

## WORLD HERITAGE LIST

### Barumini (Italy)

No 833

#### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Su Nuraxi di Barumini
<i>Location</i>	Cagliari, Sardinia
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

#### Justification by State Party

The Barumini complex is an exceptional example of the *nuraghe* culture, built in the Bronze Age and in use for a long period. Although *nuraghi* are unique, to be found only in Sardinia, they are among the most significant manifestations of the prehistoric culture of the Mediterranean basin.

[Note The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. However, in the tentative list for Italy sent to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre on 28 June 1996, criteria iii, iv, v, and vi are quoted.]

#### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Su Nuraxi di Barumini is a *site*.

#### History and Description

##### *History*

During the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (c 1500-800 BC) on Sardinia a unique form of architecture developed: circular defensive towers in the form of truncated cones built of dressed stone, with corbel-vaulted internal chambers. Some (as at Barumini) were surrounded by quadrilobate enclosures consisting of towers linked by massive walls. Villages of small circular-plan houses developed around these strong-points.

The precise dating of the period of building the *nuraghi* on Sardinia is still the subject of debate among scholars, since there is some conflict between

radiocarbon dates and those obtained by conventional archaeological stratigraphy. The influence of the Mycenaean *tholos* tombs, reflected in the corbelled roofs, now favours an earlier rather than a later dating. It is generally accepted that the central tower at Barumini dates from the later 2nd millennium BC.

The central defensive structures are considered to have been built by single families or clans. As Sardinian society evolved in a more complex and hierarchical fashion, there was a tendency for the isolated towers to attract additional structures, for social and defensive reasons.

The major effort towards the extension and elaboration of the defensive works at Barumini is dated to the Early Iron Age (10th-8th centuries BC), when Sardinia was exposed to Carthaginian incursions. It is significant that the larger *nuraghic* settlements of this type are located on those parts of the coast, or on the wide coastal plain of the eastern half of the island (as is the case of Su Nuraxi), that were most vulnerable to seaborne attacks. It was during this period that the defences at Barumini and elsewhere were strengthened and the villages accreted around the central defences for protection. They became in effect small urban settlements, housing self-sufficient communities with their own range of craftsmen.

Some time in the 7th century BC Su Nuraxi was sacked by the Carthaginians and the defensive works were slighted. However, it continued as a settlement, the houses being rebuilt in a different style. With the Roman conquest of the island in the 2nd century BC most of the *nuraghi* went out of use. However, excavations have shown that there were people living at Su Nuraxi until the 3rd century AD.

##### *Description*

The principal (and earliest) feature of Su Nuraxi is a massive central tower or keep, built of large dressed stones without the use of mortar (dry-stone construction). It consists of three chambers, one upon the other and linked by a spiral staircase (the third is only fragmentary). The ceilings of the chambers are of corbelled construction. The structure probably stood originally to a height of at least 18.5m.

The four subsidiary towers added later are linked by a massive stone curtain wall. The courtyard that they form is entered through a narrow gate at ground level on the south-east side. This was later sealed and access to the citadel would have been by means of a ladder or some other installation controlled from the interior.

These walls were in their turn enlarged and strengthened, and at the same time a second enclosure was constructed, which enclosed the domestic buildings that had been built round the keep in the intervening period. These are for the most part small, circular stone structures consisting of a single room, but one is much larger, 7m in diameter with a bench running round the inside of the walls. This is interpreted as a council chamber associated with some form of urban administration.

After the sacking of the settlement and the dismantling of the defences by the Carthaginians, new houses were built. They were in a different form from their predecessors, built using small stones and consisting of several small rooms. At a number of points they abut or overlie the earlier defences.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

The archaeological site has been the property of the Italian State since 1972. It is protected under the provisions of the basic Italian antiquities statute, Law No 1089 of 1 June 1939. This requires any intervention on the defined protected site or monument to be authorized by the Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Provincie di Cagliari e Oristano, a regional agency of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali. It is also protected as a site of natural interest under the provisions of Law No 1497/39.

The area surrounding the archaeological site is a protection zone, defined in the Building Plan of the Commune of Barumini, now in its final stages of approval.

### *Management*

The archaeological site is managed by the Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Provincie di Cagliari e Oristano, working with a local cooperative group that arranges guided tours of the site (all tours must be accompanied). This group has created a permanent visitor centre in the Capuchin Convent in the nearby village, where guidebooks, videos, and CD-ROMs are available for purchase.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

Until 1940, the only visible remains at Barumini were fragmentary, and it was assumed that they were no more than the foundations of a structure, set on a natural hill, that had been robbed for its buildings materials. It was not until a torrential rainstorm uncovered more substantial remains that the importance of the site became recognized.

The Italian archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu, carried out exploratory excavations at the time of the discovery of the site, and returned to excavate the entire site from 1951 to 1956.

From the time that the site was opened to the public a certain amount of sporadic maintenance and conservation work was carried out. However, a major campaign took place in 1990-94. This included reinforcement of the quadrilobate bastion and houses in the eastern and south-eastern sectors, the installation of external and internal stairways and an upper platform to permit access to the central tower, fencing of the whole archaeological area, the creation of an electronic protective barrier around the monument, using closed-circuit cameras, and the

installation of artificial lighting inside the main structure.

This work was financed from the regular budget of the Soprintendenza, supplemented by major funds provided by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Agency for the Development of Southern Italy).

A plan is currently under preparation for the construction of an interpretation centre within the archaeological area, financed by the Sardinian Regional Government and the European Union.

### *Authenticity*

The level of authenticity of the monument is very high. Interventions involving the use of modern materials such as reinforced concrete, metal, and wood are minimal and unobtrusive, and do not impact adversely on either the authenticity or the appearance of the archaeological remains.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Su Nuraxi in February 1996. ICOMOS also consulted the leading British expert on European protohistory.

### *Qualities*

The archaeological site of Su Nuraxi at Barumini is the best preserved and most complete example of the unique form of prehistoric defensive complexes known as *nuraghi*. Although these monuments are unique to Sardinia, they represent an exceptional adaptation of materials for defensive purposes at a very early stage in human development.

### *Comparative analysis*

The *nuraghi* are to be found only on the island of Sardinia. The only comparable prehistoric structures are the brochs of northern and western Scotland and the islands. In view of the geographical and chronological separation of the two types of monument, it does not seem appropriate to ICOMOS to make a judgmental comparison between the two. They represent similar responses to comparable political and social situations, but entirely independent of one another and separated in time by several centuries.

## Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

The *nuraghe* of Sardinia, of which Su Nuraxi is the pre-eminent example, represent an exceptional response to political and social conditions, making an imaginative and innovative use of the materials and techniques available to a prehistoric island community.



**Barumini :**  
**Vue aérienne /**  
**Aerial view**



**Barumini :**  
**Le nuraghe et une partie du village /**  
**The nuraghe and part of the village**