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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

# Palace of Baldu

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Site location

The so-called Palace of Baldu stands in a thick forest in the countryside of Luogosanto, in North-eastern Sardinia: the region of Gallura. In order to reach the archaeological site take the SS 133 state road from Tempio Pausania to Luogosanto, then proceed towards Arzachena for about 1 km. At the intersection, turn left as indicated by the road signs, and continue for about 2.5 km along a dirt road until you come to a rest area. From this point, the site may be reached on foot after a short walk.

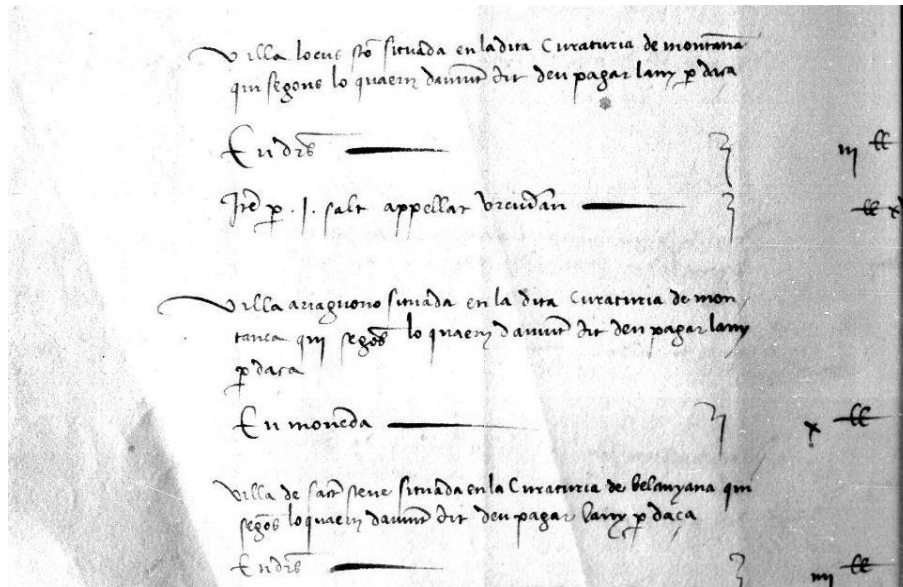
## ■ History of the excavations and studies

The archaeological site called *Lu Palatzu di Baldu* is a medieval tower in front of which there is a polygonal courtyard: around this twenty rooms are placed.



**Fig. 1** - Luogosanto, *Lu Palatzu di Baldu* (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

Such structures have been related to the *Villa de Sent Steva* attributed to the curatoria of *Balanyana*<sup>1</sup> in the Barcelona codex of the *Compartiment de Sardenya*, a tax census carried out in 1358<sup>2</sup>. An excerpt is kept in the State Archives of Cagliari, in the Old Royal Archive, in which the wording *Villa de Sent Steve* appears (figs. 2-3)<sup>3</sup>, while in a second document, which is the investiture act of Bernardo Comelles, the independent settlement is reported as *Sant Steve*<sup>4</sup>.



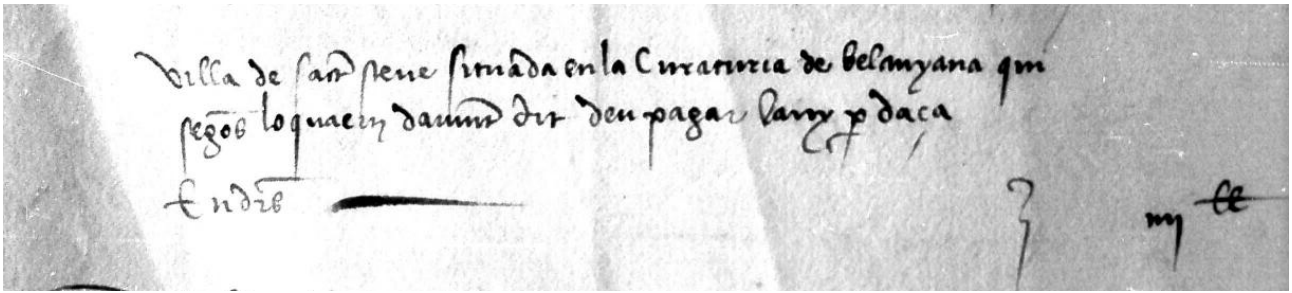
**Fig. 2** - Excerpt from the registry page containing the measures taken for the Giudicati of Gallura and Arborea (ASC, Antico Archivio Regio, reg. F1, f. 25) in which the villages of *Locus Sancto* and *Sant Steve* appear (from [http://www.archivostatocagliari.it:443/patrimonioarchivio/immagine.html?open=F44010901\\_S&t=UA&pg=1&idp=2112&typ=s&doc=00000063.Jpg&scegliImm=vai](http://www.archivostatocagliari.it:443/patrimonioarchivio/immagine.html?open=F44010901_S&t=UA&pg=1&idp=2112&typ=s&doc=00000063.Jpg&scegliImm=vai)).

<sup>1</sup> MURINEDDU 1962, pp. 115-117; SELIS 1969, p. 24; DAY 1973, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> The census is a document source written in Catalan, known as the *Compartiment de Sardenya* or *Repartimiento de Cerdeña*, which certifies a certain number of political and administrative measures carried out by the Crown of Aragon in order to ensure a closer control of the Island's territories. It is currently preserved in the Archives of the Crown of Aragon in Barcelona (CIOPPI, NOCCO 2005, pp. 622-623; CIOPPI 2010, p. 222). From the text it is possible to obtain the tax amount paid by the village of Sent Steve to the Crown, i.e. 4 lire (BOFARULL Y MASCARÒ 1856, p. 810).

<sup>3</sup> A.S.C., Antico Archivio Regio, reg. F 1, f. 25v; PANEDDA 1978, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> A.S.C., Antico Archivio Regio, reg. F 1, f. 25v; PANEDDA 1978, p. 223.



**Fig. 3** - Excerpt from the registry page containing the measures taken for the Giudicati of Gallura and Arborea (ASC, Antico Archivio Regio, reg. F1, f. 25) in which the village of *Sant Steve* appears (from [http://www.archivioatocagliari.it:443/patrimonioarchivio/immagine.html?open=F44010901\\_S&t=UA&pg=1&idp=2112&typ=s&doc=00000063.Jpg&sceglilmm=vai](http://www.archivioatocagliari.it:443/patrimonioarchivio/immagine.html?open=F44010901_S&t=UA&pg=1&idp=2112&typ=s&doc=00000063.Jpg&sceglilmm=vai))

The identification of the site with the village documented in the fourteenth century was suggested by Vittorio Angius (1797-1862) during the nineteenth century, under the entry of Gallura in the *Dizionario storico-statistico, geografico-commerciale degli stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna*, where he describes the state of the structures he saw<sup>5</sup>. The dedication to the first martyr is still maintained in a single place of worship in the region called Balaiana: it is just a few meters from the palace<sup>6</sup>. The features of today's church of St. Stefano appear to relate to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they are probably the result of the restoration of an existing medieval nave which served the aforementioned village<sup>7</sup>. Sources do not report further news of the village beyond the fourteenth century, although the remains found during excavations at the site document at least one inhabitation - if not a continuity of life – until the following century. The extinction of the town could well have been caused by the progressive depopulation which affected the whole district of Gallura from the fourteenth century<sup>8</sup>. The absence of documents revealing the history of the palace poses many difficulties of interpretation concerning the events which characterised it, encouraging the birth of many legends which have survived to this day; the attribution of the palace to king Ubaldo from the Visconti family or to the

<sup>5</sup> ANGIUS 1840, pp. 80-81; ANGIUS 2006, p. 484.

<sup>6</sup> PINNA, CORDA b.c.d.s.

<sup>7</sup>Such interpretation was subsequently recalled and followed by other researchers during the course of time (see PANEDDA 1978, pp. 223-225; CAPRARA 1996, p. 146).

<sup>8</sup> PANEDDA 1978, pp. 138-148, 223; PINNA 2012, pp. 436-437; PINNA, CORDA a.c.d.s.; PINNA, CORDA b.c.d.s.

Della Gherardesca family seems to be influenced by folklore<sup>9</sup>. This lack leaves many uncertainties concerning various aspects such as the commissioning of the building itself, the exact date or the reasons for its construction, the function of its surrounding areas and the presence of any village in its vicinity: data which therefore must be deduced from surveys and archaeological finds<sup>10</sup>.

In 1978, Dionigi Panedda devoted a part of his study concerning the Giudicato of Gallura to the curatoria of Balaiana: whilst outlining the history of the villages he also spoke about *Villa de Sent Steva* and therefore of the presence of the Palace of Baldu<sup>11</sup>.

At the end of the eighties, as part of the SITAG<sup>12</sup> Project, a census was carried out in the territory of twenty municipalities in the north-eastern part of Sardinia: the sheets produced by these activities were published in the monograph *Archeologia del territorio. Territorio dell'archeologia. (The territory of archaeology) Un sistema informativo territoriale orientato sull'archeologia della regione ambientale Gallura. (A geographic information system oriented towards the archaeology of the environmental region of Gallura)*. The first part of said work includes a series of introductory contributions divided into chronological phases or according to specific issues<sup>13</sup>.

A first test excavation of the area was undertaken in 1999 during the restoration work, under the direction of Dr. Daniela Rovina of the Archaeological Heritage Superintendence for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro, with the assistance of Dr. Andrea Coletti: during this three areas were brought to light ( $\delta$ ,  $\epsilon$ ,  $\zeta$ ) located to the east of the tower<sup>14</sup>. Between June and November 2001 and June and September 2002, various investigations also involved nine other rooms ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\eta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\iota$ ) and the interior of the square tower, directed by the Archaeological Heritage Superintendence for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro,

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<sup>9</sup> FOIS 1992, p. 181; MARTORELLI 2002-2003, p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> PINNA, CORDA b c.d.s. The site has been studied in relation to its architectural features and its palatial nature, for this reason it is mentioned within larger works focusing on the castles of Sardinia (see FOIS 1992, pp. 181-183; FLORIS 2012-2013, pp. 53-54).

<sup>11</sup> PANEDDA 1978, pp. 215-229.

<sup>12</sup> The acronym SITAG refers to the Geographic and Archaeological Information System of Gallura.

<sup>13</sup> *Archeologia del territorio*.

<sup>14</sup> COLETTI 1999; PINNA 2004, p. 319; CORDA 2013, p. 345; PINNA 2012, p. 437.

Dr. Angela Antona, in collaboration with the Chair of Medieval Archaeology of the University of Cagliari, coordinated in the field by Dr Fabio Pinna<sup>15</sup>. F. Pinna has made many other contributions related to archaeology in Gallura and particularly to the site of *Lu Palatzu di Baldu*: which include *Un villaggio medioevale nel cuore della Gallura* (2002-2003); *Luogosanto, scavi archeologici nell'area del Palazzo di Baldu*; *Organizzazione spaziale e relazioni commerciali di un abitato medioevale della Gallura. Nota sugli scavi archeologici nell'area del Palazzo di Baldu (Luogosanto)* (2005); *Archeologia, storia e identità: una ricerca sul territorio della Gallura tra la tarda antichità e il medioevo* (2006); *Archeologia, storia e identità: una ricerca sul territorio della Gallura tra la tarda antichità e il medioevo* (2007); *Archeologia del territorio in Sardegna. La Gallura tra tarda antichità e medioevo* (2008), a monograph which originated from the studies made during his doctorate in Archaeology and post-classical antiquities at the University of Rome "La Sapienza"<sup>16</sup>.

During the month of August 2010, in the municipality of Luogosanto, the GalluraArcheoMed10<sup>17</sup> project was undertaken; this was aimed at laboratory research and territorial reconnaissance; in 2012 a new tranche was begun based on communication and the study of the materials (fig. 2). The two events - in collaboration with the Archaeological Heritage Superintendence for the provinces of Sassari and Nuoro and the City Council - were designed to facilitate the approach of the community to its cultural heritage and were aimed at a better understanding and appreciation of the territory's monuments<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> PINNA 2002-2003, pp. 77-78; CORDA 2010, p. 289; PINNA, CORDA a c.d.s. p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> MARTORELLI 2002-2003, pp. 85-86; PINNA 2002-2003; PINNA 2004; PINNA 2005; PINNA 2006a; PINNA 2007; PINNA 2008; PINNA 2010.

<sup>17</sup> The research was carried out under the coordination of F. Pinna (CORDA 2010, p. 289; CORDA 2013).

<sup>18</sup> CORDA 2013; PINNA, CORDA a c.d.s., pp. 146-147.



**Fig. 4** - Luogosanto: educational activities carried out during the school camp organised within GalluraArcheoMed12 (from Pinna, Corda a c.d.s., p. 149, fig. 5).

Again in 2012, two additional contributions were made: one aiming to provide a territorial framework for Gallura with an in-depth analysis of the palace of Baldu<sup>19</sup> and one born from the collaboration between F. Penna and D. Musio, which focused on the study of the vitreous artefacts found at the site (fig. 5), whose manufacture could reveal important and unusual overseas business relations<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> PINNA 2012.

<sup>20</sup> PINNA, MUSIO 2012.



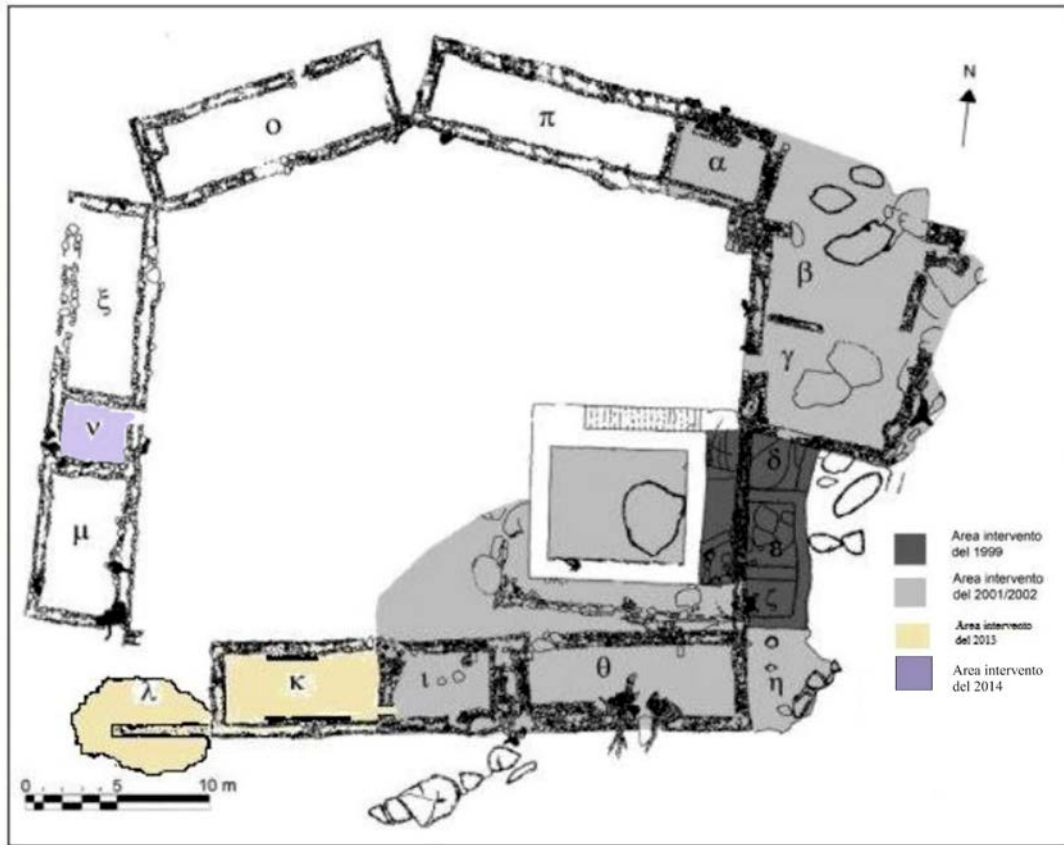
**Fig. 5** - Palace of Baldu: fragments of a vitreous mosque lamp (from Pinna, Corda a c.d.s., p. 158, fig. 18).

After about ten years, the archaeological investigations in the area of *Santu Stevanu* were resumed in July 2013, thanks to a triennial ministerial grant: its scientific direction was entrusted to Prof. Fabio Pinna, who has been teaching Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology in the Department of History, Cultural Heritage and Territory of the University of Cagliari since 2008<sup>21</sup>. During these activities, the kappa ( $\kappa$ ) and lambda ( $\lambda$ ) spaces were investigated and a test was carried out in the area behind the church of Santo Stefano;

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<sup>21</sup> Since 2001 numerous students from the University of Cagliari and the Postgraduate School of the same university have been involved in all the excavations.

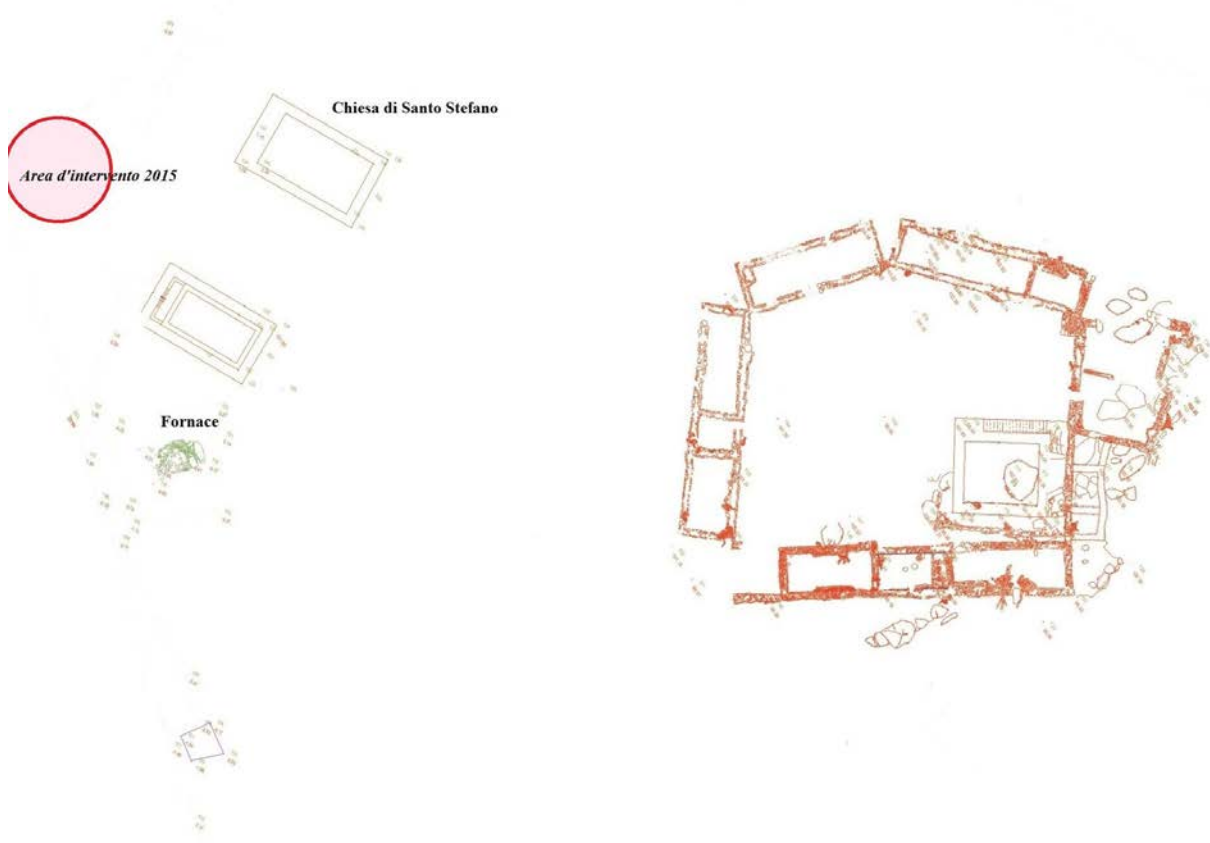
the following year the research focused on room ni (v), located in the western sector of the courtyard (fig. 6)<sup>22</sup>.



**Fig. 6** - Plan of the Palace of Baldu indicating the rooms involved in the archaeological activities over the years (Graphic reconstruction by C. Cocco).

During the 2015 excavation campaign, the attention of researchers shifted to the sector lying west / northwest from the church of Santo Stefano (fig. 7): this area has revealed a circular structure whose identification is still being studied.

<sup>22</sup> PINNA 2014.



**Fig. 7** - Luogosanto, area of Santo Stefano: archaeological site and identification of the sector involved in the 2015 excavations (Graphic reconstruction by C. Cocco).

Two additional articles are currently being printed concerning the issues of trade and political relations within the Giudicato of Gallura, on the basis of the archaeological data gathered from the Palace of Baldu<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> PINNA, CORDA a c.d.s.; PINNA, CORDA b c.d.s.

## ■ Credits

Deepening card edited by Dr. Claudia Cocco and Dr. Francesca Collu

## ■ Bibliographic abbreviations

ASBASS	Archivio della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici per le province di Sassari e Nuoro.
ASC	Archivio di Stato di Cagliari.
ANGIUS 1840	V. ANGIUS, <i>s.v. Gallura</i> , in G. CASALIS, <i>Dizionario storico-statistico, geografico-commerciale degli stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna</i> , VII, Torino 1840, pp. 80-81.
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**RiMe**

*Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea* (CNR) I, 2008 e ss.





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## La Sardegna cresce con l'Europa



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