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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Palace of Baldu

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Devotion towards Santo Stefano

Not far from the Palace of Baldu there is the church dedicated to Santo Stefano - maybe a place of worship for the same name village which was mentioned during the fourteenth century - whose marble statue is kept in the Diocesan Museum of Luogosanto (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 - Luogosanto, church of Santo Stefano: cult statue of the protomartyr (photo by Unicity S.p.A.).

This cult was widespread particularly because the saint, who lived during the first century AD, was the first Christian martyr, the reason why he is celebrated the day after the birth of Christ (December 26th). His origins are unknown, perhaps Greek, because of the name

(which means Crowned), and because in the Acts of the Apostles (6-7) it seems that Stephen was a point of reference for the Hellenic community. In order to end a controversy which arose between Greeks and Jews in the city of Jerusalem for the daily distribution of alms to widows, the proposal was made to choose seven men from the population "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" called deacons: one of the chosen was Stefano (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Vatican, Apostolic Palace, the Chapel of Nicholas: Saint Stephen receives the diaconate and distributes alms, fresco by Beato Angelico (between 1447 and about 1448)
(from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santo_Stefano_riceve_il_diaconato_e_distribuisce_le_elimosine).

While carrying out his duties, he performed miracles, preached and converted to the faith in Christ the many people who came to Jerusalem, thereby antagonising the Hellenistic Jews: they accused him "of blasphemy against Moses and against God" (6:11) and they brought him before the Sanhedrin around 36 AD. The condemned man was led out of the city to be stoned whilst praying and said: Lord Jesus, accept my spirit. Then he knelt and said out loud: «Lord, do not blame them for this sin! And having said that fell asleep» (7, 58-60). At the time of the martyrdom, Saulo of Tarso was present, not yet converted, who

later become the spiritual heir, becoming Saint Paul, the people's apostle. The relics were found in 415 A.D. in the village of Kefar-Gamla.

Usually the martyr is represented young and without a beard, dressed with the diaconal dalmatic and the stole. Stones, symbol of martyrdom that often appear from the 12th century (fig. 3), or the rocky ground, which refers to the place where the stoning took place are details often present; more generic ones which aim to certify a death because of upholding the faith are the Book of the Gospels, the symbol of the Diaconate, or the palm of martyrdom. The statue in the church of Luogosanto depicts the saint kneeling with his arms outstretched in prayer whilst welcoming martyrdom. Also, the celebration of the festival in the month, may suggest the possibility of local worship.





Fig. 3 - Florence, Horne Museum: *Santo Stefano*, painted in tempera and gold on wood (84x54 cm) by Giotto (approximately 1330-1335) (http://www.museohorne.it/basepage.php?p=dettaglio_big.php&n=159&nm_g=2&p_g=1&pg=1).

■ Credits

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