



Two Fragments of Punic Wheel-Made Clay Figurines from the Tophet of Bithia – Su Cardolinu (Domus de Maria – South Sardinia)

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ENG Abstract: The paper presents and discusses two fragments of wheel-made clay figurines recently recovered during the renewed investigations conducted by the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in the Tophet of Bithia, situated on the islet of Su Cardolinu. These two specimens, representing the first instances of wheel-made clay figurines found in Bithia outside of the well-known batch of “suffering devotees”, hold significant implications for the understanding of the history of the Tophet of Su Cardolinu and, more generally, the settlement of Bithia.

Keywords: wheel-made clay figurines; Punic terracottas; Tophet of Bithia; Sardinia.

^{ES} Dos fragmentos de figuritas púnicas de arcilla fabricadas a torno procedentes del tofet de Bithia – Su Cardolinu (Domus de Maria – Sur Cerdeña)

Resumen: En este artículo se presentan y analizan dos fragmentos de figuritas de arcilla hechas a torno, recientemente recuperados en el ámbito de las nuevas investigaciones realizadas por la Universidad Ca' Foscari de Venecia en el tofet de Bithia, situado en el islote de Su Cardolinu. Estos dos especímenes, que representan los primeros casos de figuritas a torno hallados en Bithia fuera del conocido lote de “devotos sufrientes”, tienen importantes implicaciones para la comprensión de la historia del tofet de Su Cardolinu y, más ampliamente, del asentamiento de Bithia.

Palabras clave: figuritas de arcilla hechas a torno; terracotas púnicas; tofet de Bitia; Cerdeña.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. The finding context. 3. The wheel-made clay figurine fragments found at Su Cardolinu. 3.1. Fragment No. 1. 3.2. Fragment No. 2. 4. Concluding remarks. 5. Bibliographic references.

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1. Introduction

Since 2021 Ca' Foscari University of Venice has resumed archaeological investigations on the islet of Su Cardolinu (Chia, Domus de Maria – South Sardinia) (Fig. 1).

The islet was identified as the site of the Tophet of Bithia in 1964 during a survey of the Sulcis coast conducted by a joint mission of the University of Rome and the Soprintendenza di Cagliari, directed by Ferruccio Barreca. During this exploration, a wall running along the northern edge of the islet was excavated (Fig. 2). In the northeast sector of the islet, a structure (Building C) was unearthed and interpreted as an altar due to approximately 10 urns dated between the end of the 7th and the 6th century BC discovered around it. Finally, two cultic buildings (Buildings A-B) dated no earlier than the 4th century BC were partly excavated west of the altar (Fig. 2).²

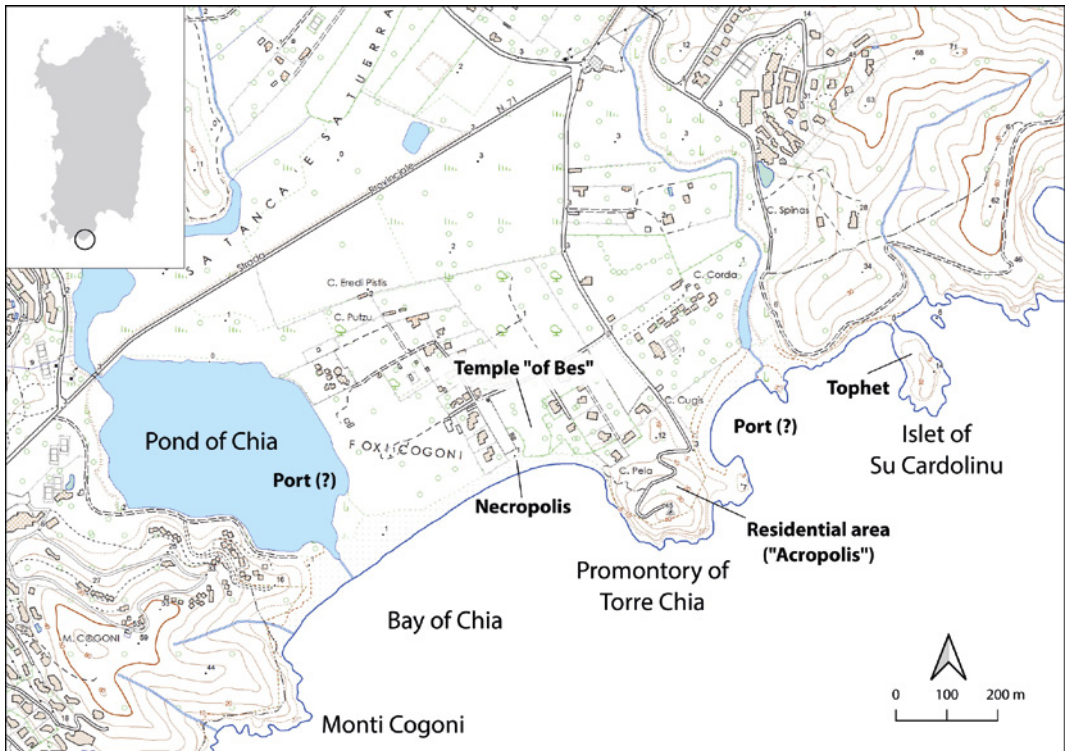


Fig. 1. The area of Chia (Domus de Maria – South Sardinia) with an indication of the main sectors of ancient Bithia (elab. S. Floris)

The new research project of Ca' Foscari University of Venice includes an intensive survey and stratigraphic excavations, which so far have been carried out in the "urnfield" and the sacellum (Building B).³ During the fieldwork, two anthropomorphic bottle-shaped terracotta fragments were discovered. These fragments belong to the material class of wheel-made clay figurines, which are typically Carthaginian and widely diffused in the Phoenician West from the 7th century BC onwards.

¹ The research is carried out, under the scientific direction of Alessandra Gilbert and my fieldwork direction, on concession of the *Ministero della Cultura* (Decreto del Direttore Generale ABAP rep. n. 911 del 13.08.2021) and in agreement with the *Comune di Domus de Maria*.

² Barreca 1965, 145-152. See also, Pesce 1968, 337-340; Barreca 1986, 295; Bartoloni 1996, 26, 38-40; Floris – Gilbert, forthcoming.

³ Floris – Gilbert forthcoming.

Their immediate antecedents are found in the Cypriot production, which, along with those from Phoenician and Syro-Palestinian regions, is part of the Aegean tradition of the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, inspired by New Kingdom Egyptian models.⁴

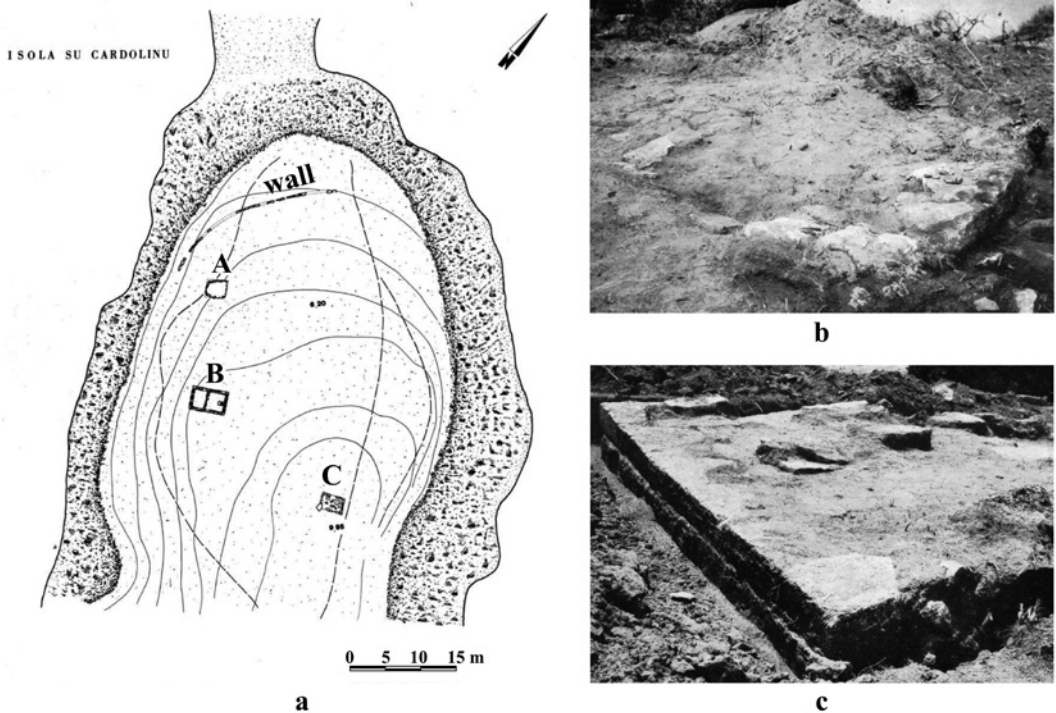


Fig. 2. Bithia, Su Cardolinu. Excavation 1964: a) Plan of the islet with the positioning of the structures; b) Building A; c) Building B (elab. S. Floris from Barreca 1986, fig. 69 and Barreca 1965, pls. LXVI-LXVII)

In the Phoenician West, such artifacts likely held a primary funerary significance.⁵ This is supported by their discovery predominantly in funerary and tophet contexts, with some findings in votive contexts that are nevertheless ideologically linked to the funerary sphere.⁶ It has been proposed that these artifacts were used in rituals associated with the formation and maintenance of specific communities and that the emphasis on certain anatomical elements —such as eyes, nose, mouth, breasts, navels, and genitalia—, along with their resemblance to zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vessels, suggests a conception of the human body as a fluid container.⁷

⁴ For this material class, Ferron – Aubet 1974 and, in particular, pp. 155-163 for its origin.

⁵ For a funerary interpretation of this material class see Garbini 1980, 173-175. Giovanni Garbini accepted Aubet's and Ferron's proposal to connect the figurines with human fertility but not their reading as ex-votos reproducing devotees (Ferron – Aubet 1974, 144-145, 159-165). Noting that the oldest specimens (7th-4th century BC) come from necropoleis or tophets, Garbini proposed that they are representations related to concepts of "death and fertility, dissolution and regeneration", thus depicting what "the deceased will be, when he has completed his cycle, a source of life" (Garbini 1980, 175). The only exception is the case of the specimens from the Temple of Bes deposit in Bithia, for which Garbini followed Pesce's interpretation as ex-votos depicting "suffering devotees" (Garbini 1980, 172-173).

⁶ These are the groups of figurines found in Bithia, Narbolia and Isla Plana. The proposal to associate these findings with funerary ideologies was put forward by Giuseppe Garbati in a talk presented at the Xth International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies held in Ibiza in October 2022.

⁷ López-Bertrán 2016.

The two fragments discovered at Su Cardolinu represent the first instances of wheel-made clay figurines found in Bithia outside the well-known batch of approximately two hundred specimens uncovered by Gennaro Pesce in the votive deposit just outside the Temple of Bes, located in the area of the beach cemetery of Sa Colonia (Fig. 1).⁸

The two sherds can be preliminarily classified, albeit with some uncertainty due to their noticeable incompleteness, as Type I A according to Aubet and Ferron's classification. Specimens of this type are recognized as having Eastern, specifically Cypriot, origins and are considered prototypes of the productions and typological developments found in the Western regions of the Mediterranean.⁹ From this type –documented in Carthage,¹⁰ Motya,¹¹ Ibiza¹², and several locations in Sardinia, such as Nora,¹³ Bithia,¹⁴ Pani Loriga,¹⁵ Sulci,¹⁶ Monte Sirai,¹⁷ Tharros,¹⁸ Narbolia,¹⁹ and other centers in the region of Oristano²⁰— derive the later productions of Ibiza and Bithia, which appear to be autonomous from each other.²¹

The figurines found in the Temple of Bes deposit belong to these later productions and are commonly dated between the 3rd and the 1st centuries BC,²² although the proposal of reframing the earliest attestations appears reasonable.²³ These figurines present original features that reflect an interplay between various cultural components, predominantly Punic and indigenous, but also influenced by Italic elements within the framework of “provincial Hellenism.”²⁴ Instead of raising their arms in the typical praying gesture, these figurines feature elongated, threadlike arms touching various body parts with their hands. This peculiarity has led to their interpretation as ex-voto depicting “suffering devotees” utilized within cults, an interpretation further supported by the recovery of anatomical ex-voto in the same votive deposit.²⁵ The individualized therapeutic-votive purposes of the figurines found in the Temple of Bes deposit²⁶ set them apart from the wheel-made clay figurine productions of other Punic centers and align them more closely with the hand-modeled figurines of Neapolis.²⁷

⁸ Pesce 1965; Aubet 1969; Uberti 1973; Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 50-103. See, also, Garbati 2008, 26-30; 2010, 166-170; Carboni 2012, 33-40; Garbati 2014; López Bertran 2017; Garbati 2022, 67-84.

⁹ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 37-38.

¹⁰ Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 1-20, 41.

¹¹ Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 44-46. See also Ciasca – Toti 1994, nos. 1-6, 51-52, 132, 152-154, 216-223, 226-227, 230; Nigro 2020, 132, fig. 10, a-b.

¹² At Isla Plana (Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 121-135) and at Puig des Molins (Ferron – Aubet 1974, no. 154).

¹³ Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 48-49; Zucca 1980, n. 1; Campanella 2009, nn. 4-5.

¹⁴ In the Temple of Bes deposit (Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 50-66).

¹⁵ Botto 2012, 295, fig. 24.

¹⁶ Uberti 1971, n. 9; Moscati 1988a, 93-95.

¹⁷ Ferron – Aubet 1974, no. 104; Moscati 1996, 39-41.

¹⁸ Acquaro *et alii* 1975, 18, A1, pl. I; Moscati 1976; Fariselli *et alii* 1999, 113, fig. 12, e.

¹⁹ Moscati 1968b; Ferron – Aubet 1974, 122, nos. 109-120; Stiglitz 2005, 64-67, pl. I.

²⁰ See, e.g., Orri (Sanna 2011).

²¹ Some evidence of late (3rd-beginning of 2nd century BC), Punic or “Punicising” wheel-made figurines is also documented in the far western Mediterranean, e.g. in the sanctuaries of La Algaida (Corzo Sánchez 2007, 200, Fig. 3b; Horn 2011, C279; Martín Ruiz 2023, 123, 126) and La Serreta (Horn 2011, 153-154, 249-253, C222, C228, C252-253, C316), and in the residential area of Los Villares (Horn 2011, 243, C226-227).

²² Pesce 1965, 69, note 3, 71; Uberti 1973, 42-44. Most recently, Garbati 2022, 72-74. For a dating between the mid-4th century and the 1st century BC, see Ciccone 2001, 39-40; Chergia 2019, 295.

²³ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 46; Moscati 1989, 53. The chronological framing of the original layout of the Temple of Bes is also problematic. The deposit represents a reliable *terminus ante quem*, with its limit being the 1st century BC. A *terminus post quem* is offered by a series of cremation burials dated to the 7th-6th centuries BC, found outside and beneath the building's flooring (Ciccone 2001, 38-40; Chergia 2019; Garbati 2022, 72-73, with bibliography).

²⁴ Bernardini 2006, 79; Garbati 2014.

²⁵ Pesce 1965, 66-69; Galeazzi 1986; Galeazzi 1991. Most recently, Garbati 2022, 75-76 and note 76.

²⁶ Galeazzi 1986, 191.

²⁷ Moscati 1989, 7-56; Moscati 1992, 81-83; Moscati 1993, 106-108; Campus 1997, 168-174; López-Bertrán 2017.

The ritual activities performed in the Temple of Bes were dedicated to a deity depicted with Besoid iconographical features and healing prerogatives, potentially identified as the god Eshmun. The location of the Temple —inside of which some votive clay feet similar to those of the deposit were found²⁸— in the area of the cemetery of Sa Colonia indicates that the dead played an active role in the votive practices carried out in the sacred area.²⁹

2. The finding context

The terracotta fragments presented here were recovered during the 2021 and 2022 excavation campaigns in the area of Building B.

Building B is the larger of the two cult buildings Barreca unearthed in the western area of the cult place of Su Cardolinu in 1964, during the only excavation campaign conducted before 2021.

The smaller structure, named Building A, was interpreted as an aedicula containing a cult image,³⁰ while the larger, Building B, was interpreted as a sacellum (Fig. 2).³¹ Based on their construction techniques, Barreca dated the buildings to no earlier than the 4th century BC.³²

Building B has a rectangular floor plan measuring 5.85 x 3.70 m. The base of the walls (approximately 50 cm thick, with a maximum height of 25 cm) has been preserved. They are constructed with polygonal sandstone blocks and small irregular stones bound with mud mortar. Many sandstone blocks are triangular³³ and “T-shaped”³⁴ (Fig. 3) and may have been reused from an older nearby structure.³⁵

Building B consists of two rooms of similar size, divided by a step of large, irregular stones interpreted by Barreca as the plinth of a wall (Fig. 3). The western side is open, suggesting that it gave access to the building through a 70 cm wide threshold. According to this interpretation, Building B was organized into two rooms: a front room with a rammed earth floor accessed through the open side, and a rear room. In the rear room, close to its back wall, an altar-base (approximately 80 x 50 cm) was arranged on the longitudinal axis of the building.³⁶

Within the scope of the investigations carried out by the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the area of Building B underwent an intensive survey from 2021 to 2023, with the excavation of the building resuming in 2022. In the rear room of the building, a hardcore layer of sub-base —probably a preparation for a not-preserved floor³⁷— has been uncovered. However, the excavations have not yet yielded elements for a stratigraphically based dating of Building B.

²⁸ Pesce 1965, 36.

²⁹ Lastly, Garbati 2022, 74-81.

³⁰ Built on a square foundation of flat stones measuring 3.10 m per side, Building A consists of a small structure with a square plan (1.70 m per side). The floor and wall base, constructed of small polygonal sandstone blocks (45 cm thick and preserved up to 25 cm in height), were preserved (Barreca 1965, 147, 151-152, pl. LXVI; 1986, 295; Perra 1998, 159, no. 4).

³¹ Barreca 1986, 295.

³² Barreca 1965, 145-152.

³³ See the recent discovery in the area of the Phoenician necropolis of Nora of a quarry face with traces of extraction of triangular sandstone ashlar, not yet identified in the site's structures, dating before the setting of the necropolis in the first half of the 7th century BC (Bonetto *et alii* 2022, 267, fig. 18, b).

³⁴ Bassoli *et alii* 2013, 289.

³⁵ This structure could potentially be associated with a Nuragic structure reported at Punta 'e Su Senzu, approximately 300 m northeast of the islet of Su Cardolinu. In 1964, during the same territorial survey that led to the discovery of the Tophet of Bithia, Barreca identified several “T-shaped” blocks at Punta 'e Su Senzu and interpreted them as “baetyls” (Barreca 1965, 145, pls. LX-LXI). However, these blocks could also be interpreted as building elements of a Nuragic structure (Lilliu cited in Moscati 1968a, 137). For the report of a Nuragic tower at Punta 'e Su Senzu, see Bartoloni 1996, 38; also, Minoja *et alii* 2016, 126.

³⁶ Barreca 1965, 147-148, 152, pl. LXVI; Perra 1998, 161-162, no. 5.

³⁷ Floris – Gillibert, forthcoming.

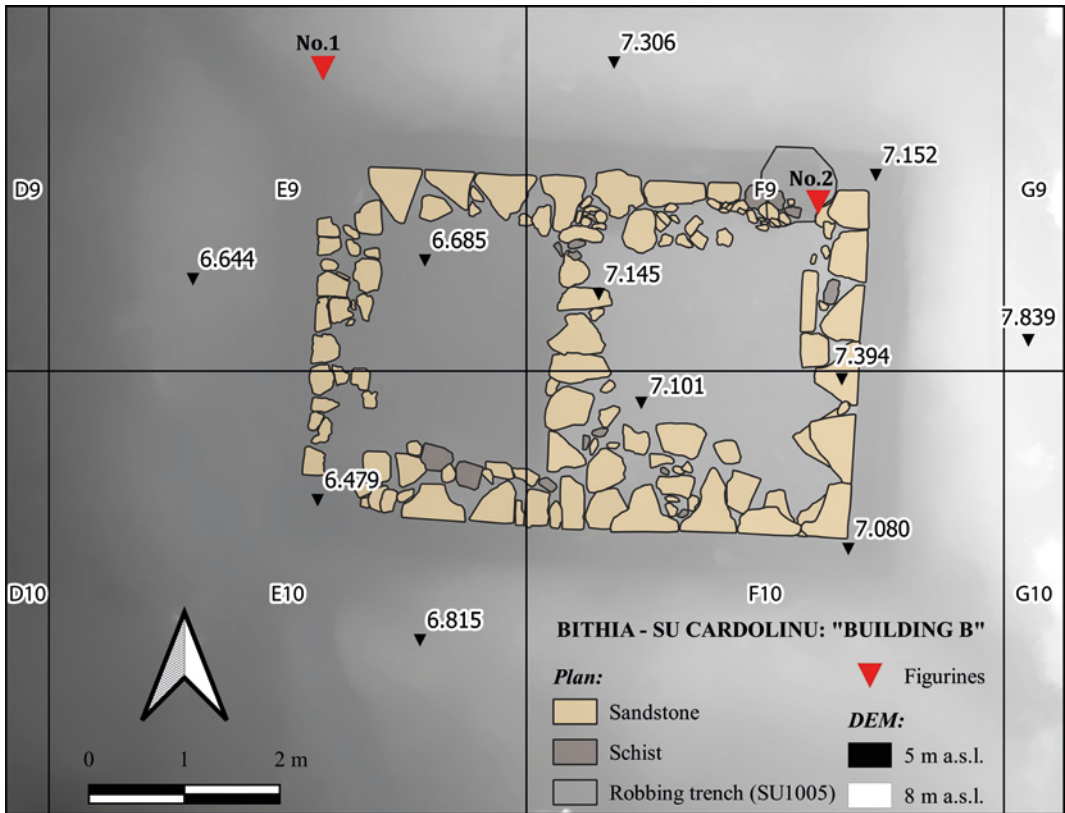


Fig. 3. Plan of Building B with an indication of the finding location of the Clay Figurine Fragments Nos. 1 and 2 (elab. S. Floris)

Fragment No. 1 was found during the intensive survey conducted in the area of square E 9, just outside Building B (Fig. 3, No.1). Notably, squares E-F 9-10 encompass not only Building B but also the soil removed during the 1964 excavation works. It was accumulated around the structure's perimeter, with greater depth observed on the east, north, and south sides (Fig. 3). Fragment No. 1 was located at the summit of the mound north of Building B (Fig. 3, No. 1), suggesting its origin from the layers excavated in 1964 to unearth the structure. Thus, although recovered outside Building B, Fragment No. 1 is likely to be associated with this structure.

Fragment No. 2 was found in the fill of a robber trench (SU1004), which was dug to extract blocks from the eastern sector of the northern wall of Building B (Fig. 3, No. 2; Fig. 4). Despite the secondary nature of the discovery context, it is likely that the figurine to which Fragment No. 2 belonged was originally positioned within Building B.

This aspect is particularly relevant given that wheel-made clay figurines have been discovered in association with cultic buildings in other Tophets, such as those at Motya and Monte Sirai. However, it is worth noting that –as at Su Cardulinu– most of these findings were unearthed in secondary contexts due to the transformations that occurred over the extended lifespan of these sanctuaries.

The Tophet of Motya provides significant chronological information regarding the usage of figurines within the sanctuary. While only one fragmented specimen was recovered in the earliest sector of the urnfield, in Stratum V (circa 625-550 BC),³⁸ a significant batch of at least 130

³⁸ Ciasca – Toti 1994, 7-9, 62-63, no. 230, pl. XXXVII.

wheel-made clay figurines, alongside other terracotta artifacts dating from the mid-6th to 5th centuries BC, was found in a votive deposit located within the robber trenches of the perimetral walls of the building known as Sacellum A or Temple T6, which was likely destroyed during the Dionysian conquest of 398/7 BC.³⁹ The utilization of wheel-made clay figurines in the Tophet of Motya is, therefore, estimated to have occurred between the 6th century BC⁴⁰ and the siege of Dionysius I.



Fig. 4. The Clay Figurine Fragment No. 2 in situ (photo S. Floris; on concession of MIC)

At Monte Sirai, three wheel-made clay figurines were found in secondary contexts in the Temple of the Tophet. The first fragmentary figurine was found in an ash layer inside the building, dating to the 3rd-2nd century BC.⁴¹ However, on stylistic grounds, the figurine has been attributed to the early 5th⁴² or 6th century BC.⁴³ A similar dating has been suggested for the second fragmentary specimen, found in a dump beside the access steps to the Temple of the Tophet, along with materials dated to the second half of the 4th century BC.⁴⁴ The same chronological framework has been proposed for the third specimen, of which only the head is preserved. It was

³⁹ Ciasca – Toti 1994, 8-9; Mammìna – Toti 2011, 32-33. For a recently found specimen see Nigro 2020, 132-133.

⁴⁰ This dating is based on the above-mentioned discovery of a specimen in Stratum V (Ciasca – Toti 1994, 9; Orsingher 2020, 152). Anyway, as noted by Adriano Orsingher, it's important to consider "that the upper surface of stratum V served as a walking level between the mid-6th and the end of the 4th century BC, which may have determined cases of intrusive materials" (Orsingher 2020, 152, note 30).

⁴¹ Garbini 1964, 96-99, pls. L-LI.

⁴² Garbini 1966, 115-116.

⁴³ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 46; Moscati 1981, 20; Moscati 1996, 39-40, pl. VII, a.

⁴⁴ Moscati 1981; Moscati 1996, 39-41, pl. VII, b.

found alongside a small archaic plate and fragments of black glazed ware in a backfill layer that sealed the depositions of the oldest stratum of urns and leveled the area for the erection of the Temple's steps.⁴⁵

The Tophets of Carthage, Sulcis, and Nora have also yielded wheel-made clay figurines.

In the Tophet of Carthage, such figurines have been found in the urnfield, next to or on top of the urns, often protected by stones like the urns. According to H el ene B enichou-Safar's reconstruction of the sanctuary's life, these figurines can be attributed only to the 3rd phase (550/525-300/275 BC)⁴⁶ and, apparently, in no case can they be dated later than the mid-5th century BC.⁴⁷

The exact context of discovery for the two specimens from the Tophet of Nora, attributed to the 6th-5th centuries BC,⁴⁸ remains unclear, although they may have been found in the urnfield.⁴⁹

Similarly, the finding context of the clay figurines from the Tophet of Sulcis, of which only one specimen dated to the 5th century BC has been published,⁵⁰ is also unclear.⁵¹

3. The wheel-made clay figurine fragments found at Su Cardolinu

3.1. Fragment No. 1

Signature: SC21.S1.E9.71

Dimensions: max. width 7.5 cm

Colour: outer surface 7.5YR, 6/4 (light brown); fracture 2.5YR, 5/6 (red)

Fabric: rough to the touch; small to medium-sized white inclusions and very small silver-coloured bright inclusions; rare reddish-brown medium-size inclusions

Essential Description: fragment of a wheel-made clay figurine; upper left portion of the body; left breast and part of left arm can be recognized

Figures: Fig. 5; Fig. 6

Fragment No. 1 preserves the left upper body of a wheel-made clay figurine, displaying the left breast and a portion of the left arm. The breast is a small bump created by hand-molding a small clay core to connect with the body's outer surface seamlessly. As is customary in this material class, the left arm is fashioned by applying a hand-molded stick element. A shallow depression is visible on the preserved surface to the right of the breast. It could be interpreted either as splintering due to the figurine's breakage or as a part of the *linea alba* rendered by digital impression between the breasts, a common feature in the specimens from the Temple of Bes deposit⁵² and other Punic sites.⁵³

Fragment No. 1 shows no traces of painted decoration –used elsewhere to depict elements of the body or clothing– which is consistent with the documentation from the Temple of Bes.

⁴⁵ Bondi 1982, 278, pl. LXIV, f; Moscati 1996, 41, pl. VII, c.

⁴⁶ B enichou-Safar 2004, 95-96.

⁴⁷ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 44.

⁴⁸ Patroni 1904, cols. 189-190; Ferron – Aubet 1974, 46, NOR.1-2; Chiera 1978, 62-64.

⁴⁹ It's possible that the fragmentary figurine with only the head preserved (Patroni 1904, col. 190, fig. 22; Ferron – Aubet 1974, NOR.1) could be associated with the "clay head" found, likely in the area of the urnfield, by Filippo Vivanet in 1890 (Vivanet 1891, 301). The second, almost intact specimen (Patroni 1904, col. 190, fig. 21; Ferron – Aubet 1974, NOR.2) is not mentioned in Vivanet's excavation report. Therefore, it is possible that it was found in 1889 during the fortuitous discovery of the Tophet of Nora, which was exposed by an extraordinarily violent coastal storm, rather than during the subsequent excavation campaign carried out by Vivanet in 1890 (see Vivanet 1891, 299).

⁵⁰ Moscati 1988a, 93-95.

⁵¹ Moscati 1972-1973, 15; Ferron – Aubet 1974, 33.

⁵² Uberti 1973, 24.

⁵³ For example, see Ferron – Aubet 1974, nos. 7, 8, 15, 22 (Carthage), 47 (Motya), 109 (Narbolia), 126, 131, 132, 134, 137, 138, 140 (Isla Plana), 154 (Puig des Molins).

Regarding the depiction of the breast, while this feature alone is insufficient to determine the gender of the wheel-made clay figurines,⁵⁴ it is noteworthy that the execution of Fragment No. 1 does not find direct parallels in the extensive repertoire of clay figurines of “suffering devotees” found in the deposit of the Temple of Bes. Generally, in the latter repertoire, the figurines’ breasts –representing male, female, or sexually undetermined figures– are usually made by digital impression or by applying two small clay globes, often pierced.⁵⁵



Fig. 5. Clay Figurine Fragment No. 1, photo (photo S. Floris; on concession of MIC)

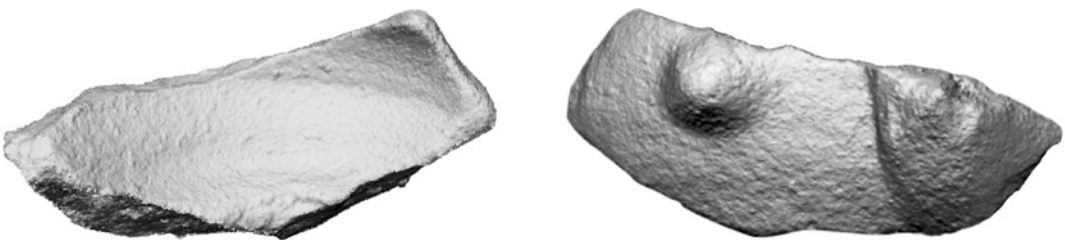


Fig. 6. Clay Figurine Fragment No. 1, 3D Model, inner and outer view (elab. S. Floris)

⁵⁴ This is true for the wheel-made figurines and the hand-shaped figurines found at Neapolis (Moscati 1989, 44; López-Bertrán 2017, 57). See Ferrer – López-Bertrán 2017-2019, 145; 2020, 375-376 on the relationships between clay figurines, healing practices, and breastfeeding.

⁵⁵ Uberti 1973, 23-24. Some resemblance to the Su Cardolinu specimen can be seen in the figurines Ferron – Aubet 1974 nos. 56 (BIT.7), pl. LI; 60 (BIT.11), pl. LV; 62 (BIT.13), pl. LVII; 73 (BIT.24), pl. LXVIII; 83 (BIT.34), pl. LXXIX; 87 (BIT.38), pl. LXXXIV; 89 (BIT 40), pl. LXXXVI; 96 (BIT.47), pl. XCIII.

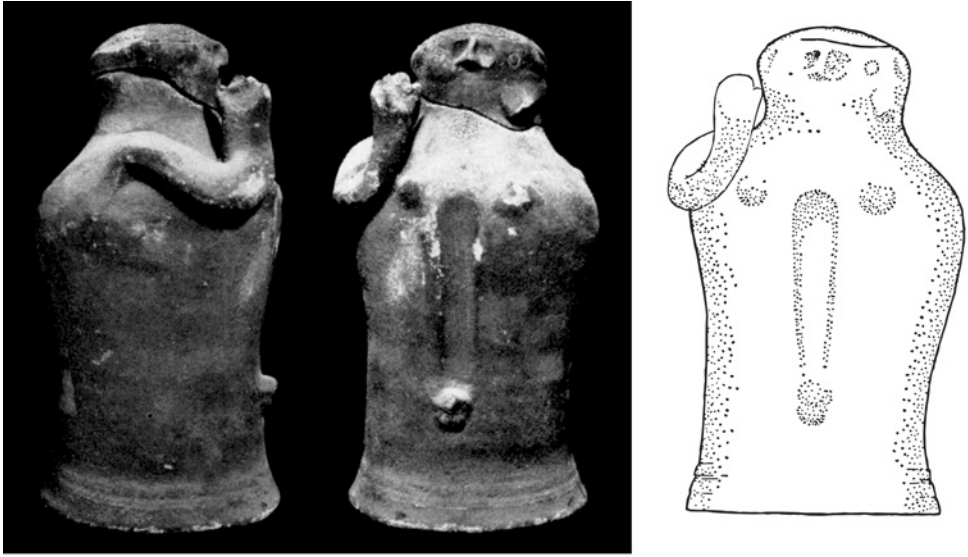


Fig. 7. Clay Figurine from the deposit of the Temple of Bes at Bithia (elab. S. Floris from Uberti 1973, fig.1, b and pl. I, 2)



Fig. 8. Clay Figurine from the deposit of the Temple of Bes at Bithia (elab. S. Floris from Uberti 1973, pl. I, 3)

From the surviving portion of the arm, which is relatively thick with an ellipsoidal cross-section and folds directly upwards, it can be inferred that the broken part was originally raised from and detached from the figurine's body. This characteristic does not align easily with the repertoire of the Temple of Bes deposit, where the arms are generally slender and sinuous, and instances of arms detached from the body are uncommon, as the hands are usually positioned on the part of the body that is sore or ill. Moreover, the posture of raised arms is not frequently documented in the most significant groupings identified by Maria Luisa Uberti on the basis of the position of the arms.⁵⁶

Among the figurines of the Temple of Bes deposit, those cataloged as nos. 1, 2 (Fig. 7), and 3⁵⁷ (Fig. 8) in Uberti's catalogue, belonging to Class A1 of the same author's classification (equivalent to Aubet and Ferron's Type I A), are the only ones with an arrangement of the arms that bears some resemblance to that of Su Cardolinu Fragment No. 1. However, significant differences in execution can be observed (Figs. 7-8).

Looking beyond Bithia, despite the diverse forms and combinations typical of this material class, a comparison can be drawn between Fragment No. 1 and Carthaginian production. Specifically, the rendering of the breast and arm allows for a direct comparison with a specimen recovered in the Carthaginian Tophet during the 1935-1936 Lapeyere excavation⁵⁸ (Fig. 9). The figurine belongs to Aubet and Ferron's Type I A, whose attestations in the city of Elissa occur between the 6th and the middle of the 5th century BC, with exceptional instances also in the second half of the 7th century BC.⁵⁹ It depicts an ithyphallic male figure with painted decoration featuring two red bands crossing over the chest. Both arms are bent, with the right forming a "V" shape and the palm facing forward, while the left arm is extended forward with the palm facing right⁶⁰ (Fig. 9).

It is noteworthy that Su Cardolinu Fragment No. 1, depicting a left limb, closely resembles the rendering of the right arm of the Carthaginian statuette, bent and with the palm facing forward. However, this is not problematic considering that the iconographic variant featuring both arms bent and raised with palms facing outward is the most common among male figurines found in Carthage, Motya, and Ibiza, as well as in the less numerous findings from Nora, Monte Sirai, and Tharros.⁶¹ In the Tophet of Carthage, an example is provided by an ithyphallic Type I A statuette recovered by Pierre Cintas in a context dated to the late 6th-first half of the 5th century BC.⁶²

In light of these Carthaginian comparisons, a chronology ranging from the 6th to the first half of the 5th century BC may be proposed for Fragment No. 1. This timeframe also aligns with the dating of other specimens of wheel-made clay figurines found in other tophet-sanctuaries.⁶³

If this proposed framing is confirmed by further research at Su Cardolinu, such a finding would be particularly significant. It would attest, at this early chronological stage, to the presence in Bithia of Type I A figurines, from which, as demonstrated by María Eugenia Aubet and Jean Ferron, other typologies widespread in the Phoenician and Punic West would develop, including the "suffering devotees" from the Temple of Bes deposit in Bithia.

Regarding the artifact's production context, it's conceivable that such a statuette was crafted by a locally active artisan, possibly of North African origin, whose work foreshadowed the later workshop that produced the "suffering devotees". Alternatively, the hypothesis that Fragment No. 1 is an imported Carthaginian product, suggested by Sabatino Moscati for a head found in the

⁵⁶ Uberti 1973, 29-30. Raised arms are observed in only six of the intact or nearly intact figurines found in the Temple of Bes deposit. They belong to Positions 8 (right arm at the neck, left at the sexual organ), Position 15 (arms at or near the face), and Position 16 (right arm raised, left at the neck) of Uberti's classification.

⁵⁷ Uberti 1973, 48-49, nos. 1-3, pl. I.

⁵⁸ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 62-64, n. 1 (CAR.1), pls. I-III.

⁵⁹ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 43-44.

⁶⁰ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 64.

⁶¹ Ferron – Aubet 1974, 148.

⁶² Ferron – Aubet 1974, 44, 68-69, (CAR.10), pl. XVI.

⁶³ See above, Paragraph 2.

Tophet of Sulcis,⁶⁴ cannot be dismissed without a detailed fabric analysis. In any case, both scenarios are consistent with the context of Bithia, which has long been characterized as having significant exchanges with the North African metropolis since the Archaic period.⁶⁵



Fig. 9. Clay Figurine from the Tophet of Carthage, front and side view. The outline in dark-yellow in the side picture on the left indicates the portion corresponding to Fragment No. 1 from Su Cardolinu (elab. S. Floris from Aubet – Ferron 1974, pls. I-II)

3.2. Fragment No. 2

Signature: SC22.B.US1004.REP1

Size: max. diam. 5 cm

Colour: outer patina 7.5YR, 7/2 (pinkish grey); fabric 2.5YR, 6/8 (light red); fabric core 2.5YR, 5/3 (reddish brown)

Fabric: smooth to the touch and relatively purified; small white inclusions and very small silver-coloured bright inclusions

Essential Description: fragment of wheel-made clay figurine; only the head is preserved

Figures: Fig. 10; Fig. 11

Fragment No. 2 consists on the head of a wheel-made clay figurine, originally part of a complete figure.⁶⁶ The head is rounded and vertically flattened, with faint traces of the neck

⁶⁴ Moscati 1988a, 94.

⁶⁵ Acquaro – Bartoloni 1986.

⁶⁶ Although exceptional, examples of Punic wheel-made clay figurines depicting only the head are known (see e.g. Moscati 1968c, pl. II; Moscati 1988b, 13-14, 23, pl. I, 2). Less certain are the possible attestations of bodiless heads in the Temple of Bes deposit repertoire (Uberti 1973, 107, no. 216, pl. XXIX).

separated by a distinct, sharp edge. Inside, potter wheel marks culminate in the characteristic knot. The face, with an ellipsoidal shape, was hand-moulded without applying an additional clay plate. Orbital cavities and the nose-mouth ensemble were formed simultaneously through simple digital impressions and pinching of the front part of the head. Despite surface erosion, some anatomical details executed with a potter's rib remain discernible. The mouth is rendered by a simple interruption of the line of the prominent nose, and below it, only a portion of the chin or pointed beard is preserved. The eyes, vaguely almond-shaped, are depicted with slight grooves. At the top of the head, faint, wavy, irregular grooves represent the hair. The ears are not described.

Fragment No. 2 exhibits characteristics consistent with Type 2 of Uberti's head seriation. The figurine likely belonged to Class A1 of Uberti's classification (which aligns with Aubet and Ferron's Type I A), as most figurines with a Type 2 head feature an open base.⁶⁷

If the possibility that the figurine represents a "suffering devotee" is not ruled out a priori, it remains impossible to derive further information about the body's depiction and other anatomical features solely from the study of the head. This is due to the random combination of different anatomical components,⁶⁸ and identical figurines are absent in the Temple of Bes deposit repertoire.⁶⁹



Fig. 10. Clay Figurine Fragment No. 2 (photo S. Floris; on concession of MIC)

⁶⁷ Among the figurines presenting a Type 2 head, 18 specimens (Uberti 1973, nos. 9, 14, 27, 33, 44, 48, 51, 54-61, 63-65) have an open base and belong to Class A1 (= Aubet and Ferron's Type I A), while only 3 specimens (Uberti 1973, nos. 70-71, 91) present a closed base and belong to Class A2 (= Aubet and Ferron's Type III).

⁶⁸ Uberti 1973, 26, note 75.

⁶⁹ Pesce 1965, 60.

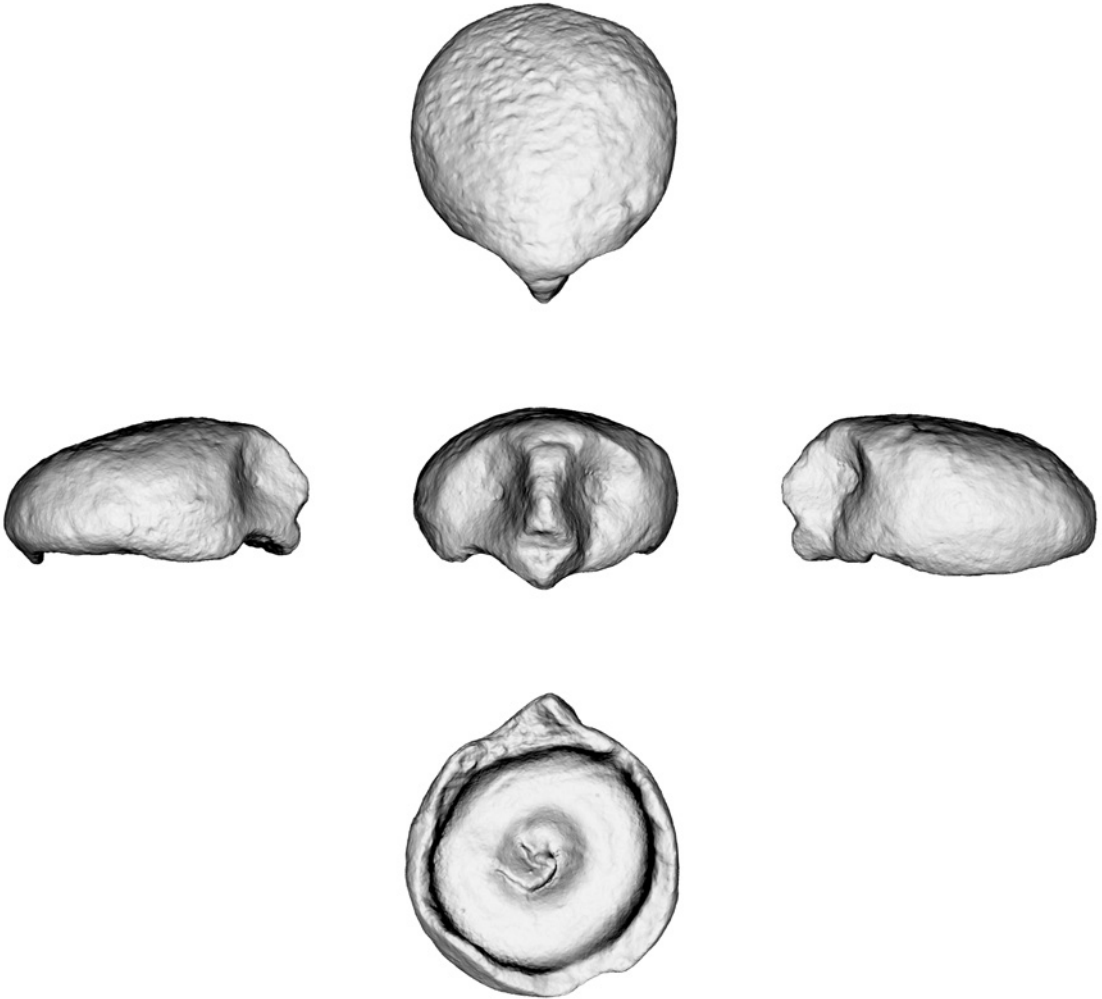


Fig. 11. Clay Figurine Fragment No. 2, 3D Model, front, top, bottom, and sides view (elab. S. Floris)

Certain details, such as the rendering of the hair and eyes⁷⁰, suggest a slightly different typological and, possibly, chronological framework for Fragment No. 2 compared to the specimens found in the Temple of Bes deposit. This impression may find support in the context of discovery –i.e., Building B, the Sacellum of Tophet of Bithia– given that no wheel-made clay figurine found in other tophets is comparable to the “suffering devotees” of the Temple of Bes deposit.

If this is the case, it would be likely that the figurine’s arms were raised or brought to the chest, and the considerations regarding the production context of Fragment No. 1 could also be extended to Fragment No. 2.

⁷⁰ In Su Cardolinu Fragment No. 2, the depiction of the hair and eyes is achieved through a gentle pressure of the potter’s rib, resulting in subtle impressions on the clay rather than distinct grooves. A similar technique using the potter’s rib to delineate eyes and hair is documented at Bithia, as seen in some examples from the Temple of Bes deposit. However, in these cases, the impressions typically create sharp and deep furrows (cf. e.g., Uberti 1973, 23-24, nos. 5, 8, 16, 21, 26, 31, 32, 45, 47, 51, 53, 72, 73, 98, 196, 133 154, 156, 163, 167-169). Among the few specimens resembling Fragment No. 2 in terms of eye rendering, see Uberti 1973, nos. 76, 153.

4. Concluding remarks

To summarize, the recovery of two fragments of wheel-made clay figurines at the Tophet of Bithia – Su Cardolinu as part of the research project carried out by Ca' Foscari University of Venice is particularly significant.

These fragments are the first specimens of wheel-made clay figurines found at Bithia outside of the Temple of Bes votive deposit in the area of the cemetery of Sa Colonia, which yielded about two hundred figurines generally dated between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC.

The discovery also enriches the repertoire of wheel-made clay figurines from the Tophets of Carthage, Motya, Nora, Sulcis, and Monte Sirai, mostly dated between the 6th and the 5th centuries BC.

A similar chronological framework may apply to Fragments No. 1 and 2 from the Tophet of Bithia – Su Cardolinu.⁷¹ However, this dating should be considered provisional due to the high degree of incompleteness characterizing these findings. Confirmation or revision will depend on further excavation data from the area of Building B.

Nevertheless, the recovery of the two fragments of wheel-made clay figurines is particularly significant for understanding the sacred area of Su Cardolinu and the history of the settlement of Bithia during Phoenician and Punic times.

According to the current interpretation, the Tophet of Bithia, located on the islet of Su Cardolinu and centered on an altar (Building C) around which F. Barreca excavated circa 10 urn depositions dated between the end of 7th and the 6th centuries BC,⁷² is believed to have ceased its activity before the end of the 6th century BC. Following a period of abandonment, a new “non-tophet” sacred area centered around Buildings B and A –respectively interpreted as a sacellum and an aedicula– would have been established on the islet of Su Cardolinu. This new phase of activity is thought to have commenced in the late Punic period and, more precisely, no earlier than the 4th century BC.⁷³

Together with the significant results achieved in the urnfield –where, between 2021 and 2023, a depositional area later than the one documented by F. Barreca has been excavated⁷⁴–, the two fragments significantly contribute to bridging the functional and chronological distance between the “archaic Tophet” and the “late Punic sanctuary”, highlighting the unity and the complexity of the historical development of the Tophet of Bithia-Su Cardolinu, to which future research is expected to make further contributions.

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⁷¹ In regard to Fragment No. 2, which lacks the drum-like configuration typical of the oldest specimens, a preliminary dating later than that of Fragment No. 1 could be suggested.

⁷² Barreca 1965, 149-151.

⁷³ Bondi 1979, 142 and note 20. See, also, Moscati 1986, 226-229; Bartoloni 1997, 83; Garbati 2019, 284-285.

⁷⁴ Floris – Gillibert forthcoming.

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