

Church of San Giovanni Battista

This parish church, dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of Fonni, rises in the old town centre, in the ancient *Canio* district (possibly dating back to the Early Middle Ages). Built in the 16th century in late Catalan gothic style and later refurbished, the church has a tall façade which mirrors the three-nave plan of the interiors. Above the church door by the main nave, is a three-mullioned window, whose round arch framing the opening in the middle is higher than those on the sides. Higher still, a round arch decorated with several semi-circular blind arcades, crowns the façade. Two smaller doors lead into the scantily decorated aisles. The front wall and the external brickwork are plastered. The double-pitched roof was renovated in recent years (1986).

The bell tower has a square plan. It rises on the left, at the back of the presbytery and right behind the sacristy. Access to the bell tower is through the sacristy. Partly plastered from the ground up to the middle section, the rest of the tower is made of stone. Four lancet windows enclosing the bells lighten the structure. A cross sits on top of the small pointed dome which rests on an octagonal base.

The church features a longitudinal plan, divided into three naves and six bays, one of which houses the presbytery. Covered by a five-part rib vault, the presbytery has a rectangular termination and no apsis, and intersects with the side bays through pointed arches. Covered by a pointed barrel vault, the central nave has diaphragm pointed arches in natural stone, which rest on protruding pillars and engaged columns decorated with sculpted capitals. All the bays in the aisles are barrel vaulted. Round arches connect both the bays and the intersection with the central nave. All the niches are lit by segmental lunettes, except for the niche in the first bay and the second niche on the right. Natural incoming light filters through square section windows into the presbytery.

The whole church is paved with grey bardiglio and white Carrara square marble slabs, with two different patterns that alternate in diagonal lines. The floor in the presbytery area, which is raised by three steps, is mostly paved with grey slabs. In addition to the magnificent decorations of the building, such as the capitals and a triumphal round arch (decorated with geometric and floral bas-relief patterns, and several vertical and horizontal moulded frames), a large *Crucifixion* painted by Antonio Corrigo from Atzara in 1987 enhances the lunette behind the altar. A wooden crucifix and a statue of Saint John the Baptist, both dating back to the 18th century, can also be found inside the church.

The building was closed to the public and church service was suspended in the autumn of 2018, as a result of several structural failures which mostly affected some of the columns. Extensive renovation work was also funded by the joint efforts of the community and many expats from Fonni. Renovation work also extended to the close-by ex Poa and the Casa del Clero (Clergy House), involving the reconversion of these buildings into a community-oriented, multipurpose space.

A solemn procession around the village takes place in Fonni on June 24, to celebrate Saint John the Baptist. *Sa die de Vrores* ("flower day") is the name of this religious festival. The *S'istangiaru* horsemen of Madonna dei Martiri (Virgin Mary of the Martyrs), dressed in traditional costume from Fonni, carry the banner, followed by several others in civilian clothes and hundreds of women also wearing the traditional dress. *Su Casseri* and *Su sociu* walk in front of the statue of the saint, carrying *Su Cohone de Vrores*, a richly decorated votive type of bread of very ancient and possibly pre-Christian origin. *Sa Arrela 'e Vrores*, an equestrian tournament where accomplished horse riders display their riding skills, takes place after the procession has ended. The rituals performed in honour of the saint include picking herbs such as elder, which is then scattered all along the procession route, *s'abba 'e vrore* (Saint John's water) and *s'ardu 'e isprone* (amethyst sea holly), during the night between June 23 and 24.

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