

Sa Sartiglia

Sa Sartiglia, otherwise known at its inception as *Sartilla*, is an equestrian tournament held in Oristano for the past 500 years on Carnival Sunday and Mardi Gras. The tournament on Sunday is organized by the Corporation (*Gremio*) of farmers, whereas that on Mardi Gras by the Gremio of carpenters. It has, arguably, an ancient Castilian origin. Researchers M. Falchi and M. Zucca found a manuscript dating the first tournament to 1543, whereas Pau, a late local historian, believed it originated in Oristano before the Spaniards set foot on the island. In fact, in a letter written to an English friar in the 14th century, St. Catherine of Siena stated that the Judge of Arborea could provide two galleys and one thousand horsemen to fight in a crusade for ten years. While being far from conclusive evidence that the tournament had already been, or was about to be held, this letter is certainly a testament to the importance of horse-breeding in Oristano and its surrounding countryside at the time.

The name "Sartiglia" comes from *Sortija* which, in turn, evolved from the Latin word *Sorticola*, the diminutive form of *Sors* which does not only mean fate and fortune, but also "ring".



La Pariglia: The Pyramid.

The ring is a tin star provided with a hole at its centre, hanging from a ribbon strung above horseman's height across the street near the Cathedral, at which masked horsemen aim with their swords on steeds galloping at breath-taking speed, after being announced by trumpets and drums and having gathered pace down a route, covered with sand, snaking across the town centre. The number of stars caught on each day is a sign of the wealth that the harvest and carpentry work will bring to the corporations.

At the end of *Sa Sartiglia*, elsewhere within the old walls, another sand covered route will be trodden by horses ridden by those same masked horsemen and women showing their stunting prowess, while engaging in all sorts of acrobatics on two and three galloping steeds at a time. This is called *La Pariglia*, and ends at sunset.

The leader of both trials is called *Su Componidori*, meaning "the one who marshals". He is chosen by the members of the Corporations, who do not disclose his name until Candlemas, when *Su Majorale* announces it directly to the appointee and a careful selection of the horses as well as adequate practice can start. He is neither a man, nor a woman but androgynous, much akin to the

land and, at the end of the tournament, blesses by-standers and the town with the "little doll of May" (*Sa Pippia 'e maiu*), a bunch of flowers swaddled in a ribbon, believed to pre-date the tournament itself, followed by the other horsemen at a canter first, and then alone, riding with his back on his galloping steed's, face up gazing at the Heavens.