Excavations have been focused in particular on two sectors, both localised outside the external defensive wall surrounding the nuraghe, namely sections D and E. Sector D (12 × 15 m) is situated against this external wall, south-east of the nuraghe, between towers 1 and 7. Sector E (10 × 10 m) extends east of the central court between towers 2 and 3. Sector D is defined by a number of structures and rooms that were built at a time when the nuraghe and its outer defensive wall were already being abandoned and falling into disrepair. One of these rooms (A) was partially built over one of towers (K) of the outer wall, which was backfilled towards the end of the 2nd C. BC. Fig 2.

In sector E, the ongoing excavations have revealed earlier phases, showing that throughout the 7th and 6th C. BC a stream of about 4m wide ran nor'westerly parallel to the nuraghe's external defensive wall. The stream was subsequently channelled by the construction of two parallel embankments around the late 7th C. BC, and from the second half of the 6th C. BC it begins to be backfilled with domestic trash. By the 5th C. BC the stream was completely backfilled and a sequence of irregular mortar boxes were laid in the area during the 4th C. BC, which may have been used for a variety of outdoor productive activities (Fig 3).

Amphora types

Area E

The earliest amphora types come from sector E, and include amphora fragments dating between the late 8th and 4th C. BC, while the amphora typologies attested in sector D mostly date between the 4th and 2nd C. BC. In the amphora assemblage collected from sector E, the most ancient type is a rim fragment of a Ramon type T.1.1.1.1 – Bartolini SI, generically dated to the mid 8th and mid 7th C. BC. Based on stratigraphic data and associated material, the fragment should be considered residual, as the same stratigraphic context has yielded finds dated as late as the mid 6th C. BC. Slightly later is the chronology of a rim fragment of a T.7.1.1.1.1 – B5 amphora type, which goes back to the first half of the 7th century BC. From the western Mediterranean, traditionally associated to production areas at the Phoenician settlements in Ambra, there are two fragments of type T.10.1.2.1, dated to the mid 7th – early 6th C. BC.

From the late 7th C. BC and throughout the 6th C. BC, Phoenician amphorae were much more abundant at S’Urachi, as is evident in 18 fragments of type T.2.1.1.2 – B7, dated to the late 7th – early 6th C. BC, by 21 fragments of type T.2.1.1.1.2 – D1, dated to the late 7th – mid 6th C. BC, and by 24 fragments of type T.4.1.2.1 – D23, dated to the 6th – early 5th C. BC. The most frequent amphora type from sector E is type T.1.4.1.1 – D4, dated to the 5th – early 4th C. BC, and attested by 25 rim fragments. The most recent phase in this sector, dating to the mid 4th C. BC, is represented by 12 fragments of type T.4.1.1.3.4 – D7, the chronology of which ranges between the late 5th and the end of the 4th C. BC (Fig 4).

Amphora typologies: chronological aspects

The overall distribution of Phoenician and Punic amphorae types from the excavations in sections E and D at S’Urachi points to a substantial increase in the presence of amphorae from the late 7th C. BC, as shown by the chronological profile based on a weighted mean of a 25-year chronological resolution unit (Fig 6).

It should however be noted that the peaks do not necessarily relate to periods of increased circulation of amphorae, because they may at least be partially explained by the overlapping chronologies of some amphora types; the early-6th century peak is a case in point, as it is created by the conventional dates of types T.2.1.1.1.2 – B7, T.2.1.1.1.1.2 – D1, and T.1.4.1.1 – D23. Similarly, the first half of the 5th C. BC is where the chronologies of types T.1.4.1.1 – D23 and T.1.4.1.1.1 – D4 overlap, while the peak in the late 5th – early 4th C. BC may be ascribed to the chronology of types T.4.1.1.3.4 – D7 and T.4.1.1.3.6 – D7. It is nevertheless clear that a substantial portion of the amphorae at S’Urachi date to the late 7th and early 6th C. BC, and that there similarly are a substantial number of fragments dated to the late 5th – 4th C. BC. Those two periods correspond broadly to the establishment of two permanent Phoenician sites around the Gulf of Oristano – namely Olibo and Tharros – and to a steep increase of rural settlement across the island during the Punic period from the 4th C. BC onwards (Fig 7).

Ceramic fabrics and provenance

A preliminary ceramic fabric reference classification for west-central Sardinia has been built up over the past twenty years, based on material from the recent excavations of the Punic site at Tharros and other sites of the central-west coast of Sardinia. The classification, preliminary, could not only help identify the different phases of the ceramic production in the site, but could also help identify the different forms of material culture and the different economic activities carried out in the site. The results of this preliminary study are presented in the following sections, and show that the ceramic material from S’Urachi is characterized by a high degree of variability, with a wide range of fabrics and technologies used for the production of the different types of vessels.