

THE FEAST OF SANTI COSMA E DAMIANO



A classic graphic representation of the two Saints .

This feast is in honour of the saints Cosmas and Damian. According to a famous chant dedicated to them, the two Christian brothers were born in Aegea, in Arabia, although history classifies them as of Greek origins. They were born to a wealthy Christian family together with their brothers Anthimus, Leontius and Euprepus. Their mother Theodota, after the premature passing of her husband, dedicated herself lovingly to the care and education of her five children. Later, Cosmas and Damian moved to Syria to study sciences, in particular medical disciplines. In 303 AD, under Diocletian's empire and persecution, Cosmas and Damian were arrested by Lysias, the Prefect of Cilicia, who ordered for them to be brutally tortured and then beheaded. Their bodies were buried in the city of Cyrus, in Syria. According to the legend, Emperor Justinian sumptuously restored and fortified this city, in gratitude for recovering from a dangerous disease through the intercession of the two martyrs. With the continuous expansion of the Roman Empire and the trade with the East, the abilities and the fame of these two saints became so widespread that their relics were transferred to a Roman church dedicated to them. Cosmas and Damian have always been regarded as protectors of physicians, due to the fact that they accepted no payment for practicing

the medical profession, which led to them being named "Anargyroi" (Greek word for "with no money"). Their names were definitively included in the Canon of the Mass and their feast is celebrated on the 26th of September (before the liturgical calendar's reform it was on the 27th). To the people of Mamoiada, the feast of Saints Cosma e Damiano represents the end of the harvest. However, the main reason why Cosmas and Damian are venerated is that, given their medical profession and abilities, believers invoke and pray to them to cure all their diseases.

Sos nostros males sanade, Santu Cosomo e Damianu (cure our diseases, Saints Cosmas and Damian) is the refrain of a Sardinian chant dedicated to them.

The feast takes place in a rural sanctuary (6 km from Mamoiada) that takes the name of the two saints. In summer, the sanctuary attracts many pilgrims, given the opportunity to stay in the typical *Hùmbessias* surrounding the church. These *Hùmbessias* are one-room spaces, each with an independent entrance, and are more than 50. Anyone can request one of these places from the *Priore* – the person that organises all the activities relating the sanctuary - to enjoy there some weeks of holidays during the established period. Only two *Hùmbessias* are private, one of them is for the priest.

Besides, in the centre of the sanctuary, there are some *Lozzas*, small loggias reserved to the street traders and vendors during the feast period. In the middle of the big circle of *Hùmbessias*, there is the *Priorato*, a big house where the *Priore* and the group of people that helped him/her lived during this period. The *Priorato* covers two floors. On the ground floor there are two big rooms and a kitchen, where pilgrims are always welcome to rest or have something to drink and eat.

The church is adjacent the *Priorato* and is accessible from an interior door, while for pilgrims there is one main and two side exterior entrances.

At the top of the main façade there is a small bell that dates back to 1666. In the interior of the church, two big white statues of the martyred saints are placed on the altar, and there are other two polychrome statues



The sanctuary of the Saints Cosmas and Damian (photo T. Corbula)

on a small table near one of the side entrances. Magnificent and precious glazed ceramics can be admired on the walls of the church: they represent the Stations of the Cross and were made in Spain – in the factory of Alcora, in Castellón de la Plana – by the artist José Cotanda Aguilera.

These were seen all around the world in 1998, during the Good Friday Stations of the Cross celebrated by Pope John Paul II at the Colosseum.



A ceramic from *Via Crucis*



The source near the Sanctuary

For nine days, from the 18th to the 26th of September, believers pray the Novena every day – a series of Christian prayers – and in the same period the bishop of Nuoro celebrates a special Mass for sick people and pilgrims.

The Priore is elected by the people every year and receives the blessing of the priest. He/she, helped by other people, renovates, if necessary, the internal and external structures of the sanctuary, creates a pleasant atmosphere and organises some appropriate events.

The celebrations in honour of Saints Cosmas and Damian start at the beginning of September, but the real feast takes place on the 26th, 27th and 28th of the same month. It's a feast that warmly welcomes everybody, with songs, dances, music, banquets, typical games and every kind of entertainment.



Sas lozzas as they are today



Sellers in the Sanctuary in an image of the Istituto Luce, 1955



Picture of the 1955 Festival (Istituto Luce)



Pictures of the 1955 Festival (Istituto Luce)



'70s



60s



Current restoration