

## Crypt of Blessed Antonia Mesina

The crypt in the parish church of Santissimo Salvatore houses the remains of Blessed Antonia Mesina, born in Orgosolo on 21 June 1919. The entrance is on the right side of the church, in front of the house where she lived with her large family until 1935, when she tragically lost her life. One spring morning, while she was gathering firewood to bake bread in 'Ovadduthai', a place just outside of town, with her friend Annedda Castangia, she was violently assaulted by fellow villager Giovanni Ignazio Catgiu. When she refused to submit to him, he struck her with a rock 74 times and killed her. Her murderer was sentenced to death by firing squad on 4 August 1937, while the young woman, now considered as the Maria Goretti of Sardinia, was beatified on 4 October 1987 by Pope John Paul II.

As you can see, the dwelling is a traditional old stone two-storey building. A staircase leads from the inner courtyard to the upper floor, where Antonia's kitchen and bedroom are located. The few rooms furnished with the pieces and utensils of the time testify to the simple yet decent lifestyle of the Mesinas and of the agricultural and rural culture of the time.

Her remains were originally buried in the town cemetery, where you can still see the original marble headstone with a carved lily donated by Armida Barelli, the then-National President of Azione Cattolica, an association of which Antonia was a member.

However, in April 1983 the body was exhumed and moved into a white coffin to be transferred to the Church of Santissimo Salvatore, which was built in the second half of the 20th century and became a parish church in 1971. On 4 October 1987, the remains were dressed in the traditional costume of Orgosolo brides, exposed for veneration and finally moved to the crypt on 14 May 1994, where now are displayed in a glass casket under the altar. The crypt is always open to visitors and is enriched by a cycle of frescoes depicting the life of the 'Antonia Mesina, the Servant of God' by Giovanni Cau.

Antonia Mesina, who is very dear to the hearts of many, both in Orgosolo and elsewhere, has been the subject of many studies and publications. She is celebrated annually on May 17, the day of her death. This is a much-anticipated event with every year attracts lots of visitors from the whole province and other neighbouring Sardinian towns. In 2019, for the centenary of her birth, a Jubilee Year was proclaimed.

*Text by Cecilia Mariani*

