

POSTSCRIPT

to

THE ICON OF ST. PAUL at the Wignacourt Museum, Rabat, Malta

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Following the Conservation and Restoration Report (*Salve Pater Paule*, May 2009, pp. 102–3), further studies have investigated both the original context of the panel, and the particular style of the sword carried by St. Paul.

Firstly, as the present panel appears to represent the left section of a larger work, unless the latter was a narrative scene, St. Paul's stance, facing to our right, implies the following:

(a) The original work would not have shown him paired with St. Peter in illustration of the words "St. Peter and St. Paul", because St. Peter is accordingly shown first, and unless they both face forwards, they turn towards each other. The same applies when the two are shown on either side of Christ, a crucifix, or the Virgin and Child: each turns to the central motif.

(b) In the absence of evidence of any similar cut down the left side of our panel, we may also discount both an original horizontal iconostasis beam, and the panel of a polyptic, where St. Paul was just one in a long line of saints on the left flank of a central motif.

(c) His right-facing stance does suggest two contexts: either the panel once formed the left section of an original *ex voto* composition in which St. Paul and another saint were shown to the left and right respectively of a central motif (as for example in Salvatore Litard's *ex voto* with St. Genevieve, presented to the Sanctuary of Our Lady, Mellieha (Catalogue no. 24, *Salve Pater Paule*); or it is the left section of a painting of two single saints, St. Paul and a close associate. For the latter we have the example of the painting by the sixteenth century artist Michele Damaskinos, much-travelled Cretan artist of the second half of the sixteenth century: this shows St. Paul with his devoted friend, the Cypriot apostle St. Barnabus, companion on his first journey, who later became the patron saint of their first destination, the island of Cyprus.

Secondly, St. Paul holds a ceremonial or 'parade' sword which has the long slender blade of a warrior saint, a type designated by R.E. Oakeshott¹ as Type XVII, found all over Europe, and particularly frequently between 1370 and 1425. By the end of the fifteenth century the hilts of Type XVII became very varied and their constituent parts—pommel, grip, and guard—extremely complex. The pommel of St. Paul's version is Type VU: the particular version of pear-shaped pommel known as 'key-shaped' (i.e. a nineteenth-century watch key).² Damaskinos, the sixteenth-century artist mentioned above, includes it in his icon of Saints Servius and Bacchus, now in Corfu. In addition, both pommel and short grip of St. Paul's sword have a covering of gilded stucco, features shared with the ceremonial sword of the Emperor Sigismund I, made in 1435³. And the guard, strongly recurved, is an example of the decorative designs, immensely varied and competitive, that had evolved from the simple so-called 'cross guard' of earlier Crusader times. In the case of Sigismund, for instance, the guard has a dragon or "Wurm" design - the emblem of the *Gesellschaft der Lindwürms* of which he was a member⁴.

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¹R. Ewart Oakeshott, "The Archeology of Weapons", ed. Dover 1966, Chap XVII; idem, "Records of the Medieval Sword", ed. Boydell & Brewer 2009, p.216 ff.

²R. Ewart Oakeshott, "The Sword in the Age of Chivalry", ed. Boydell & Brewer 1997, p.107ff, pp.139–140, Appendix: Postscript to ed. 1994.

³R. Ewart Oakeshott, op.cit. note 2 above, Plate 42B.

⁴R. Ewart Oakeshott, op.cit. note 3 above, p.126.