

## **SEULO CAVES PROJECT**

### **Report on work undertaken during August 2011**

#### **Background to the project**

The Seulo Caves Project began in 2009. It is funded by the Fondazione Banco di Sardegna, The British Academy and The Prehistoric Society, and is directed by Dr. Robin Skeates (Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UK). It seeks to clarify the research potential of the Seulo caves in relation to four key research aims. These are to establish: (1) the diversity of natural caves and their human uses in the territory of Seulo (CA); (2) how some of these caves and their natural features were selectively and variously modified from natural spaces into sacred places, especially during later prehistory; (3) the character and variety of rites of passage performed and experienced in these caves by different members of society; and (4) the degree to which these persons and the material dimensions of their cave ritual traditions were connected to (or marginalized from) wider patterns of life.

The work is being undertaken with the permission of the Direzione Generale per i Beni Archeologici (Roma), in collaboration with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici per le Provincie di Sassari e Nuoro, Dott.ssa Giusi Gradoli (COMET – Valorizzazione Risorse Territoriali), Dr. Terrence Meaden (Department of Continuing Education, Oxford University, UK), and with the assistance of the Comune di Seulo.

In August 2011, two kinds of work were undertaken:

#### **1) Post-excavation work**

Given the large quantity of artefacts and bones collected during the 2009 and 2010 fieldwork seasons, we mainly focussed on post-excavation work. Jeff Veitch – Durham University Archaeology Department's photographer – re-photographed all of the key artefacts found so far, as well as all of the artefacts found during 2011, and all four caves excavated so far. Yvonne Beadnell – an archaeological illustrator – drew all of the key artefacts found so far, in preparation for their publication. In addition, Robin Skeates completed his detailed recording of the ceramic and lithic artefacts found during 2010.

#### **2) Continued excavation of Grutta de is Janas 'Inferiore'**

In 2009, test excavations were undertaken at four cave sites in the territory of Seulo (Su Grutta 'e is Bittuleris, Riparo sotto roccia Su Cannisoni, Grutta I de Longu Fresu, and Grutta de is Janas).

Fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 has since been focussing attention on Grutta de is Janas – a large cave system, which contains extensive prehistoric deposits. Grutta de is Janas is located on an upper-middle hill slope, above a tributary stream of the Riu Lareri, at an altitude of 797 m (39 51' 27.20" N 9 15' 43.34" E).

During August 2011, excavation work continued in one of the lower chambers of this cave system: 'Is Janas Inferiore'.

This semi-circular chamber (2.8 metres wide and c. 3 m deep) lies to the side of a corridor and large chamber that connect the West and North branches of the cave system. It is delimited on three sides by large speleotherms.

As in 2010, a recording grid of 1 x 1 metre squares was used. The front half of the chamber (closest to the entrance) was divided into six 1 x 1 m grid squares. (The rear half of the chamber is covered by a rock fall.) The archaeological deposits were excavated according to stratigraphic units and all finds recorded in three dimensions. All deposits were excavated carefully, using brushes and fine tools, then sieved.

The excavation of this area is still not complete, but the following stratigraphic units have so far been identified:

Context 1: rock-fall and disturbed surface deposits (10 to 40 cm deep), containing dark grey ashy soil (particularly in the entrance area), goat droppings, large pottery sherds, (including some wheel-made orange fineware of the historic period, and some finely decorated dark burnished ware with linear and curvilinear incised motifs that can be assigned to the Ozieri culture), animal bones, small pieces of wood, an acorn, a match, and some plastic;

Context 2: loose, fine, dark brown and dark grey, ashy soil deposit (3 to 5 cm deep), containing small stones (1 to 5 cm long), some bones, and a large quantity of pottery sherds (including some decorated pieces with impressed or incised motifs);

Context 3: discontinuous, natural, calcite formation derived from drip water (2-4 cm deep);

Context 4: black ashy deposit (depth still unknown), containing very fine soil, animal bones, Ozieri culture pottery sherds, obsidian, and a flint blade. The majority of this deposit was found to be well sealed by the overlying calcite formation (Context 3).

A sample of animal bone from the upper part of this deposit, excavated in 2010, has been radiocarbon dated to around 3800-3700 cal BC, which ties in with the Late/Final Neolithic Ozieri style of the pottery found in this context:

Context 4, 'pit' 2 (i.e. upper Context 4 – i.e. the deepest pointed reached in 2010) Grid Sq. 2	Sheep/goat radius, find #2	OxA-23524	5016±31	3822-3708 (53.6%)	Late Neolithic – Ozieri culture
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Two further samples from Is Janas inferiore have recently been submitted for radiocarbon dating:

Cow bone: maxilla (upper jaw) including 3 teeth – probably less than 3 years old	Context 2, Grid Square 6, Find # 26 – near metal blade (so ? Bronze Age) 02/08/2010
Sheep/goat bone: right femur (2 frags of same bone)	Context 4 (=105), Grid Square 1 (=115), Find # 12 12/08/2011

	Final Neolithic Ozieri culture (i.e. the deepest point reached in 2011)
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At the close of the excavations, protective covers were placed over the exposed areas.

Following cleaning and preliminary analysis, all of the labelled plastic bags and crates of excavated artefacts and bones were placed in a secure repository in the Scuola Media di Seulo. This material will ultimately be deposited with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici per le Provincie di Sassari e Nuoro.

### **Future work**

In August 2012, we plan to continue these excavations in Grutta de is Janas Inferiore and to commence test excavations in a burial cave comprising part of the Su Cannisoni complex.

Dr. Robin Skeates

24<sup>th</sup> November 2011



Above - Flint blade from Grutta de is Janas 'Inferiore', Context 4. (Photo: Jeff Veitch.)

Below - Ozieri style pottery from Grutta de is Janas 'Inferiore', Context 4. (Photo: Jeff Veitch.)

