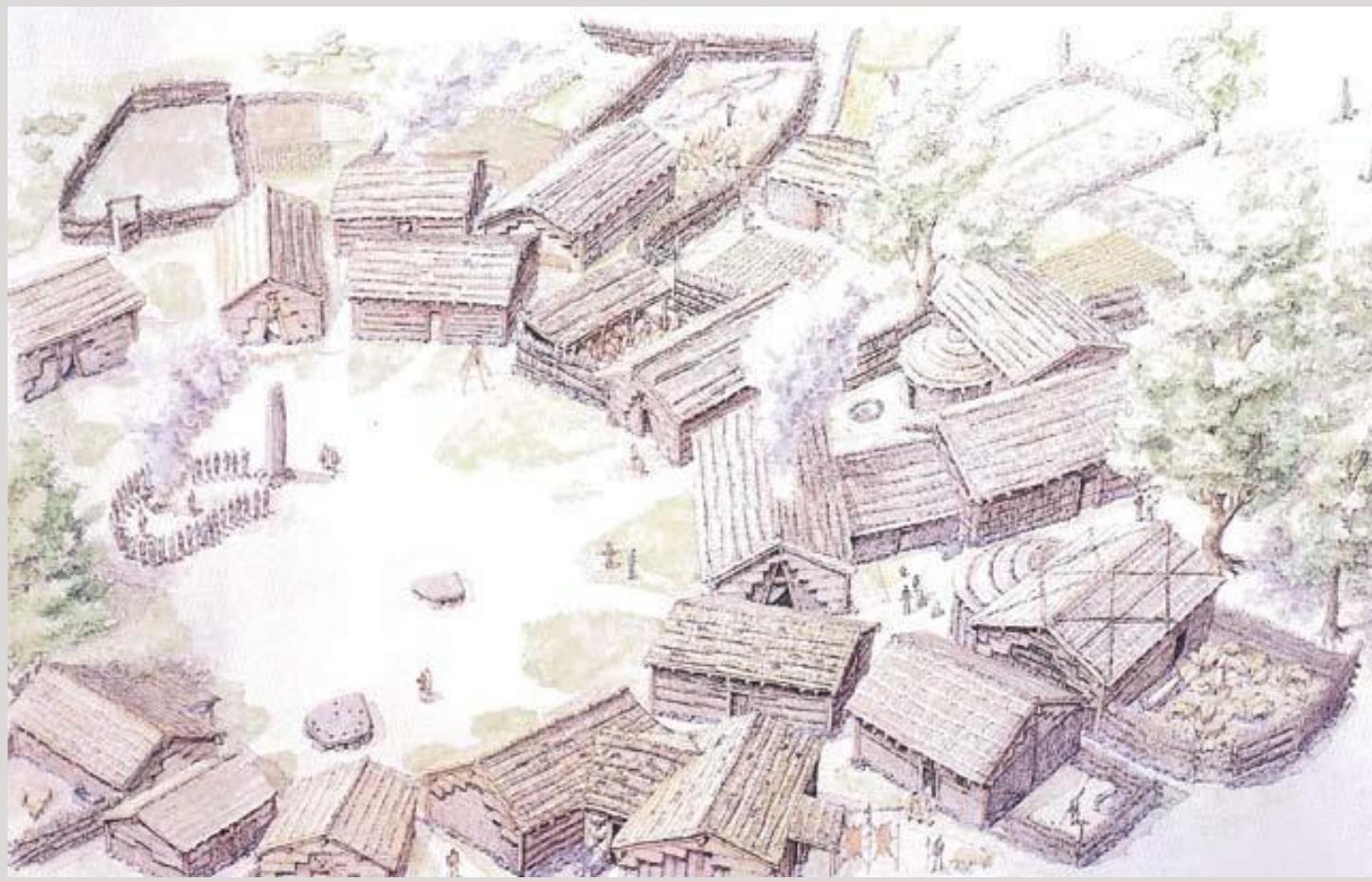


ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

Before the Altar

During the second part of the 5th millennium BC (around 4300BC), this area was already occupied by a village with elliptical shaped huts.

At the end of the last phase of Neolithic (from the year 3500 BC), another village was built. The people called “Cultura di Ozieri”, erected here quadrangular shaped huts. In that period the Menhir was situated at the left of the ramp, whereas the omphalos and the altar slab were located at its right.

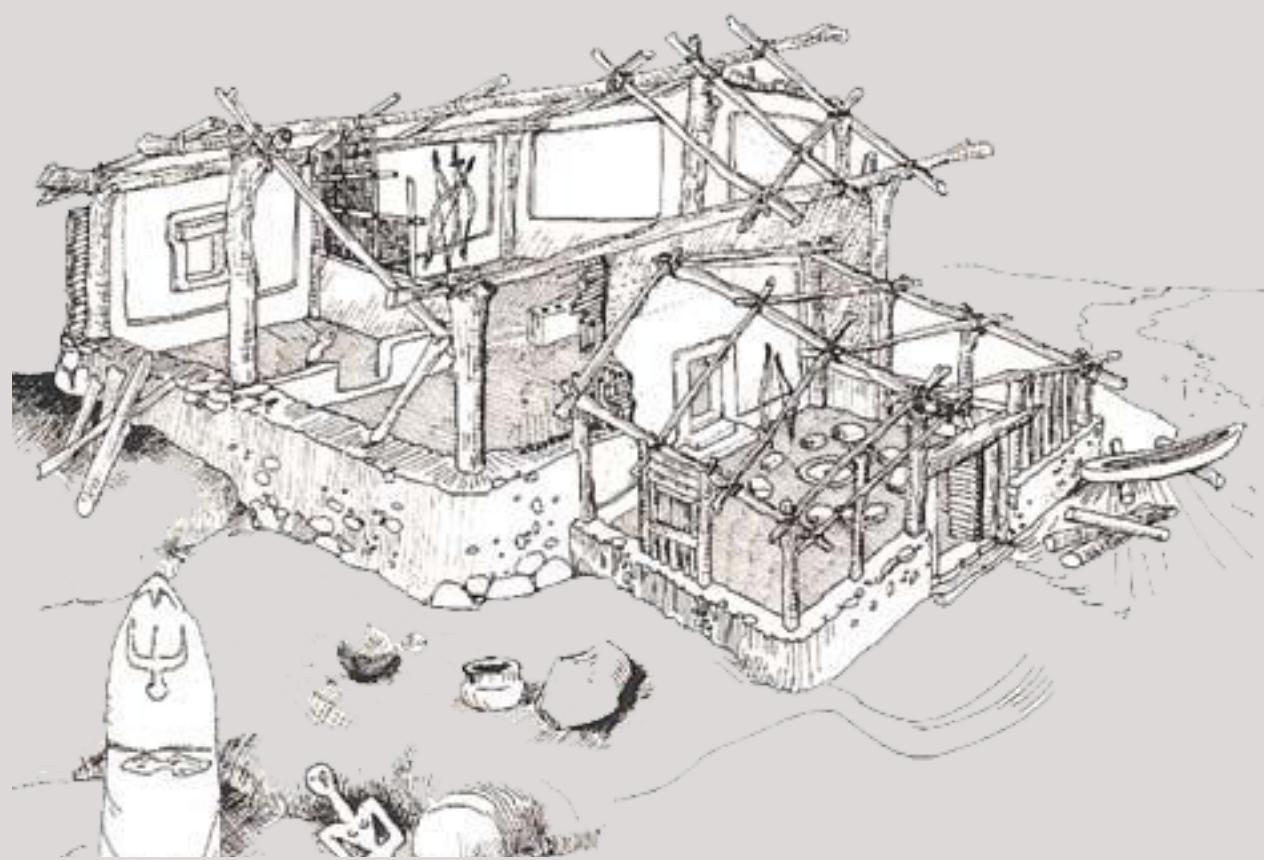


Reconstruction of the neolithic village (CORNÌ, 2000)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

Various funerary signs testify the presence of a big community here: three necropolis excavated in the rock have been found in calcareous walls in the surrounding area. This kind of tomb is called in Sardinia “domus de janas”, that literally means “fairy or witch houses”.

They are built as real houses: their architectonic structures are the same, embellished with magic and religious symbols.



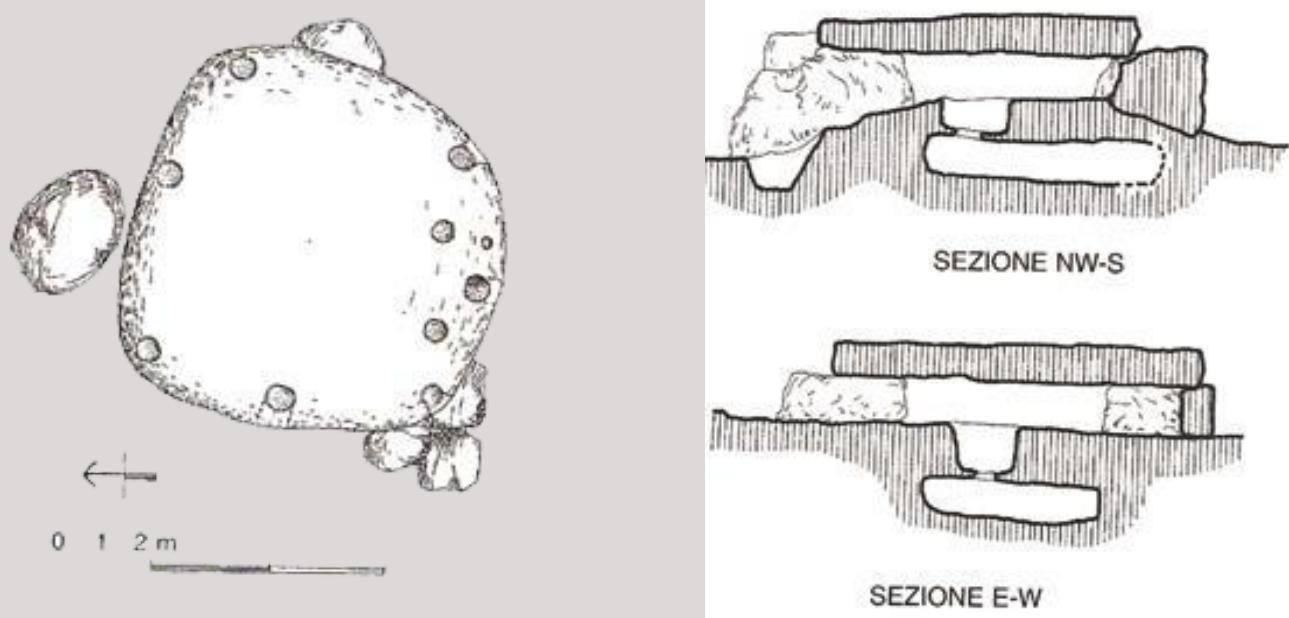
Reconstruction of a recent neolithic hut elaborated on the basis of an architectural modules observable in the domus de janas (TANDA 1984)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

➤ Sacred signs before the Altar

The Altar-slab

This large slab is situated in its original place. Below it, inside the calcareous rock, a natural drain connects the structure with a natural subterranean cavity. Experts think that it was used as a sacrificial altar for ceremonial meals or to lay offerings on it. The dating is controversial: either to a time before the building of the first altar or to the first phase of the first altar. Another slab was found in the same side of the ramp. Many animal bones were found around it, a fact which suggests that this second slab may also have been used for ceremonial meals.



Drawing an section of the altar –slab1

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

The Omphalos

This big semi-spherical stone is not in its original place: it was found outside the east wall of the archeological area. It might have been a sacred stone, like an “Omphalos” (a Greek word meaning “navel”, the most famous one being the Delfi Omphalos i.e. the navel of the world), a representation of the divinity’s presence, or a sun symbol. The stone was finished off using a particular instrument, a marteline (small stone hammer), that caused the formation of little holes on its surface. Another similar, smaller stone is located near the big one, and it was found outside the archaeological area with the other one.

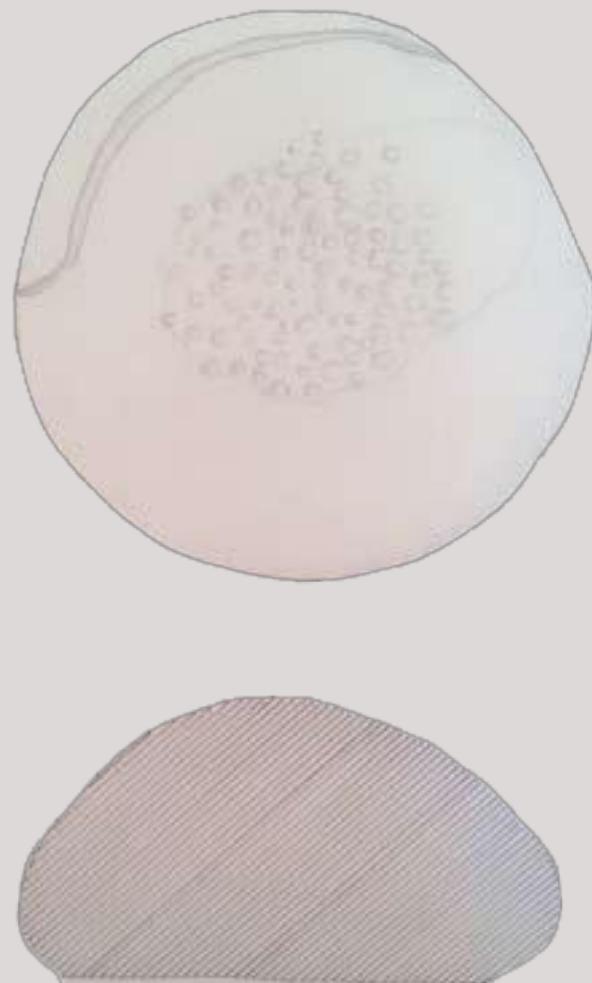


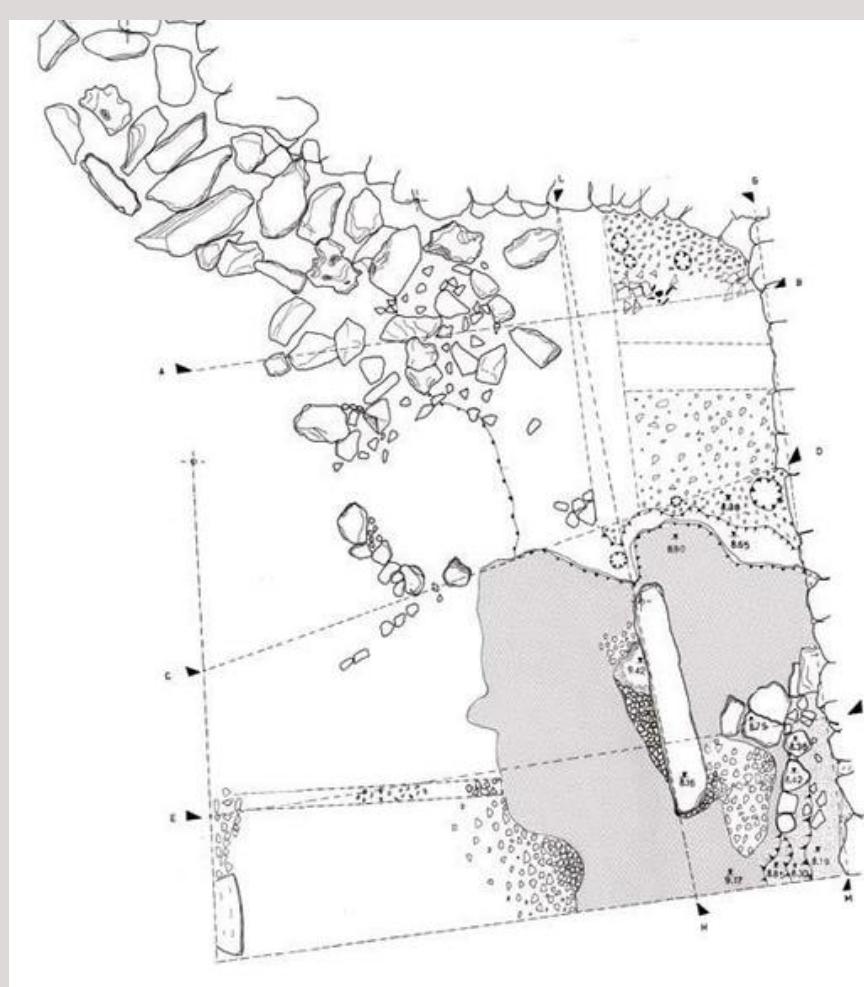
Illustration and section of the omphalos

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

The Menhir

This Menhir is 4,5 meter high and it weighs around 6 tons. It dates back to the “Cultura di Ozieri” phase, representing the most ancient testimony of the sacredness of the area: in fact, it is older than the Altar. When the Menhir was found, it was lying down. Researchers found several holes excavated in a calcareous rock around the Menhir.

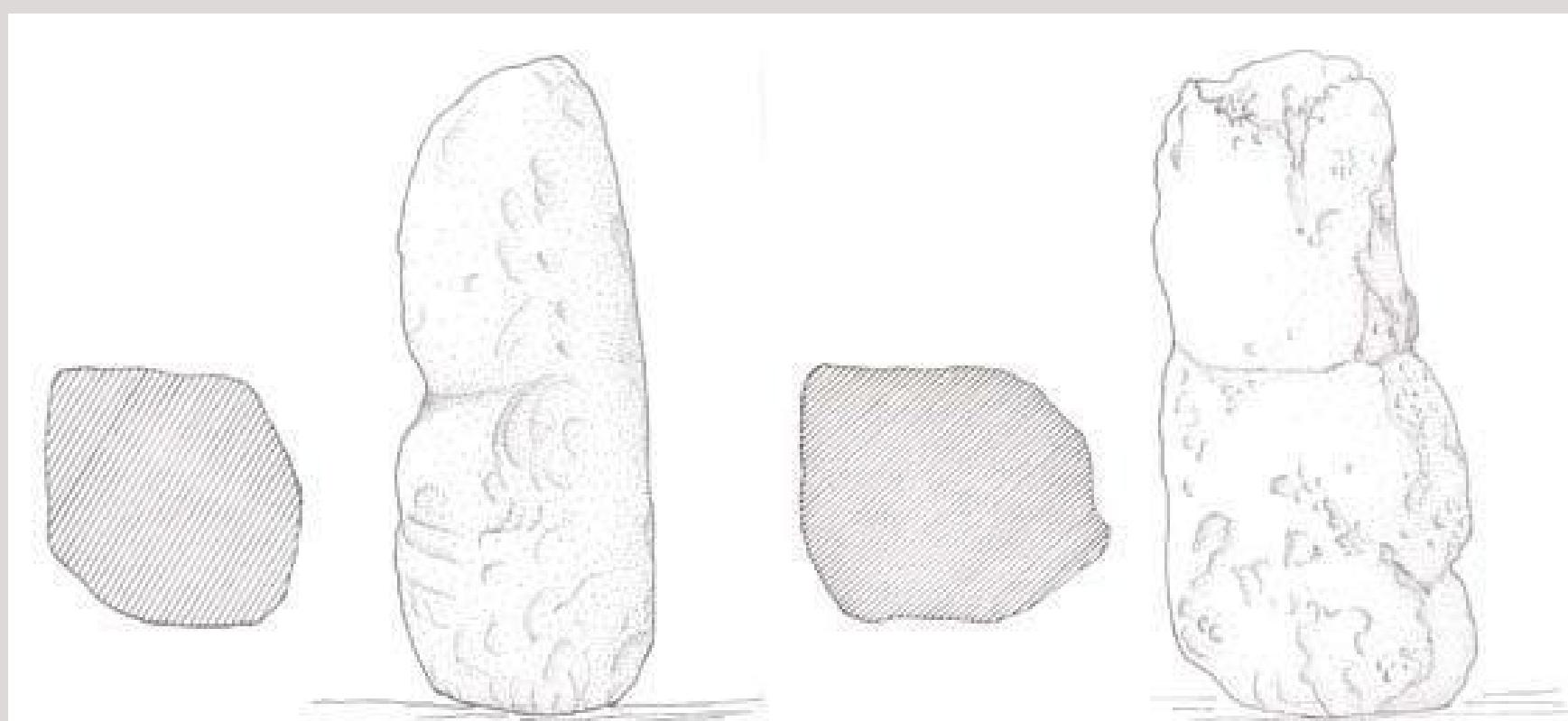
They were used to contain burnt stones and animal bones. These elements testify the execution of sacred ceremonies with meals, offerings and sacrifices to honour a divinity represented by the Menhir.



The overturned menhir and its stratigraphy

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

Other similar handmade pieces have been found in the surrounding area: a 1,90 meter high red sandstone Menhir and a 2,10 meter high white limestone Menhir. They have been interpreted as masculine and feminine divinities. They are situated outside the archeological area, close to the original position of the Omphalos.



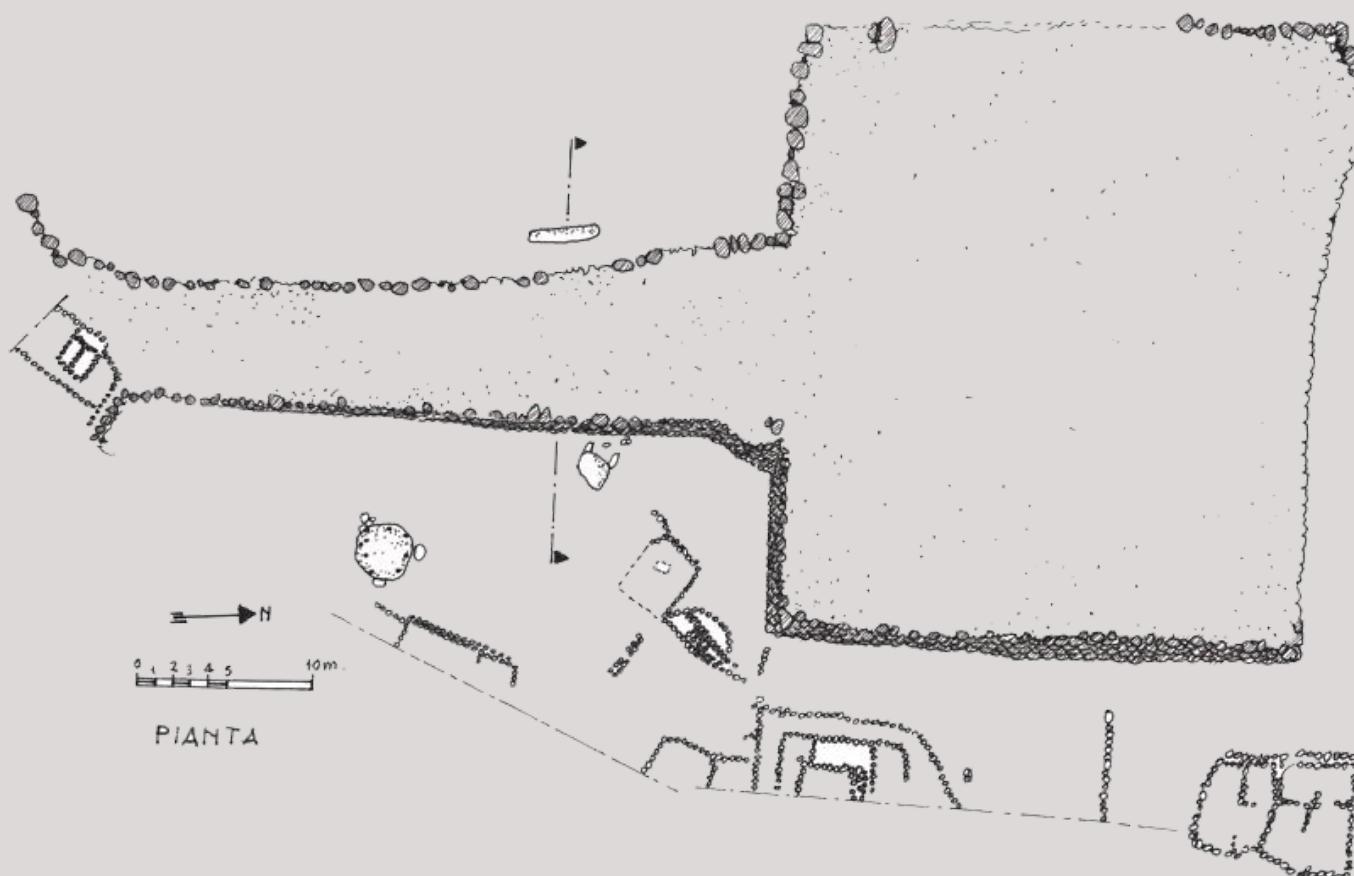
Section and prospectus of the two menhirs found on the eastside of the altar

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

➤ The Eneolithic Village

After the construction of the altar, the area was abandoned. Afterwards, during the first part of the Eneolithic period (Copper Age), another village with different characteristics was built, as demonstrated by some remains of the “Culturadi Abealzu”.

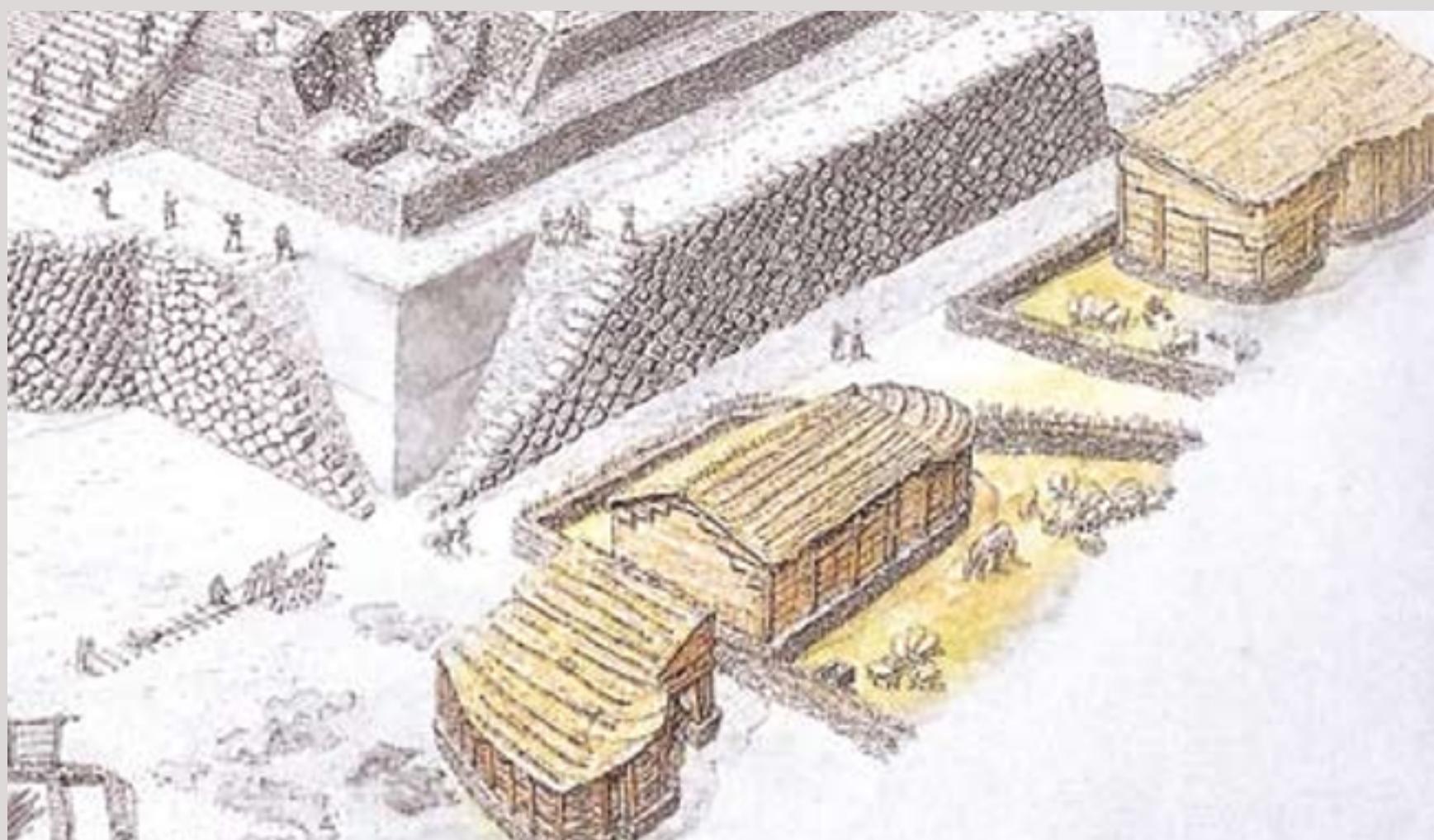
These are remains of huts: stone and crude brick walls have been found in the east side of the monument.



Huts of the eneolithic village highlighted to the east of the altar

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

It is considered a real sanctuary-village, built near the big altar which was used to get closer to the divinity. Some remains were found here dating back to the 3rd millennium BC. These are remains of pottery, animal bones and objects connected with agriculture and breeding.



Ideal reconstruction of part of the eneolithic village
(CORNÌ,2000)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

➤ The Sorcerer's Hut

This evocative name is due to the discovery of some very significative remains nearby.

In particular, abovine horn and some shells were found inside a jug close to the hut: the jug was found upside down, a position possibly due to the sudden abandonment of the hut because of a major fire.



Map of Compartment P with graphic representation of the material found during excavation

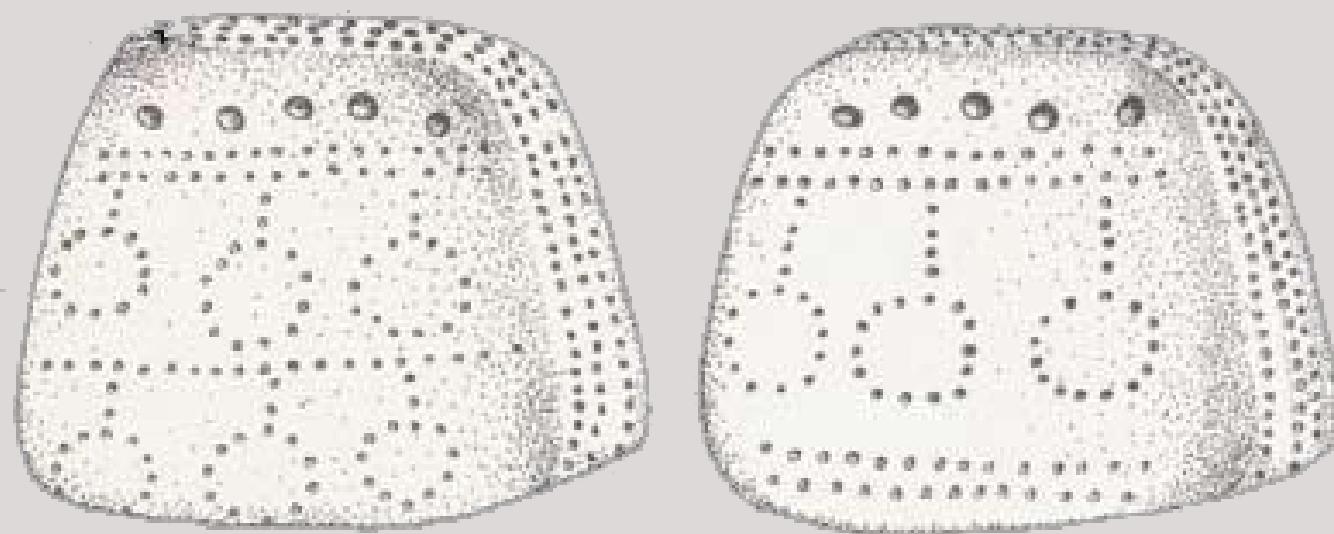


Map of the so-called «Sorcerer's Hut»

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

The remains of the hut consist of walls made of medium size stones. It was divided into 5 spaces and gives an insight into everyday life in this Eneolithic village thanks to the discovery of containers and vases (for food storage), millstones and other utensils.

A terracotta figurine and a shell full of red ochre were also found in the hut. They may have had a religious function.



Loom weight with hanging disk decoration

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

➤ Other sacred symbols

Anthropomorphic steles

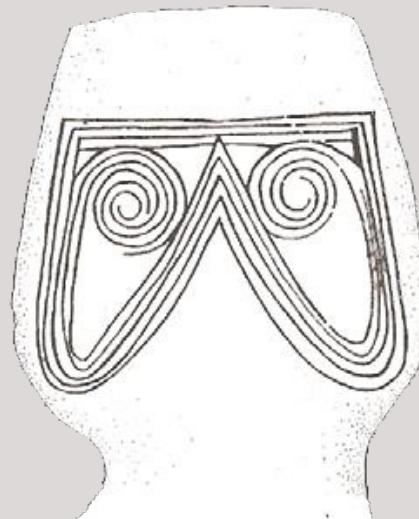
Among the most important remains, there are two decorated steles with human body elements. For this reasons they are called “Anthropomorphic”.

The “first stele”

The “first stele” was found among the filling material used to build the second altar. It is a calcareous stele carved with a straight and spiral shape, reproducing the eyes and the nose of a female figure.

The lower part has been interpreted as the connection with the neck.

The large size of the head (40x36 cm) supports the idea that it was part of a religious statue of very significant dimensions.

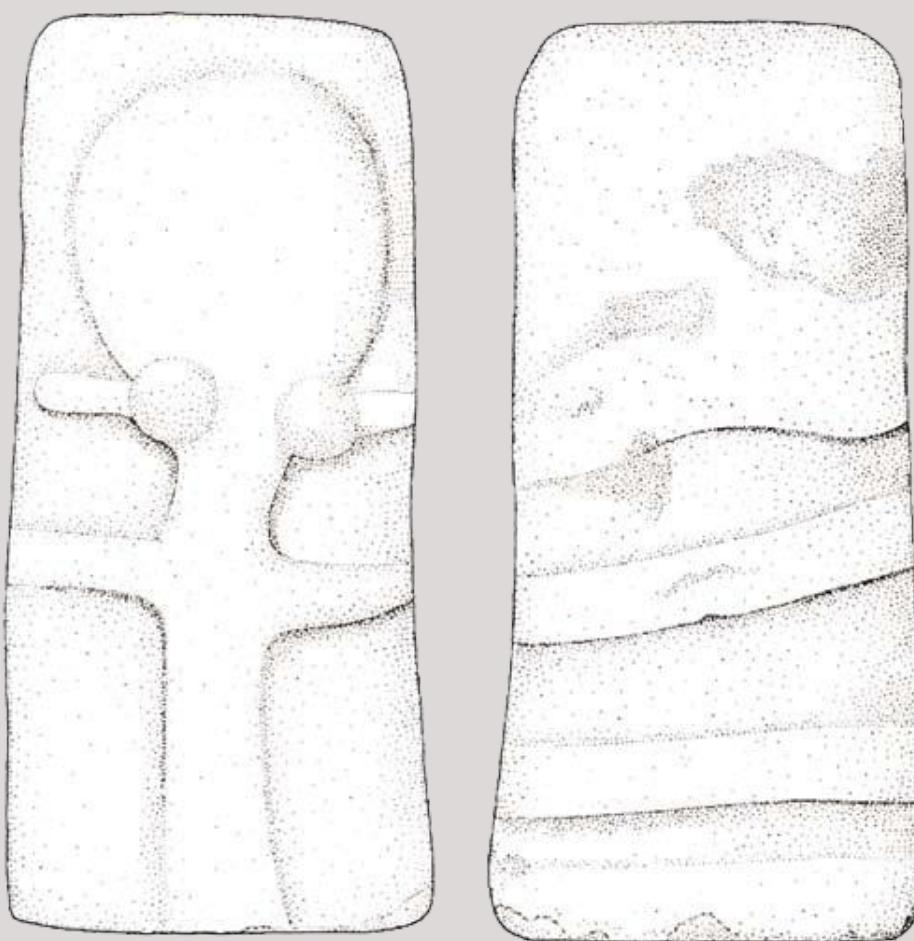


The first stele

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

The “second stele”

The original “second stele” is situated in Museo Sanna, Sassari. The copy is located in the north side of the altar. It depicts a female figure in relief: a big round head and two protuberances representing the breasts. It is believed that the two appendices represent the arms and a large belt. This stele was found lying on the ground in its present location and it dates back to the time of construction of the second altar.



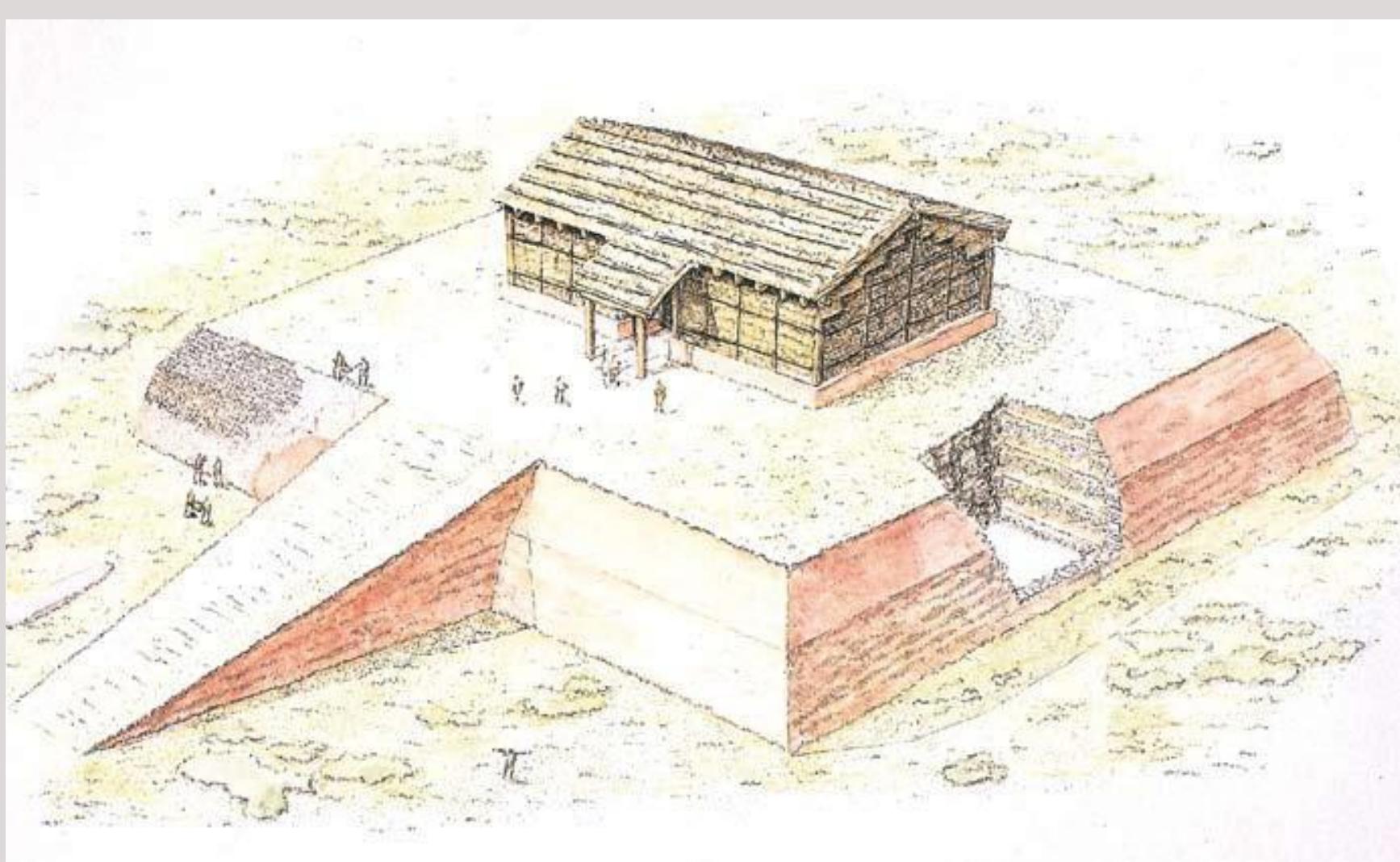
The second stele (front and rear view)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI



The two phases of the Altar

Between the end of Neolithic and the beginning of Eneolithic (3020-2860 BC calibrated dating), an original structure was built on the pre-existent sacred area. This building consisted of an over 5 meter high rectangular platform and a 25 meter long ramp. This was used to allow people to reach the top of the monument. Here, there was a quadrangular sacellum, with plastered and red painted perimeter walls and floor. These particular features explain its name: “the Red Temple”.

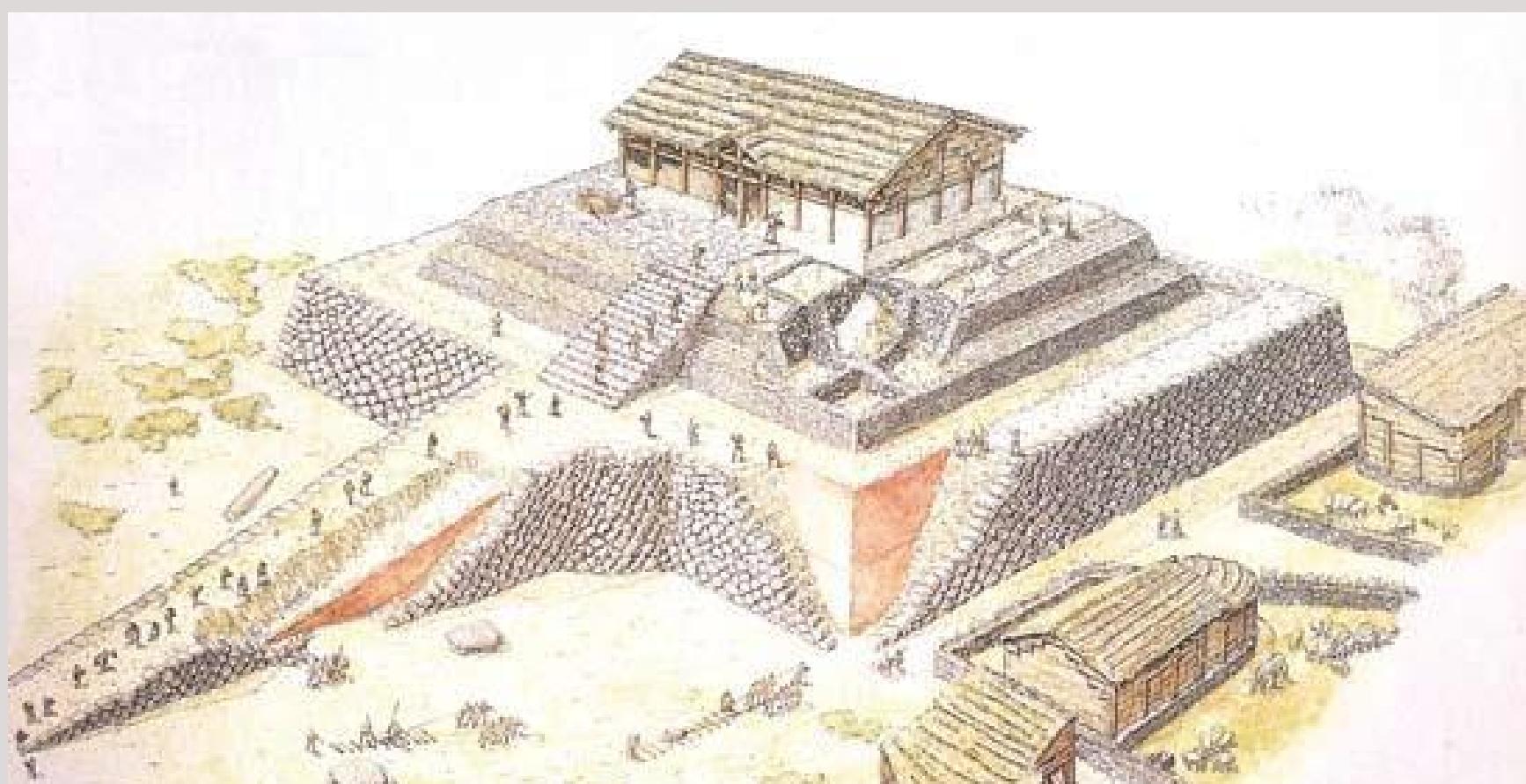


Phases I of the altar: at the top of the red temple (CORNÌ,2000)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

Around 2590 BC, after a major fire and some collapses, a new wall was built with big blocks around the construction to support mounds of earth and stones. This way, the first construction and the sacellum were incorporated into the new building. Today nothing remains of the sacred area that was located at the top of the construction.

The altar lost its function after some probable collapses, in the latter part of the Copper Age, but there is little evidence of this. The area was definitively abandoned in the Early Bronze Age, around 1800 BC. The grave of an approximately 6 year old child was found in the south-east corner, and it was dated to this period.



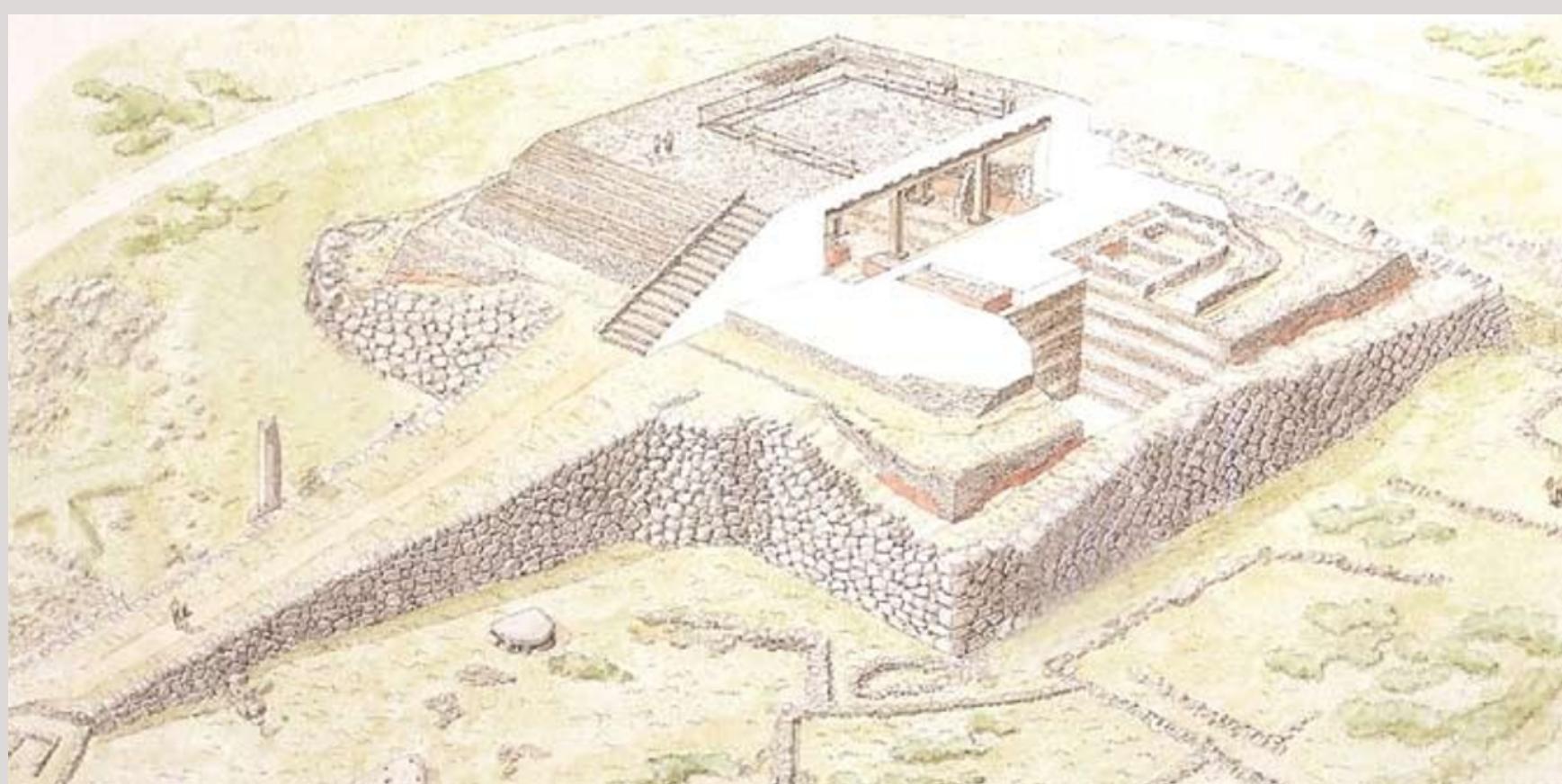
Phase II of the altar: with the new perimeter wall, the red temple is incorporated into the interior (CORNÌ, 2000)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

➤ The Altar now

The top of the construction can be reached by the stepped structure built during the restoration at the end of the 80's to allow visitors to imagine the original aspect of this impressive monument.

Other experts thought that in the beginning the last monument was built with two walls laid one on top of the other: the lower one made with big blocks with less inclined walls, the upper one made with little blocks with more inclined walls. In both cases, the most similar structure to the altar of Monte d'Accoddi is the Mesopotamian "Ziqqurat" (built in Mesopotamia during the 3rd millennium BC).

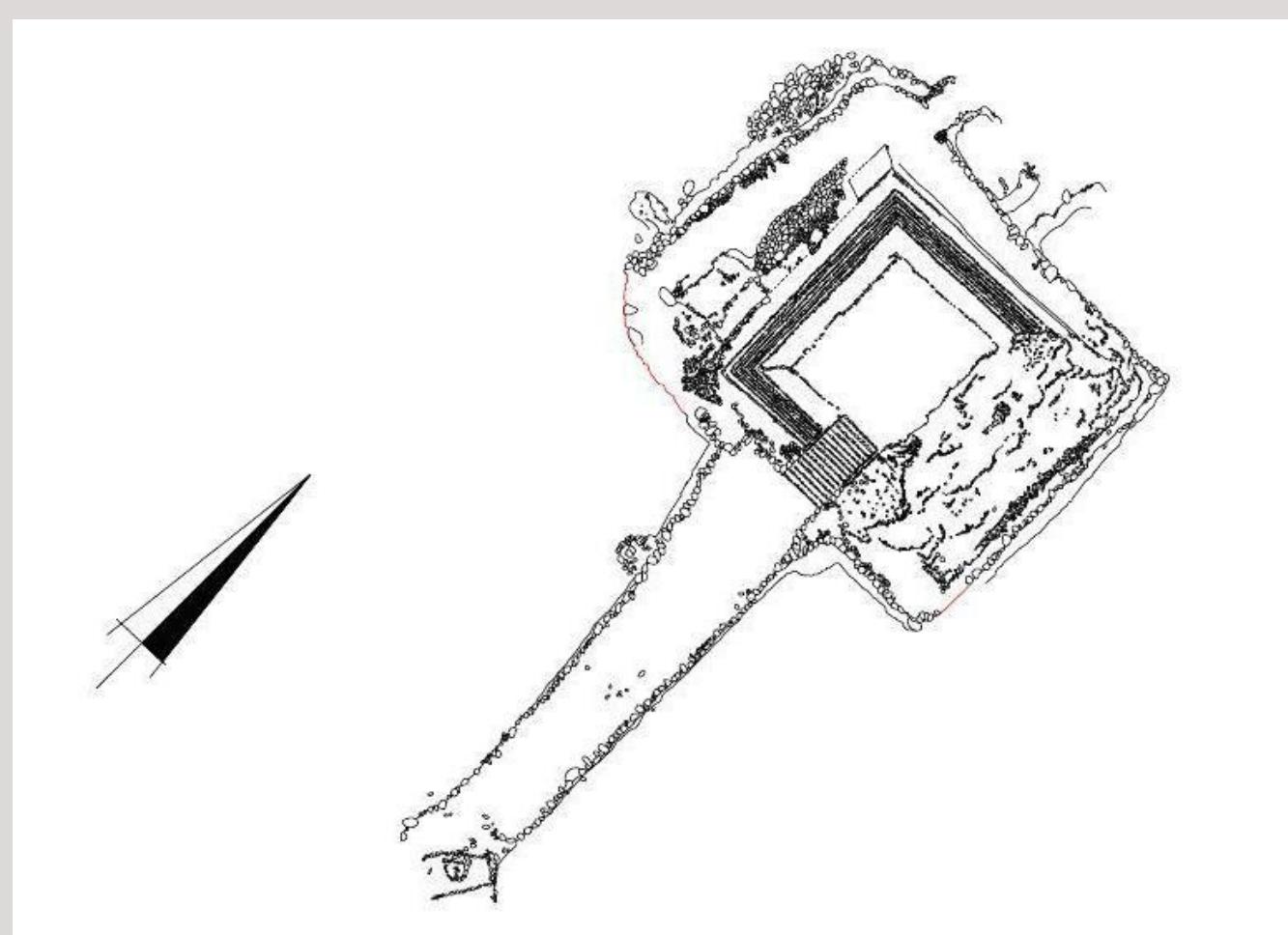


The monument of Monte d'Accoddi with the terraced Temple as currently rebuilt (CORNÌ 2000)

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI

At the end of 2009 the altar was restored. During the restoration, experts found that the south-east corner of the building develops in a circular way. This can prove that the hypothetical geometric symmetry of the reconstructions made up to now could be a stretch.

It can also be noticed that the east side of the altar is 5 meters shorter than the west one. It is difficult to reproduce the geometrical perfection of Mesopotamian towers using big blocks: the "Ziqqurat" towers were built with crude and smaller bricks.



Planimetry of the monument after the recent restoration works

ALTAR OF MONTE D'ACCODDI



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