

SAMNITE SITE IN MONTALTO, ABRUZZO, ITALY

Angelo Ferrari¹, Ezio Burri², Amelio Ferrari³, Guglielmo Palmieri⁴

¹CNR - Istituto di Metodologie Chimiche, Roma, Italia, cnrpfbc@tin.it; ²Università dell'Aquila – Dip. Scienze Ambientali, L'Aquila, Italia, ezio.burri@univaq.it; ³Istituto Tecnico Agrario “Emilio Sereni”, Roma, Italia, amelioferrari@libero.it; ⁴Dir. Settore Tecnico Comunità Montana "Montagna Sangro-Vastese", Abruzzo, Italia, Ufficiotecnico@mediosangro.it

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Two tombs in a good state of preservation have been found in *Montalto* area, in the territory of *Borrello*, a little village in *Abruzzo* (Italy). The tombs are very old and both have a little opening, which connects the sepulchre space to the outside.

One of the two tombs has a rectangular base 3,40 mt wide and 3,65 mt long. The north side is 2,90 mt high while the south side is only 1,50 mt high due to the ground slope. The side walls of the building lean to the interior giving the tomb, which has a barrel vault, a higher stability.

Today the area is covered by a forest of oaks, hornbeams and silver firs, but at a deeper examination a number of sepulchres have been located, twenty or more. We hypothesize the presence of a wide and complex burial area which has been used along various historical periods. The tombs have different structures: many are only piles of stones resulting by the collapse of the original buildings, other are similar to the grave previously described. Some graves are parallelepipeds and others are complex buildings with circular works on square bases.

In the northern area of *Montalto* there are three important walls. The first one is a little *vallum* at an altitude of 805 mt; the second is the northern wall at an altitude of 820 mt. It is about three meters high, with small passages and big supports, so it has the characteristics of a fortification wall. The southern wall, at an altitude of 840 mt, is similar to the northern one. The defence walls of *Montalto* extend towards East as far as the *Vallone delle Querce* stream, where other tumulus structures, walls of ancient buildings and big hydraulic stone works for the protection of the banks were found.

As a first conclusion it is possible to hypothesize that we are in the presence of an ancient site of the Samnites Carricini (Caraceni) and more precisely, a fortification for the defence of a sacred place. Or, more likely, a centre for the control of the street which came from the valley of the *Sangro* river to *Pescopennataro*, an ancient Samnite village. Or both the hypotheses. The Samnite centre was not destroyed by man, it is possible that it was abandoned and after, during another historical period, it was used as a burial site by the Samnites themselves. The reuse of the site for funerary purposes happened several times in subsequent periods.

Due to the great number of ancient evidences found in the area and for the historical importance, an intervention for survey and study by the Archaeological Superintendence would be necessary. Furthermore, the involvement of authorities and local competences would be useful for the archaeological exploitation and for the cultural and touristic fruition, which may result in economic and social advantages for the community of *Borrello*.

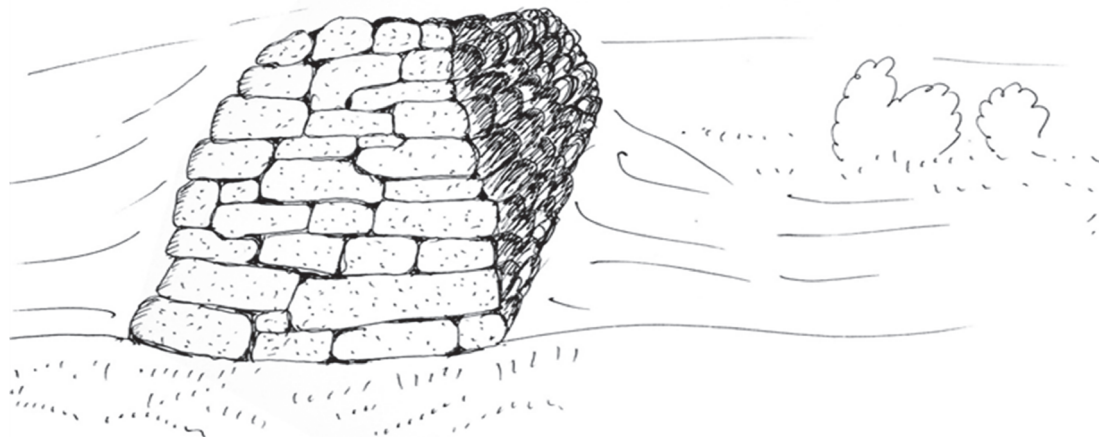
In *Montalto* area, which lies in *Borrello*'s district, no true Samnite village existed in the past. Probably, only some fortified settlements scattered along the slopes of the mountains were present. Their aim was the defence of the grazing lands in the plane

against plunderers or rival tribes. Such grazing covered a large area comprising the valley called “*Il Prato*”, the *S. Nicola* plain, the *Mattone* and the *Palazzo* hills, the *Capezze* upland and the *Verde* plain. The whole grazing lands were rich in wells and spring waters and two important streams ran through them: the *Verde* River and the *Vallone delle Querce* Creek. Owing to these watercourses the pasture activity could be carried out along the whole summer season.

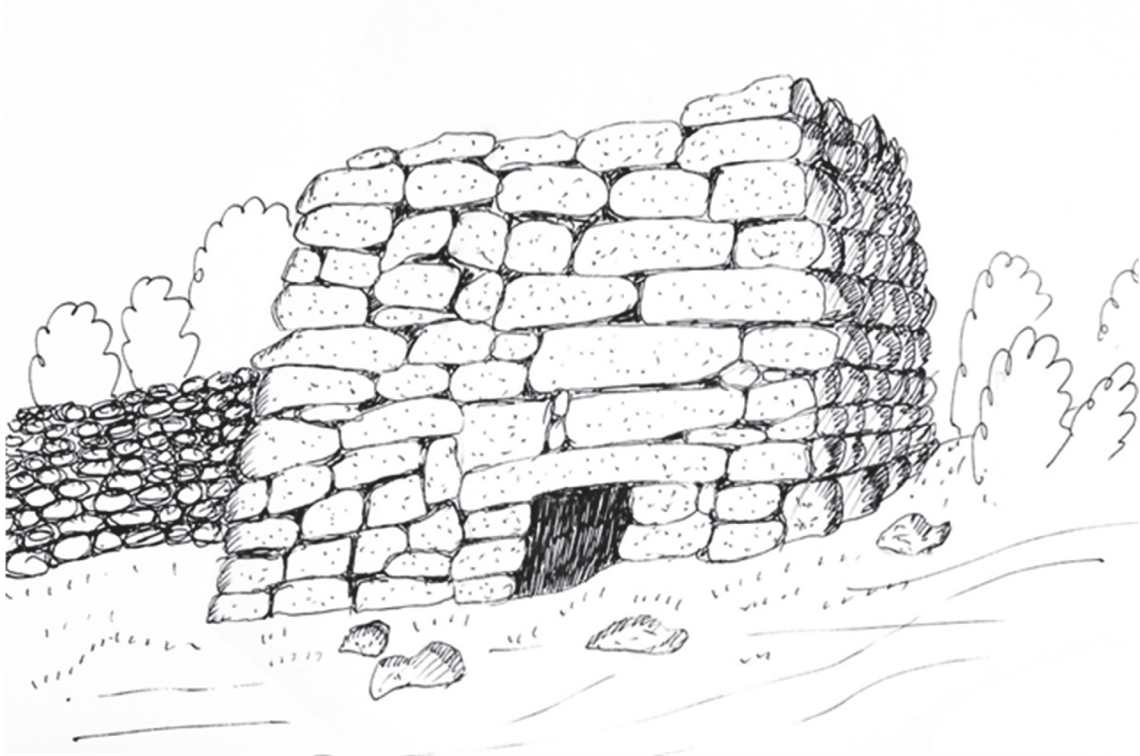
Besides *Montalto*, in the municipal district of *Borrello*, there are more areas that are interesting from an archaeological standpoint. They are rich in ancient finds of the Samnite age, which formed, on the whole, a well built system for the defence of the territory. As a matter of fact, all the surrounding area was ran through by small cattle-tracks, ancient paths used for flock transhumance. These paths connected the *Sangro-river* valley to the winter grazing of *Puglia* in southern Italy.

According to recent bibliographic references, it is thought that the Samnite tombs in *Montalto* lie in the same historic *Borrello*’s area already studied in 1874 by the archaeologist De Nino. Furthermore, more activities are planned aimed at studying in depth the knowledge of the tombs found (approximately 30) and of the Samnite defences as well as their interaction with the ancient territory.

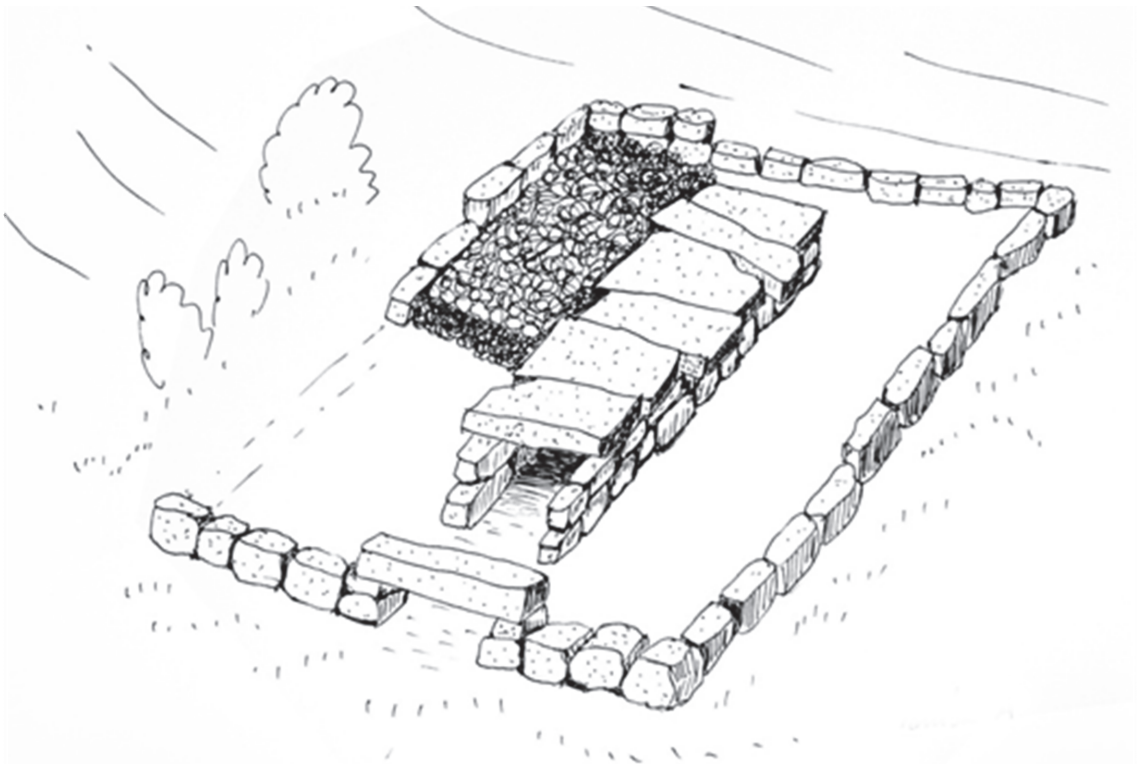
Different typologies of burials.



Tomb B



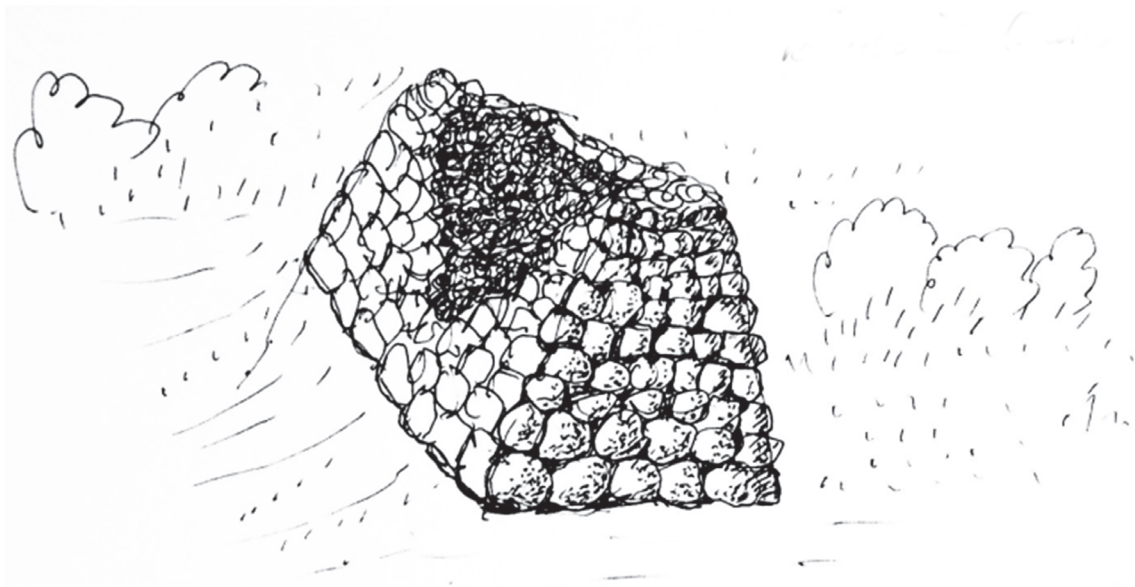
Tomb C



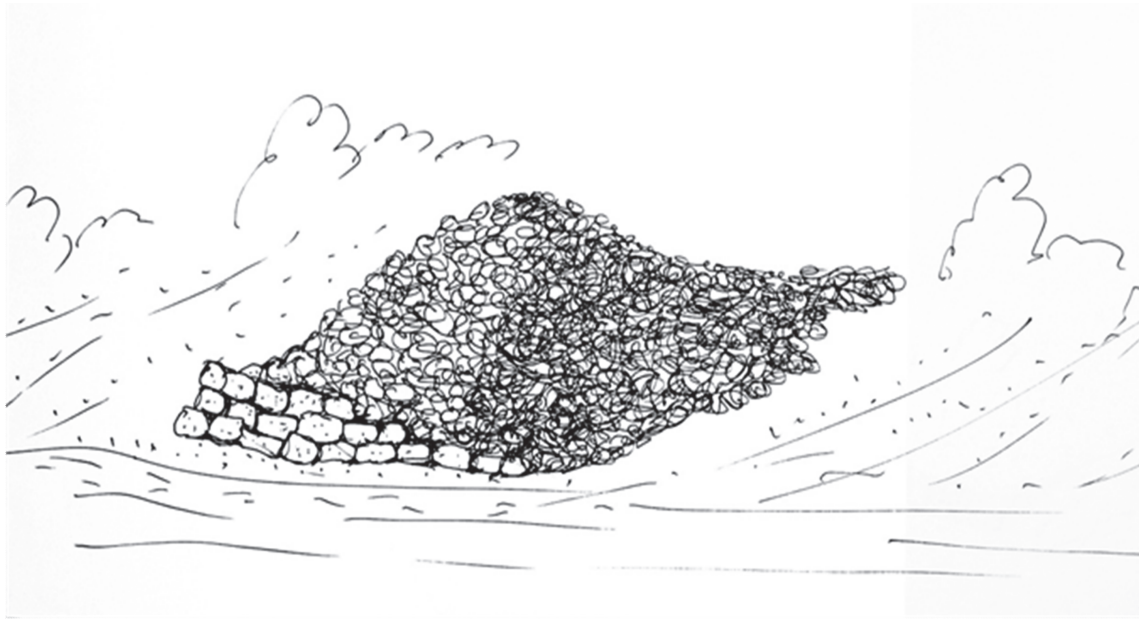
Tomb A and C



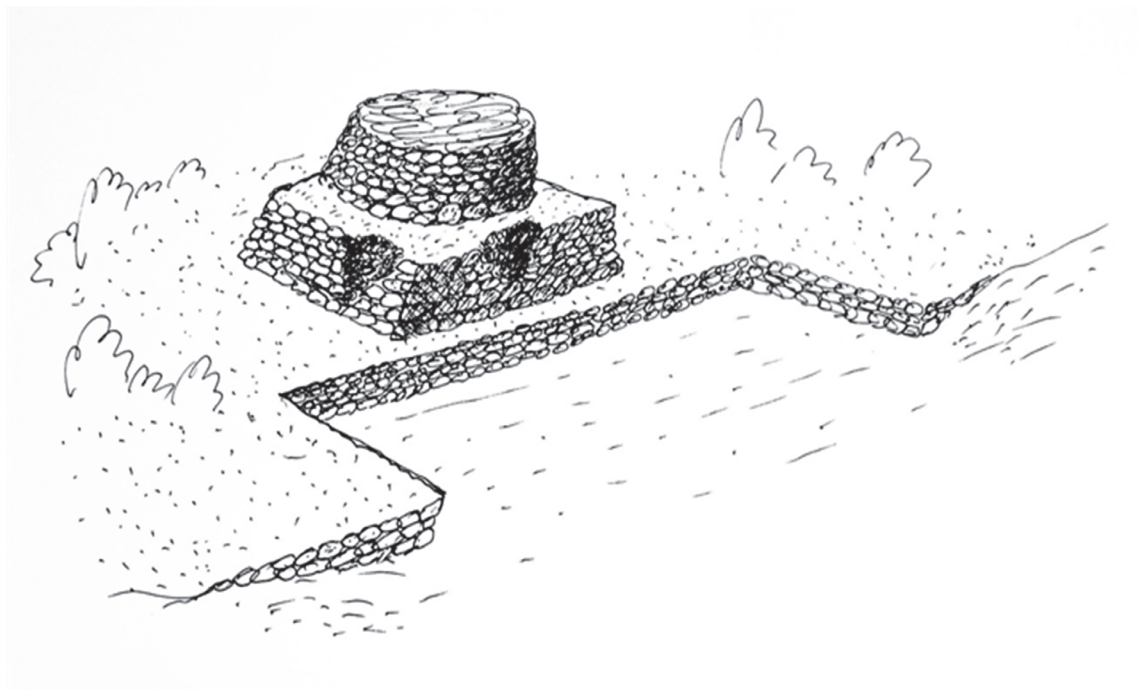
Tomb A



Tomb D



Tomb C2



Tomb F