



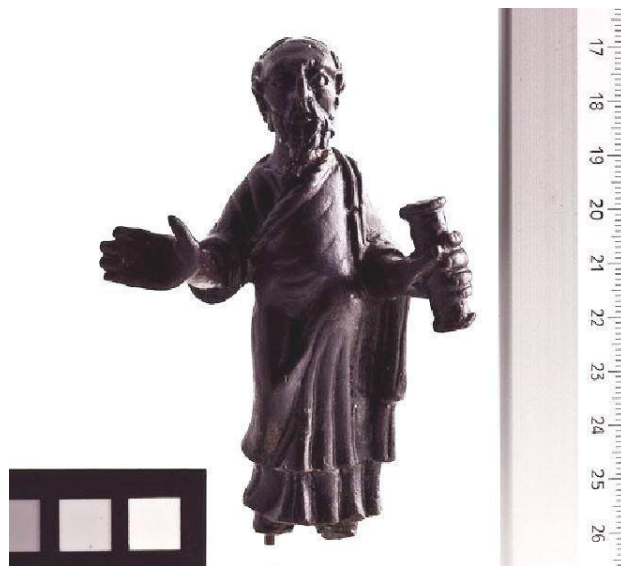
# The area of the Cornus basilicas

Patrimonio culturale  
**SARDEGNA** Virtual Archaeology



## ■ Small statue portraying St. Paul

In the area of Columbaris, east of the bishop's complex, there is a burial area used from the 4th to the 7th century A.D. Behind the cathedral apse, tomb 107 was found, which is a part of a group of 5 tombs in a line, facing East-West. These tombs were filled and then another eight people were placed in a space hollowed at as an *ossarium* inside the sarcophagus. Alongside the ossarium (dated between the 6th and 7th century), covered by kitchenware fragments arranged to protect it, they found a small bronze statue dated IV-V A.D. interpreted as St Paul, also known as Saul of Tarsus (figs. 1-2).



**Fig. 1** - Small statue of St Paul from Cornus (photo by N. Monari-RA\_00162653/R.A.S.).



**Fig. 2** - Small statue of St Paul from Cornus: profile (photo by N. Monari-RA\_00162653/R.A.S.).

Kept in the Cagliar National Archaeological Museum, the bronze is 9.4 cm high, and is an elderly person, given the wrinkles that cover his face. The person has strong, facial features, such as the straight nose, the thick beard with moustache and is bald, a particular characteristics that appears in the description of the apostle of the people in the *Acta Pauli et Theclae* before 200 A.D. The figure *expansis manibus* shows his big hand: the right open in a sign of welcome, the left holds a *volumen*, the law scroll, to show his role as a philosopher; the right knee is bent and the lower parts of the legs were broken a long time ago. The fabrics show a high quality of the piece, highlighting the volume of the body through the folds of the cassock and the pallium. The object shows details at the back that make one believe it was part of a more complex item, such as a liturgical oil lamp. This hypothesis is supported by the comparison between this item and a second one found in the *Domus dei Valerii* in Rome, kept in the National Archaeological Museum in Florence (fig. 3): the lamp was made in the shape of a boat, representing the ship of the Church, with Saint Paul at the helm and Saint Peter standing up at the stern.



**Fig. 3** - Bronze ship-shaped oil lamp (from IOZZO 2012, p. 255).

In the Cornus bronze, the place of Saint Peter was occupied by the *ex gentibus* apostle, by the position taken: this fact could reveal the place of production of the lamp, in the east, as it has been ascertained that in western iconography, the disciple was always placed at the stern; also, to support this origin, is a group of bronze lamps kept in the Museum of Cagliari, with which it has close similarities (figs. 4-6) and that represent a class of materials that circulated in the Mediterranean in the Byzantine period.



**Fig. 4** - Lamp with stand and handle with spirals (from PANI ERMINI, ZUCCA 1989, p. 271, fig. 38)



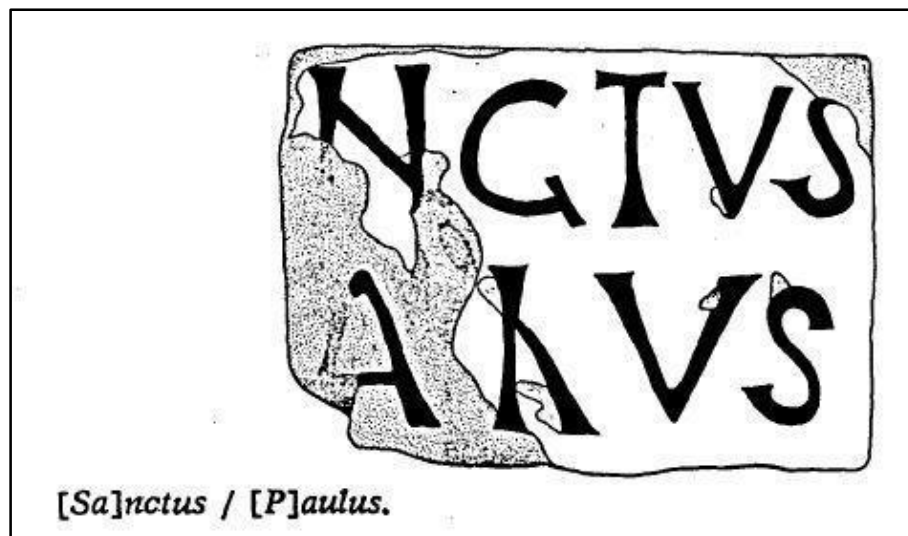
**Fig. 5** - Ship-shaped oil lamp, with loop cross and dolphin-shaped lock (from PANI ERMINI, ZUCCA 1989, p. 272, fig. 39).



**Fig. 6** - Bronze oil lamp with handle in griffon-shaped protome surmounted by the cross (from PANI ERMINI, ZUCCA 1989, p. 272, fig. 40).

Originally used as liturgical decoration for the cathedral, the centuries-old statue is now next to the *ossarium*, showing a strong devotion to Saint Paul. The hypothesis that the veneration was well extended is supported by finding a fragmentary epigraph mentioning Santa Maria, San Giovanni and San Paolo in the northern sacristy of the main basilica:

It is possible that a basilica was dedicated to each saint, that is the cathedral to the Madonna, the baptistery to St John the Baptist and the cemetery basilica to St Paul (fig. 7).



**Fig. 7** - Fragment of epigraph containing the letters interpreted as "Sanctus Paulus"  
(from MASTINO 1984, pp. 17, Tab. XLVII, fig. 2).

The iconograph of the saint can be seen in various types of work, that show further attributes added over the centuries: his image can be seen in the frescoes in the catacombs (fig. 8) or in various stone (fig. 9) and ivory (fig. 10) relief works, statues (figs. 11-12) and glass items (figs. 13). One of the particular aspects that can be seen from the representation of Saul is the philosopher's appearance and attitude, intent on reading (fig. 10), writing or holding a book in his hand (figs. 1-2); at the end of the 4th century, there is a pair of the principles of the apostles Peter and Paul, usually face to face (fig. 9) or embracing each other (fig. 9), representing the *concordia apostolorum*, or the cohesion between the two realities of the Church, shown by the two figures: *ex gentibus* - Church born from conversion after the death of Christ (Saint Paul) and *ex circumcissione* - Church founded on the Old Testament (Saint Peter) and by extension also the political unity between West and East.



**Fig. 8** - *Ad decimum* catacomb on the via Latina

([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_commissions/archeo/italiano/documents/rc\\_com\\_archeo\\_doc\\_20011010\\_catacroma\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/italiano/documents/rc_com_archeo_doc_20011010_catacroma_it.html))



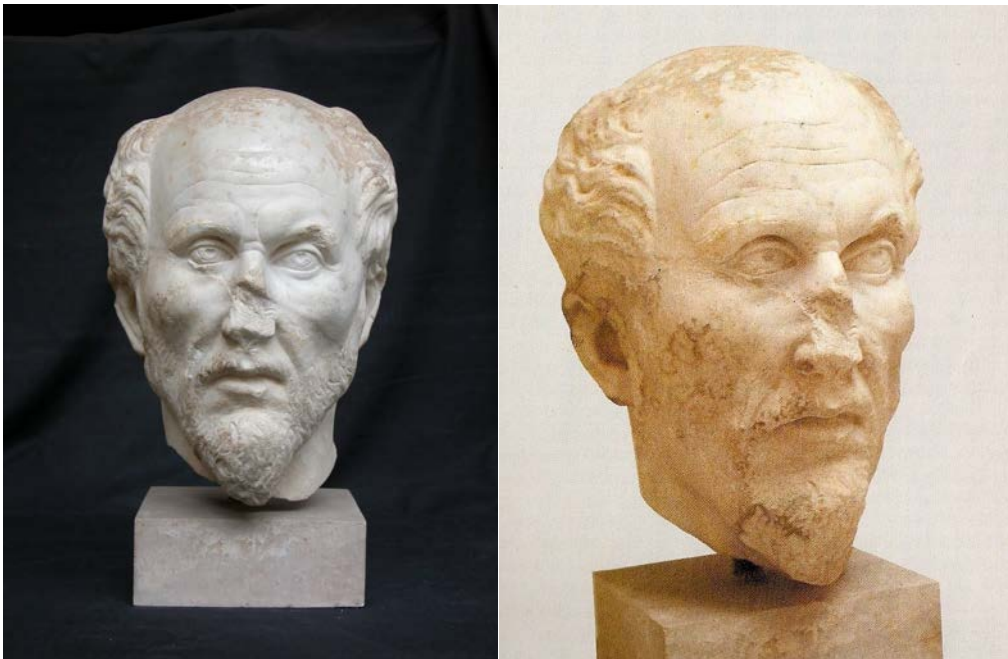
**Fig. 9** - Relief with the embrace of Peter and Paolo da Aquileia, Early Christian Museum of Aquileia

(<http://www.artefede.com/attualita/articolo.php?file=5.%20PAOLO%20FEB-BRAIO%202009%20b%20per%20sito%202.htm>)

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**Fig. 10** - London, British Museum, ivory (V century): Tecla listens to the words of Paul (from ZIMMERMANN 2010, p. 676, fig. 6).



**Figg. 11-12** - Head of the pseudo Plotino-Paolo kept in the Ostienses Museum ([http://www.exibart.com/profilo/imgpost/rev/843/rev76843\(1\)-ori.jpg](http://www.exibart.com/profilo/imgpost/rev/843/rev76843(1)-ori.jpg); <https://lucamaggio.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/filosofa-plotino-iii-sec-d-c-ostia-museo-ostiense2.jpg>).



**Fig. 13** - IV century glass from Rome, Sacred Museum of the Vatican Library  
(<http://dizionariu.zanichelli.it/storiadigitale/p/percorso/257/4586/storia-della-germania-ottone-di-frisinga>).

## ■ Credits

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