

*Saint Gorge and the dragon.
Cult, culture and foundation of the city. (Abstract)*

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The figure of St. George fighting the dragon is an icon in the Eastern and Western world: the *topos* of the glorious and sacred image, the Saint on horseback with shield and spear, opposite to the winged monster, comes from ancient times and places, subject to devotion and dedication. Following the insights of René Girard, which describes the violent origins of human culture, I propose to analyze through the traditional image of St. George, the foundation of the "strengthen city" model of the Mediterranean city during Middle Age, with particular reference in sacrificial origins of living space. Just from Book X of *De Civitate Dei* we can trace, with the bishop from Ippona, a genealogy of the city. Writes Peter Brown: "The Mediterranean Christian and its eastern and northwestern foothills came to be *loci* clearly indicated where they met the sky and earth. The shrine contains a tomb, or, more often, a relic in the form of fragments, was often called simply 'the place', *loca sanctorum*, ὁ τόπος". Thus, the transition from pagan to Christian worship is dedicated to adaptation to local conditions. In particular, for urban areas, we can speak about a "mythical-ritual graft" of Christian foundation upon the pagan; of "political achievement" in the extra-urban areas, characterized by religious superstition, "process of acculturation" - which includes a number of stations intermediate, which lasts for centuries, and which is marked by more than direct confrontation with paganism, the demystification through evangelization. Our culture, represented in the icon of the Saint, it is summarized in this figure. George, we have seen, Saint, martyr and soldier. But his name means "farmer". A farmer in arms to defend the faith. Or, a soldier of Christ, cleric devoted to the cultivation of fields. Culture comes from *colere*, same root of religion and culture: the act of defining the ground, creating an enclosed space, bounded, a boundary sacred. And here we find the original relationship between employment and demarcation of land, religious rituals and birth culture. "How can violence cast out violence?" asks René Girard, paraphrasing the Gospel verse "How can Satan cast out Satan?". The image of the battle immortalized in the icon, the bridge between nature and culture, between man and beast, is not sufficient to represent the history of human community. The legend of providential intervention of George is connected with the consumption of a sacrificial rite: the girl, the daughter of the king, is the victim who is about to be swallowed by the dragon, which periodically becomes the gift of a young citizen for quench his thirst for violence. When he faces the dragon totem animal ritually fed by the community, the traditional guardian of the threshold between the realm of the living and the dead, George qualifies

himself as a magician and exorcist, but also as a doctor and priest. The graft of the archaic worship of reveals the wisdom of the Church's Fathers: the figure of George and the dragon is an example of the process of Christianization. Anyway, before to be painted in a glorious way, the Holy Knight is one of the first martyr in Christianity, as is told in *Acta Sanctorum*. He is able to help the City because of his victimary character, *figura Christi*. As Saint Augustinus writes in *De Civitate Dei*, "Sacrificium civitas est".