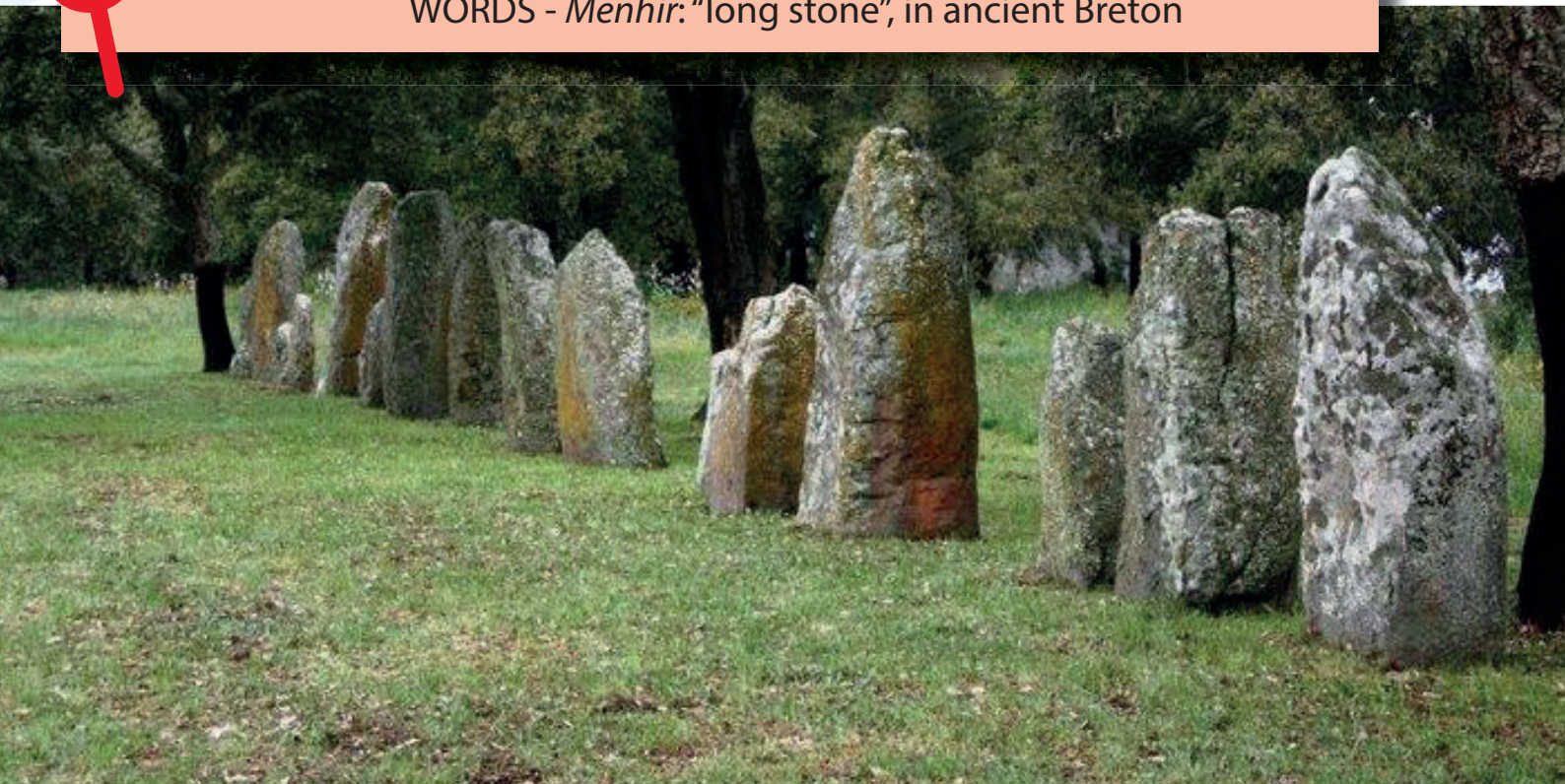
The menhir

The menhir are tall, stretched stones with a base that sticks out of the ground.

They can have square or rounded edges. Usually they become narrower towards the top and they can be even 6 meters tall. They can be found isolated or grouped together.

They probably had a religious meaning, which is almost unknown to us. In Sardinia there are plenty of them, like the ones in the photo from Goni.

WORDS - *Menhir*: “long stone”, in ancient Breton





The dolmen

The dolmen were collective burials, like the *domus de janas*.

Large stone slabs worked as walls.

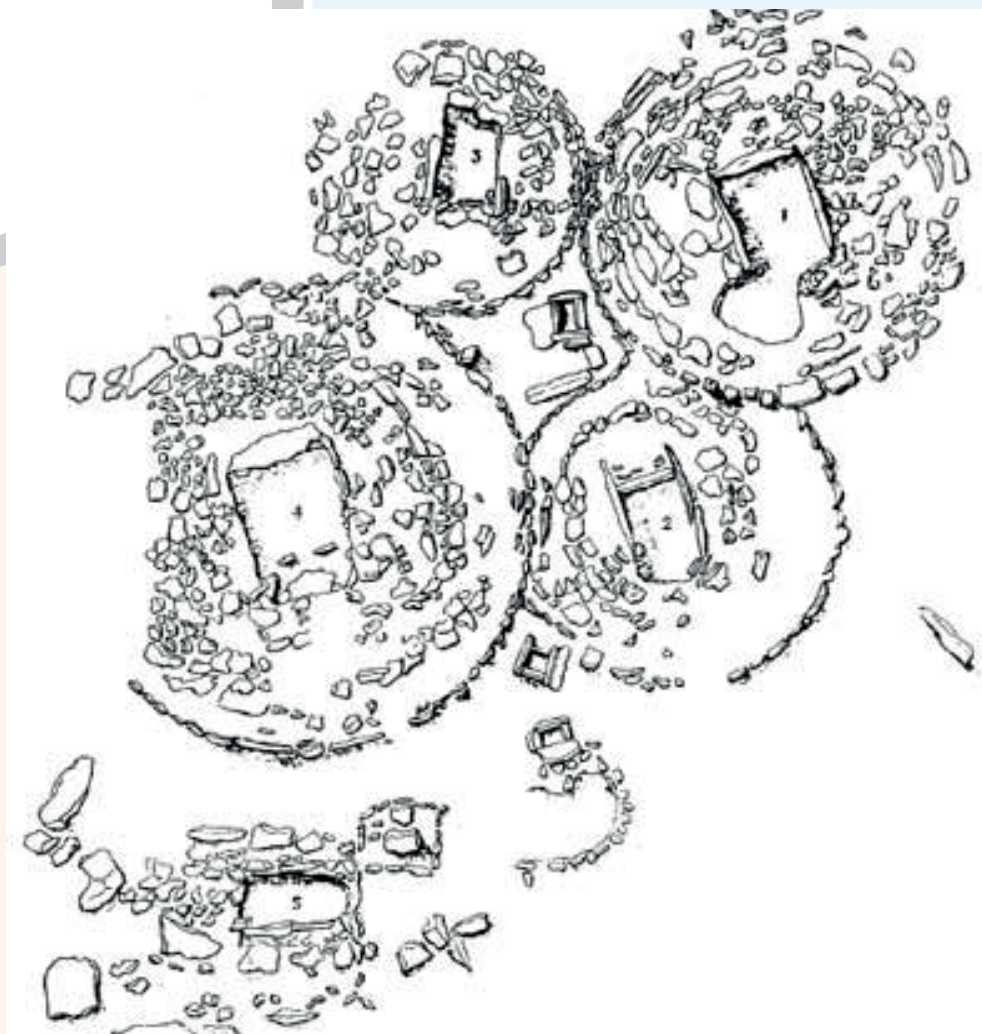
Another slab, the heaviest one, was the tomb roof and cover.

The *dolmen* were usually almost hidden and protected by high mounds of soil and grass. The *dolmen* depicted in the picture can be found in Mores and is one of the biggest ones in the Mediterranean Sea.

The tomb circles

The tomb circles were collective burials as well.

Their name derives from the tomb right in the middle of a stone circle. You can clearly see it in the pictures. On the right, you can observe the plan of the tomb circles in Arzachena, also shown in the photo on the next page. The circles are very visible.





The statue-menhir

In the final part of the Pre-nuragic era, the Sardinian populations were already skilled in metallurgy.

At that time, they used to sculpt some particular *menhir*. We call them statue-stele or statue-menhir.

Observe the picture.

In the upper part of the *menhir* you can see a "T": it represents a human face.

In the centre there is an odd figure: it's a upside-down man. In the lower part of the *menhir* there is a dagger with two blades. According to the researchers, the *statue-menhir* were made with a very precise purpose: remember the ancestors.

Their ancestors were not there anymore and they belonged to a very distant past, but they were real heroes for the Sardinians.

That is why they erected these particular types of *menhir*.



The meaning of the megaliths

Nowadays we are very careful, when it comes to talk about the megaliths.

We don't know exactly which tools were used to cut and sculpt the *menhir*.

We can't precisely tell how Sardinians were able to raise the "great stones" and stick them in the ground.

Just think about the stone slab that covers the *dolmen* in Mores: it weighs 18 tons. Or the *menhir* of Villa Sant'Antonio, in the photo: it's almost 6 meters tall. How could our ancestors put them up?

We do not even know the exact function and *meaning of the megaliths*. They certainly had a religious purpose; but what did they exactly mean for the Sardinian people? It is not easy to say.

Menhir and *dolmen*, however, are so majestic and beautiful that one thing is clear: *Sardinians* considered them *fundamental to their lives*. Therefore they are also important to us, who should respect and take care of them.



SARDINIANS AND OTHER PEOPLE: OBSIDIAN

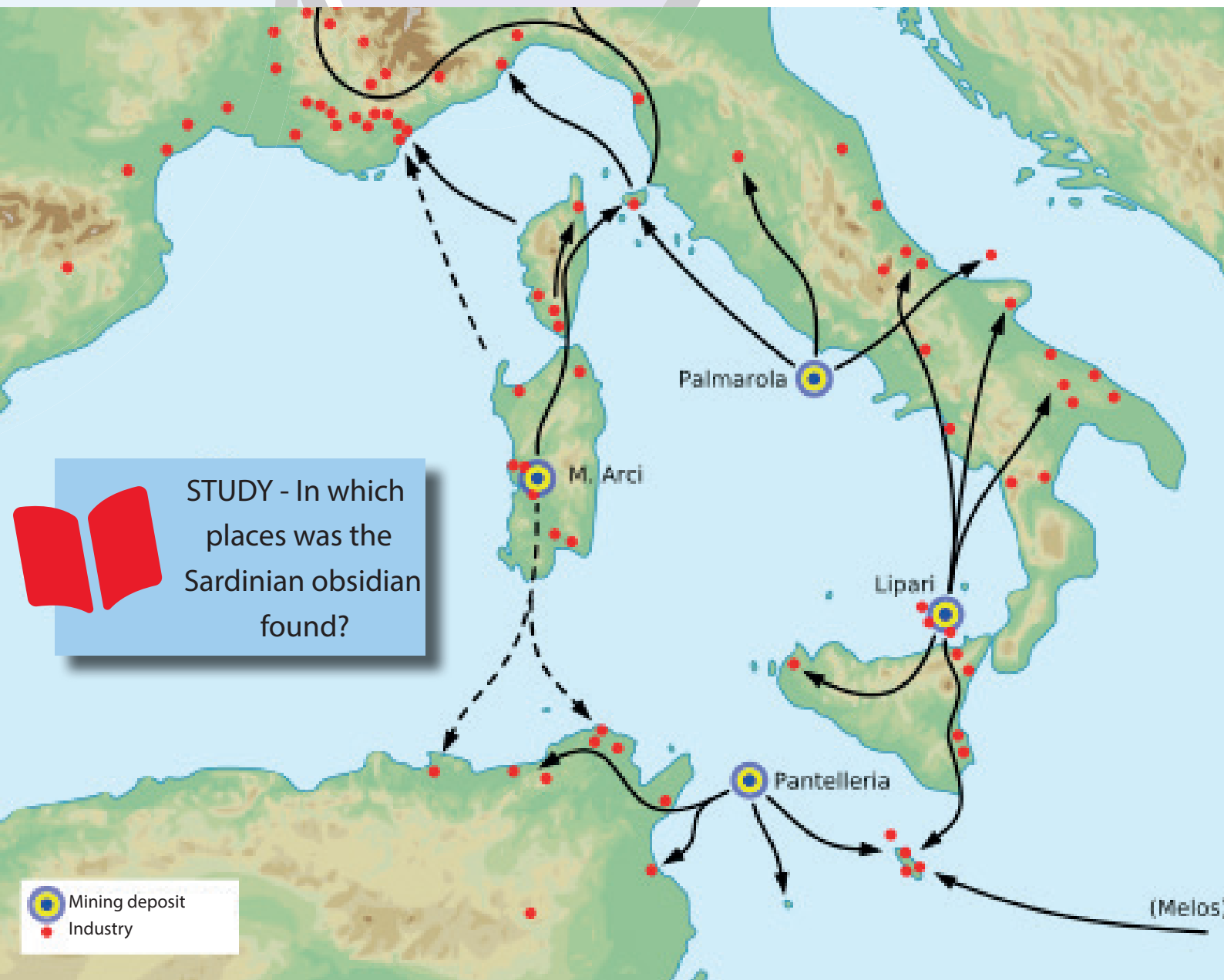
Sardinia is an island, in the middle of the Western Mediterranean. The sea, which separates it from Europe and Africa, is also the route that links Sardinia and its people to the other people.

This is as true today as it was in Prehistory.

Observe the map: it shows the obsidian trades at that time. Obsidian from Monte Arci reached lands far away through the sea, and it was found in places that were very distant from Sardinia.

So, our island was in the middle of the Western Mediterranean and also in the middle of the commercial routes.

Who said that Sardinian people are far from the rest of the world?



STUDY - In which places was the Sardinian obsidian found?

 Mining deposit
 Industry

(Melos)

SARDINIANS AND OTHER PEOPLE: MONTE D'ACCODDI

The megalithic construction of Monte d'Accoddi

Near Sassari, there is a great and mysterious megalithic construction, dating back to the Copper Age.

The photo shows what it looks like: a large, quadrangular terrace.

Its size is imponent: one of its bases is 37 meters long, the other one is 30 meters. Today it reaches a height of 10 meters.

As you can see, in order to reach the top of the platform from its base, you need to walk on a long ramp.

Near this construction the researchers discovered several archaeological findings: a *menhir*, an altar for animal sacrifices, an impressive egg-shaped boulder and many Mother Goddess figurines.

Archaeologists haven't stopped asking questions since they have excavated and discovered the building.

The most important question is: what is it and what was it used for?



A sacred temple

Researchers believe the construction in Monte d'Accoddi was a sacred temple, dedicated to the Sun and the Mother Goddess.

We have already met the Mother Goddess. The Sun is a source of life for all living beings: that is why pre-nuragic people worshipped it as a deity. In the picture you can see a reconstruction of the Monte d'Accoddi temple, as it originally was.

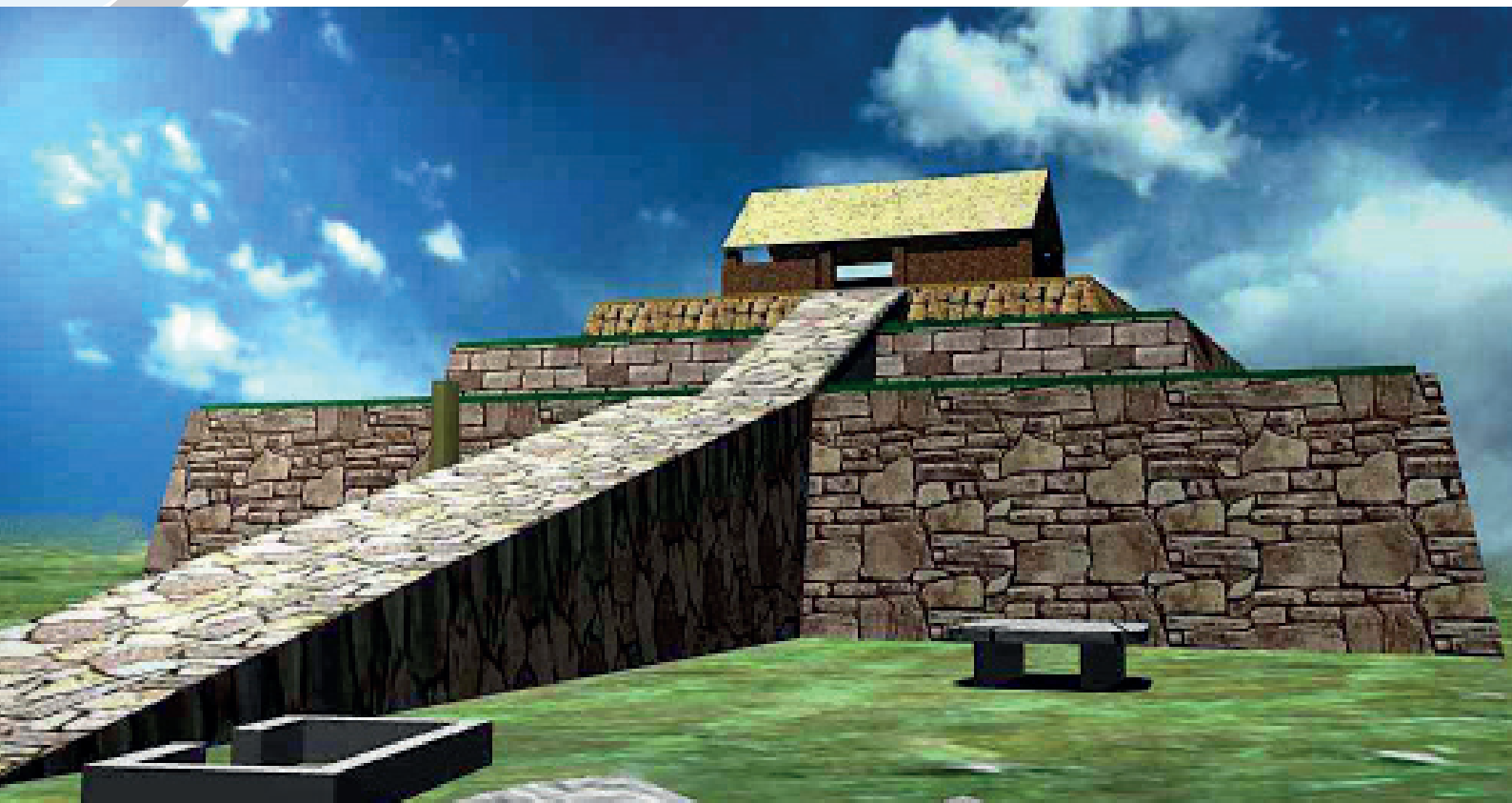
It was a lot taller than today and on its top there was an altar where the priests could perform their rituals.

At the temple base there were some huts: these were houses for the priests and for the visitors to rest after having travelled from all over Sardinia in order to attend the religious events.

How was it born?

In Sardinia there is no other temple that resembles the Monte d'Accoddi one. Similar buildings can only be found in Asia, far from our island. This fact has prompted researchers to formulate a hypothesis: Sardinians were in contact with populations that used to live in very distant lands from Sardinia.

So, we can say it again: Sardinians were really close to the rest of the world!



TO CONCLUDE...

Within these pages we have told the History of pre-nuragic people in Sardinia and we have learnt many important things.

It is a History that lasts for hundreds of thousands years. We know enough about the last part of it: the obsidian trade, the *domus de janas*, the *menhir*, the metallurgy, the Monte d'Accoddi temple, the Mother Goddess. And even more.

It is a complicated History. During this very long time, the pre-nuragic lifestyle has dramatically changed. Let's not forget they were nomads at first, then they became farmers and shepherds. They used to live in caves, then they built villages. They learnt how to use the stone at first, then they learnt metallurgy.

This is the most ancient part of Sardinian History.

It is the History of Sardinia. It is the History of a Mediterranean island, between Europe and Africa, Eastern and Western cultures. It is also a History of its relationships with close and far away people. These links enriched Sardinian History and Sardinians enriched those people's Histories as well.

Be ready, next year we'll tell you an even more fascinating History: the one of the nuragic Sardinians!



This booklet comes from the work of the team called "Storia sarda nella scuola italiana", which means Sardinian History within the Italian school system. This team consist of teachers, published authors, historians, archaeologists, graphic designers and IT experts.

The booklet is self-produced and not for sale.

In the website www.lastoriasarda.com you can find a section called "didattica" where you can download, for free and without any subscription, the PDF versions of the available booklets.

The project aims to share the booklets in three languages, Italian (ITA), Sardinian (SRD) and English (ENG).

At the moment, the available booklets are:

- * Pre-nuragic Age, in ITA, SRD and Eng;*
- * Nuragic Age, in ITA and SRD;*
- * Phoenician-punic-roman Age, in ITA and SRD;*
- * Vandalic-byzantine-giudical Age, in ITA.*

For any question, you can contact us emailing info@lastoriasarda.com.

Pictures

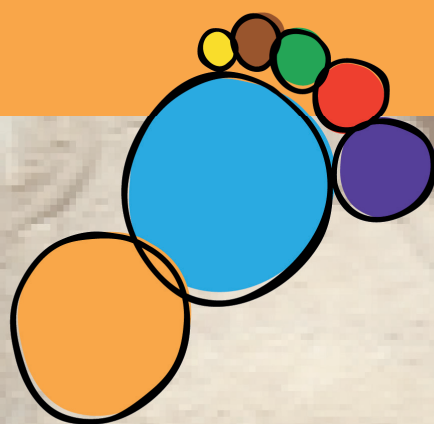
Pages 9-10: Francesco Corni.

Page 11 (bottom): Lavinia Flora (Ceramica, Tam Tam, Cagliari 2001)

Page 14 (bottom right): Paola Nuscis (Immagini, percorsi e storie, Tam Tam, Cagliari 2003)

The authors would love to credit all the photos and pictures the sources of which they could not determine with certainty.

This booklet was translated in English by Gloria Corda.



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