

## Preface

Situated in the western Mediterranean Sea, the island of Sardinia is today famous as an elite tourist destination for visitors who enjoy its beaches, crystal clear seas, and the hospitality of its residents. The island also has a rich architectural tradition that extends back to the proto-historic Nuraghic period of which numerous stone circular towers bear witness. Ancient remains of the Punic and Roman periods dot Sardinia as do churches from all periods. The medieval period is richly represented especially by churches of the Romanesque period. Less studied, and thus less known, are the churches dating to the Byzantine period, many possessing a dome and a cruciform plan, which are the focus of this present study.

My first experience with the island took place a number of years ago, when I lived for four months in the city of Sassari while serving as a missionary. A few years later as I was searching for a dissertation topic and remembering the beauty of the island and the hospitality of its people, I briefly considered writing about the Byzantine churches on the island. Though I turned my attention elsewhere, I thought that it was a subject worthy of investigation and planned to return to it sometime later. My first visits to the island to that end took place in 1989 and 1991; that work led to a paper presented at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Moscow in August 1991, but I was unable to continue my study of the buildings at that time. In the years that followed additional churches were added to the corpus of Byzantine monuments in Sardinia as new scholarship corrected earlier misperceptions and offered new insights. Finally, beginning in 2009, I was able to devote my attention to the present study, beginning with a short visit to see the churches again, followed by time spent catching up on the various publications that had come out during the intervening years. Additional visits took place during 2010 and 2011, during which I was able to revisit, photograph, and re-measure all of the buildings. It became clear to me that there was now enough material for a book and that notwithstanding the many contributions and publications of mostly local scholars, it remained the case that the churches were not well known outside of Sardinia. I determined that there was indeed something that I could add to the discourse about them, both individually and collectively in the form of a systematic study that would synthesize available information, offer new observations, and analyze the group as a whole.

As is true with such endeavors, it would not be possible to have completed this book without the assistance of many people over the years to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. From my first stay on the island I have the memory of many friends in Sassari who introduced me to the Sardi, their generosity, and their pride in their culture and island. On my first trip to visit the churches in 1989, Don Salvatore Ruzzu, then *parocco* of Cossoine, very good-naturedly lent me the keys to Santa Maria Iscalas, even though it was obvious that I had awakened him from his afternoon siesta. In recent years Don Demetrio Pinna, *rettore* and *parocco* of the basilica of Sant'Antioco allowed me free rein

to wander around his church checking measurements and taking photographs and then kindly sat down with me each time to discuss the progress of my work. Dottressa Donatelli Salvi, Director of the Museo Archeologico of Cagliari and director of the latest excavations at San Saturnino in Cagliari, graciously took me on a tour of those excavations in 2011, sharing her expertise and insights, which were extremely helpful for my work. Marcello Schirru was present at a lecture I gave at a conference in Cagliari in 2012 and later sent me a description of a project to identify and document small Byzantine churches that he had participated in as a student, sending me drawings and photographs, one of which is reproduced here.

I owe an especially deep debt of gratitude to the late Professor Roberto Coroneo of the Università degli Studi di Cagliari, long the leading scholar of the medieval art of Sardinia. Prior to my visit in 2009, I emailed Roberto, telling him that I was familiar with his work and asking for the opportunity to meet and discuss the state of scholarship on the Byzantine churches in Sardinia, a request to which he soon replied in the affirmative. Soon afterwards he informed me that he had “arranged everything” for my visit, having set up appointments to visit several churches. He and one of his students, Alessandro Ruggieri, took me to see these buildings over two days, visits that were especially enlightening, given Roberto’s expertise. He also invited me to lecture at the university and made sure that I was reacquainted with the excellent cuisine of the island. He was an extremely gracious host who treated me as a long lost friend and I greatly appreciated the discussions we had regarding so many issues covered in the present study. He was equally welcoming during my visit in 2011 and our further discussions were likewise very helpful.

As I learned later, Roberto was struck with an illness at the end of that summer, which eventually necessitated his hospitalization. Instead of getting better, his health deteriorated over the next few months, leading to his untimely passing in January of 2012. Although I am pleased to have completed this book, I am saddened that I did not finish it in time to share it with Roberto and to hear his comments and continue our discussions. In his absence, his colleague, Professor Rossana Martorelli, and his former students have carried on his work and continued to help me with this project, informing me of the latest publications and inviting me to be part of a conference held in honor of their lost colleague, mentor and friend. In particular, Andrea Pala has been very helpful in tracking down hard-to-find publications and sending them to me so that I could finish my work. *A tutti i miei amici Sardi, un grazie di cuore.*

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