

THE RETABLE OF ST. PAUL
FROM MDINA CATHEDRAL, MALTA

An ‘international’ altarpiece
and its sources in northern Italy

Joanna Lace



Abstract

The retable is made up of a central panel of St. Paul Enthroned surrounded by ten smaller painted scenes, eight of which illustrate the main events of his life, from his conversion to his death. The panels are painted in differing styles, and analysis shows that all stem from sources traceable to northern Italy, and dated between the last third of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth. The same applies to the two upper subsidiary panels that were later overpainted. Figure styles, backgrounds, and differing painting techniques are identified with various concurrent trends: Veneto-Byzantine, Lombard, and north-European—the latter reflecting Franco-Flemish work emanating from the great northern centres of patronage. In particular, abstract patterns seen on clothing, furnishings, flooring and backgrounds, are traced individually to named artists. These artists form part of a total of twelve—for convenience they are designated the 'Veneto Group'—all belonging to the generation following that of Guariento di Arpo (documented 1338–1370), and each relating to a particular aspect of the retable. The St. Paul retable was thus a collaborative work, and typical of the current 'international' milieu. In addition, the later overpainting of certain scenes provides valuable insights into developments in northern Italy in the painting of figures and of their setting within a realistic landscape, during what was an important formative period.

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Contents

1 Introduction

This great retable gives an immediate impression of brilliance and splendour, and its eleven constituent panels have an overall coherence and harmony conferred by a common palette—deep bright colours against finely-worked gold—that unifies them chromatically. The effect is powerful enough to obscure the fact that stylistically they contain certain interesting divergences, which this paper will explore. A detailed analysis reveals that Italian features predominate, also that these all have their origins in northern Italy during a period of about forty years from 1367 to c.1407. The Franco-Flemish and other ‘oltrealpe’ elements to be seen in most panels date from c.1400 to c.1410, and reflect influences current in the same region within this same time span.

It is of course to be understood that the evidence does not necessarily indicate that an Italian provenance is more likely than one in some outlying region of the Venetian *oltremare*—or indeed, in any centre of activity in habitual contact with Italian culture. The question of a specific provenance for the retable lies beyond the scope of this enquiry, and will probably have to remain open until literary evidence comes to light. The same proviso applies to the question of dating: the commissioning and /or execution of the panels could have occurred many years after the appearance of Italian prototypes.

Lack of literary evidence has always led in the past to uncertainties and differences in attribution¹, as is so often the case when the main stylistic sources, as here, belong to the period of the so-called ‘international style’. For a short period, and particularly around the year 1400, this style was truly international. This was because artists travelled, often on a free-lance basis; patronage widened to include wealthy collectors, and export (especially from Italy) was booming. An affinity developed between art of widely dispersed regions. Provenance and dating, however, can be established in several different ways. When literary evidence is lacking, and scientific examination not altogether practicable, then it is that the identification of the artistic sources that have been used by the artist (or team of artists in the case of a composite work like the retable) becomes of major importance. It is therefore with the identification of sources, iconographic and more particularly stylistic, that this investigation is concerned. It is a technique that, as will be seen, resolves some of the immediate uncertainties.

2 Preliminary Notes

I *Dating*

No documents have as yet come to light concerning the commissioning or execution of the retable², but a detailed stylistic analysis now accords well with a report that around 1419 the cathedral was extended eastwards by the addition of transepts and a short choir³. Such an event might well have occasioned the

¹Past attributions are usefully summarised in M. Buhagiar and S. Fiorini, *Mdina, The Cathedral City of Malta*, Malta 1996, Part I, p.157. They include: Italy c.1400 (P. Pullicino 1871); Siculo-Catalan, early 15th century (V. Bonello, S. Botari 1953); Catalonia, circle of Luis Borrassá, c.1410 (G. Bautier Bresc 1976 and M. Buhagiar 1987 and 1996).

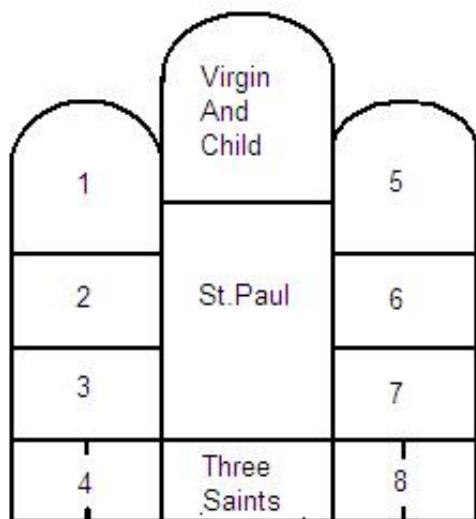
²For notes on the primary and secondary sources for medieval Malta, and a full discussion of the problems of research, see A. T. Luttrell, ‘Approaches to Medieval Malta’ in A. T. Luttrell (ed.), *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta Before the Knights*, The British School at Rome, London, 1975, p.1ff, and ibid., ‘Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography’, in *Melita Historica*, vii, no.2 (1977). An important source for Malta’s ecclesiastical history are the *Acts of Pietro Dusina’s Apostolic Visitation of 1575*; see A. T. Luttrell, ‘Approaches’, loc.cit. above, p.8 and n.53.

³The main source for the cathedral building is G.-F. Abela, *Della Descrittione di Malta Isola nel Mare Siciliano*, Malta, 1647, pp.331–333; quoted by M. Buhagiar, ‘Medieval Churches in Malta’, in A. T. Luttrell (ed.), *Medieval Malta*, op.cit.above, p.178. Abela includes among the furnishings of the cathedral “a fifteenth century retable of St. Paul”. The cathedral archives

commissioning of a major altarpiece, in keeping with the importance of the site. The date of its execution, however, remains problematic. During this period decades could elapse between the commissioning and execution of a major work. There is ample evidence of this from Sicily, Malta's dominant neighbour, where patrons were prone to demand richness and splendour rather than novelty of style⁴.

II *Framing and Assembly*

As assembled at present, the retable presents the format of the traditional historiated icon that had evolved from Byzantine art: a sacred figure surrounded by some of the traditional 'stories' of his/her life. Dismantling and re-assembly, if not outright damage, doubtless accounts for the lack of vertical buttresses which would originally have masked lengths of doweling by which main and subsidiary panels were normally joined together⁵. For some such reason, the order of the narrative of the Life of St. Paul has also notably been disturbed. Traditionally, 'Lives' begin chronologically with birth or conversion (in this case, The Road to Damascus), and/or baptism, followed by preaching/disputing, miracles, and death scenes last. Accordingly, the 'story' panels here flank St. Paul, running vertically from top to bottom in two columns, four each side. Clearly, left and right columns have been transposed at some stage, the original arrangement being as follows:



1. Road to Damascus
2. Baptism
3. Disputing
4. Sea Voyage (combining Departure for Rome and Shipwreck)
5. Miracle of the Viper
6. Healing
7. Raising
8. Beheading and Veneration

The scenes will be referred to in the above abbreviated form in the text.

The wood used—poplar⁶—was that preferred to all others in northern Italy, and the subsidiary panels—roughly square, with rounded tops and finely cusped—reflect north Italian work. Also, two distinct methods

record, on 10th January 1477, the commissioning of Petru di Messina to renew and paint the "cortina de lu altaru" [the cortina was a painted hanging installed in front of an altarpiece for protection]; and on 23rd December of the same year the payment to him "per la opera de lu scannellu [predella]"; and in 1481 the town council authorised him to receive payment "de la cona" out of funds belonging to the Church of St. Mark. It is considered that had the painting belonged to that church, its payment would not have involved the town council, who at that time took an active interest in the administration of the cathedral; see G. Wettinger, 'Artistic Patronage in Malta, 1418–1538', in A. T. Luttrell (ed.), *Hal Millieri: a Maltese Casale, its Churches and Paintings*, Malta, 1976, p.111–112 and notes. There is a reference to a bell at the cathedral in a text of 1645: made in Venice in 1370, and bearing an image of St. Paul; see A. Mifsud, *La Diocesi*, ii (1917/18), p.76–77, quoted in A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches', loc.cit. above p.20, n.124.

⁴For contemporary Sicily, see G. Bautier Besc, *Artistes, Patriciens et Confréries: Production et Consommation de l'œuvre d'art à Palerme et en Sicile Occidentale (1348–1460)*, École Française de Rome, 1979.

⁵For an account of the development of the historiated icon up to the fourteenth century, and the diffusion of the ready-made formulae that artists were trained to use, see Nancy P. Sevcenko, *The Life of St. Nicholas in Byzantine Art*, Turin, 1981.

⁶Oral communication from Mr. Samuel Bugeja, who carried out the most recent restoration work on the retable.

of construction have been employed. For the three upper panels and two of the predella panels, the original carpentry, the application of gesso, and the background gilding, were all completed before the painting was begun, and the subsequent painting or repainting of a scene was made to fit the prescribed area—between cusps, for example. This is the so-called ‘Giottesque’ or ‘Trecento’ method. The four lateral panels and one predella panel (the Beheading and Veneration) had frames added after the painting of the scene had been completed. Studies of Tuscan and Venetian methods have shown that the Trecento method was not normally used beyond the first decades of the fifteenth century, and that during that period both methods existed⁷. It is a period in keeping both with the style of the finely-worked frames and with the reported date we gave above for the extension of the cathedral (1419).

At this point it should be noted that there are features linking the framing to Spanish work of the time. The first concerns a detail of the arched frames of the lateral and predella panels: the spandrels are decorated with a diamond-shaped motif that is found in Aragonese and Valencian frames⁸. Also, the vertical format was one very common in Spain for a large retable, though by no means confined to that region. However, it will be shown that a stylistic analysis of the painted scenes points unmistakably to Italian prototypes. Any specifically Spanish element would in fact appear to be confined to the *intagliatore*. Clearly there are unknowns here, and beyond any wishes the patron may have expressed lay the intricacies of the international market prevailing at the time.

III *Literary sources of the narrative scenes*

1. *The Road to Damascus*

N.T., Acts 9.3-7. "He saw a light from Heaven, fell to the ground and heard a voice saying: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

This is sometimes referred to as The Conversion of St. Paul (or Saul). The scene has been extensively researched by Thomas Martone, in *The Theme of the Conversion of Paul in Italian Paintings from the Early Christian Period to the High Renaissance* (Ph.D. Thesis), New York University, 1977. The author cites all the other New Testament references to the event, and mentions that the horse came into the literature with St. Augustine.

2. *The Baptism* N.T., Acts, 9.18.

3. *St. Paul disputing with Festus*: N.T., Acts 25; or *St. Paul disputing with Felix*: N.T., Acts 24.

4. *The Sea Voyage* N.T., Acts 27.2 and 27.44.

5. *The Miracle of the Viper* N.T., Acts 28. 3-5.

6. *St. Paul heals the father of Publius* N.T., Acts 28.8.

7. *The Raising of Eutychus at Troas* N.T., Acts 20. 9-12, or *The Raising of Patroclus in Rome*

Acts of Paul, X, The Martyrdom, paragraphs I and II (trans. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford 1953, pp 293-4).

⁷For a useful study of the stages of altarpiece assembly, and new sequences of collaboration between *intagliatore* and painter between 1400 and 1450, see C. Gardner von Teuffel, ‘The buttressed altarpiece: a forgotten aspect of Tuscan fourteenth century altarpiece design’, in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 21, 1979, pp.21-65.

⁸For example, Pedro Serra (act.1357-1406), the Retable of San Juan and Santa Lucía, in the Convent of Santo Sepulcro, Zaragoza; Luis Borrassá, the Retable of the Archangel Gabriel (end of the fourteenth century) in Barcelona cathedral; illustrated in J. Gudiol Ricart, *Arte de España*, Barcelona, 1955, figs.108 and 280 respectively.

The precise occasion is problematic: the New Testament story of Eutychus certainly describes a night scene “with many lamps”, as in the retable scene, but it could also refer to the Patroclus story because a woman is present (behind the curtain on the left): she would be Candida, wife of the chief prison governor, who “listened and believed” and converted her husband. Also, Patroclus, Nero’s cup-bearer was, like Eutychus, described as a “lad”. The Troas story, on the other hand, would not require the presence of an imperial ruler, but this may be a reference to contemporary dramatic performances (see Section II below and note 20).

8. *The Beheading of St. Paul and The Veneration at the tomb of St. Paul* Acts of Paul, as cited above, paragraphs V and VII (op.cit. above, pp 295 and 296).

In this account Paul said to Longus and Festus (the prefect and the centurion) “Come quickly to my grave in the morning, and ye shall find two men praying, Titus and Luke”.

IV Points of Iconography

The Road to Damascus

A horse appeared in this scene in Germany and in Italy during the twelfth century. Most relevant to the Mdina version, where the horse is standing and faces left, is the one in the Giustiniani New Testament, fol. 128v, in the Giustiniani Collection in Venice, which has been dated stylistically to c.1200, and is said to be Veronese.(Fig.1)



Figure 1: Veronese School: *The Conversion of Paul*, from the Giustiniani Codex, fol. 128v., c. 1200(?). Venice, Giustiniani Collection.

Where Paul is shown falling violently, as in some other versions, the source is probably the Golden Legend, which specifically states that Paul was “thrown”.

The Baptism

Baptism was almost exclusively used to illustrate conversion. The use of a baptism ‘shell’ or other receptacle (rather than the placing of a hand) is west European. In the Mdina version the older ritual of immersion has been combined with that of the aspersion (sprinkling) method: the latter practice seems to have taken over completely in France in the fourteenth century, in Italy in the fifteenth, and in England in the sixteenth. Fonts in medieval Europe (where infant baptism had become the norm) changed from ancient sunken models to the raised type of the Mdina scene. Ananias appears as an elderly man in ecclesiastical garments from the twelfth century in Italy (for instance, in the mosaic cycles of the Capella Palatina and of Monreale, in Sicily).

The Sea Voyage

A Roman official oversees the departure from Sidon. The voyage proceeds from left to right (the usual iconography), the wind filling the sails as it takes the boat seawards. The captain, also following tradition, is shown in the stern, controlling a variety of ropes; Paul is seated beside him. The Giustiniani codex mentioned above is among the few surviving medieval cycles of St. Paul that include the shipwreck.

The Healing of the Father of Publius

Some healing scenes show a cure performed by a grasping or active pulling up of the sick person (including some Veronese manuscripts and a Neapolitan Bible now in Vienna), but the Mdina version is more common in Western Europe. In this, the healer approaches from the left with a gesture of blessing, the sick person sits upright, hands joined in prayer (sometimes, as here, attended by members of the household).

The Raising

The duplicate narrative (the boy depicted twice, both dead and raised, in the same scene) was a medieval device that continued well into the fifteenth century.

The Beheading

In the Acts of Paul, when Paul was beheaded, milk spurted “upon the soldier’s cloak”; this feature may have appeared originally in the Mdina scene, or the artist misread his model and depicted blood. The Acts of Paul, like the Golden Legend (with its account of the three fountains) omits a feature very common in art, that is taken from the apocalyptic Passion of Peter (a text attributed to St. Linus, Peter’s successor as Pope). This is the veil that Paul borrows from Plautilla, to bind his eyes before he is beheaded—also absent from the Mdina scene. The beheading often takes place out-of-doors (in Sienese works, for example)—with or without Plautilla’s veil; and fountains appeared in Roman versions (Old St. Peter’s, and its derivative at San Piero a Grado, near Pisa). The executioner is shown in the Mdina version sheathing his sword, with Paul’s head lying severed on the ground. This is the iconography widely used in Italy; in other cases, including Spanish examples, an executioner is shown in the act of raising his arm and about to swipe his victim with his sword.

***The Veneration* (Addendum, added March 2010):**

This rectilinear sarcophagus or arca, with steeply inclined gable lid, free-standing on six columns, is a significant example of the type set up for the relics of Dominic Guzman, founder of the Order of Preachers, in the church of San Domenico in Bologna. This was completed in 1267 to Nicola Pisano’s design, and was soon afterwards imitated all over Italy, particularly for the tombs of saints and beati, and particularly among the Dominicans: just as their preaching was conceived to appeal to the common worshipper, a free-standing arca enabled devotees to touch it, to benefit from the properties of the relics within. See A.F. Moskowitz, *Nicola Pisano’s Arca di San Domenico and Its Legacy*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

The Predella Saints: St. Agatha, St. Peter, St. Catherine of Alexandria

The *spoglie* of St. Agatha are in Verona cathedral. Until the sixteenth century they were housed in a *tempiletto* outside the walls, between the Porta Nuova and Porta San Zeno. (For further details see C. Benagha, *La SS. Trinita ‘in Monte Oliveto’ di Verona*, Verona, 1974; also, with details of Veronese patronage in the fourteenth century, see (ed.) Giorgio Borelli, *Chiese e monasteri a Verona*, Verona, 1980.) In the Mdina predella she is shown with her usual emblems: her severed breasts on a plate, and the palm of martyrdom (c.f. many examples in Sicily, where she holds a cross). The fact that she is crowned in the Mdina version

may be due to the artist's use of the same *cartone* as for St. Catherine of Alexandria, whom the literature refers to as of noble birth, and is usually crowned. There are notional links between St. Agatha and St. Peter (who, by appearing to St. Agatha in a vision, cured her wounds); also between St. Catherine of Alexandria, the successful advocate and philosopher, and St. Peter, whose gesture is that of a teacher. St. Peter, again, had from ancient times been seen with St. Paul. However, St. Agatha has always been revered in Malta, and the choice of saints may have been made by the patron of the retable for quite other reasons.

The Virgin and Child

The unusual feature of this panel is its placing on the upper (subsidiary) register—the position that is often taken by an Annunciation or a Pietà (Venice), or a Crucifixion (Tuscany). It is a point that may be explained only when facts are known as to how the retable came to be commissioned, and by whom. An altarpiece in Sardinia (mentioned below, note 24) also has a Virgin and Child with Two Donors in the main pinnacle. Other points of the iconography of this panel (the lack of veil, the musicians) are covered below (Section IV).

3 Stylistic Analysis

I St. Paul Enthroned

Taking as starting point the large central panel, three aspects point towards the Veneto: the head, the modelling technique, and the throne (Fig.2). Most arresting is certainly the head, whose stylised facial features belong to a time-honoured tradition for a devotional image (using proportions arrived at by means of a modular system). They produce that aesthetic and somewhat severe cast of face familiar in all icons and other works of art having their common source in Byzantium. In the present context, however, their byzantine linearity has been set within a naturalistic bone-structure—characteristically wide at the temples—that is particularly associated with hierarchical figures of the fourteenth century Sienese school⁹. Particularly close to the Mdina head in this respect is the head of St. Paul in a panel, now in Paris, from an altarpiece by an artist of the second generation of this school, dated between c. 1350 and c. 1375¹⁰. (Fig.3) This is not to say that the Mdina artist necessarily had any connection with Siena, because by this period styles from Sienese workshops had not only been taken up throughout Italy, but had spread abroad with the movement of artists between the various courts of Europe. A Sienese element is no indication of location—either of prototype or copy—but it does indicate influence, and therefore provides a useful *terminus a quo*. The close combination of ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ (i.e. byzantine and Sienese) clearly demonstrates the continuing preference (either of artist or of patron) for an ancient hieratic formula, during a period when artists were rapidly developing more naturalistic forms for other sections of a composite work.

In this connection it is notable that the Mdina artist has also kept to an ancient byzantine tradition for the Saint’s ears: they are abnormally large, and turned forward “to receive the word of God”. They have a particular morphological feature, the Y-shaped motif within the shell of the ear, that was also widespread during the fourteenth century. Artists of the Veneto were amongst those occasionally using this motif¹¹.

⁹For example, in Simone Martini’s great *Maestà* of 1315 in the Palazzo Publico, Siena (see *L’Opera Completa di Simone Martini*, Classici dell’Arte, Milan, 1970, Tav. I); Lippo Memmi’s *Maestà* in the Palazzo del Podesta, San Gimignano, of 1317 (see L. Bellosi (Introd.), *La Pittura dell’Italia centrale nell’età gotica*, I Maestri del Colore, 252, Milan, 1966, Tav. 20); A. Lorenzetti’s *St. Peter and St. Paul*, in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Roccalbegna, of c. 1320 or c. 1340 (see E. Borsook, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, Florence, 1966, Figs. 76 and 77); Giacomo di Mino del Pellicciaio, *Head of St. Anthony* of 1362, in the Pinacoteca, Siena (see M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, Princeton, USA, 1979, Fig. 61).

¹⁰See M. Lacotte (ed.), *Retales Italiens du XIIIe au XVe siècle*, Les dossiers du département des peintures, 16, Paris, 1978, No. 10: *St. Paul* (from the Church of Saint-Louis-en-l’Île, Paris). It has been variously attributed to Luca di Tommè, Bartolo di Fredi, and Lippo Vanni (see loc. cit., pp. 21-22).

¹¹These include Simone dei Crocefissi (documented 1355–c.1399), for example his panel Pope Urban V of c.1370, now in the



Figure 2: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul*, centre panel, St. Paul Enthroned. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 3: Sienese School: St. Paul, c.1360-65. Paris, Church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île.

From a stylistic point of view, the technique used in this panel for the drapery of St. Paul's mantle is more revealing. The heavy modelling by means of stereotyped white motifs is the work of an artist trained in a well-attested byzantine technique. The broad knee patch (a characteristic ovoid swirl) and sweeping prong-like shapes for the shoulder folds, constitute a simple code for distinguishing convex from flat surfaces—a method that had become widespread throughout Eastern Europe by the early fourteenth century (e.g. Cyprus, Fig.4), and continued in use in the Veneto, the region of Italy with close ties with the



Figure 4: *Fresco of The Donor Presenting the Church to Christ through the Virgin (detail)*, c.1350–c.1375. Asinou, Cyprus, Church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa.

East¹².

It was the Italian Veneto that produced the specific combination seen in the Mdina St. Paul Enthroned, where byzantine modelling accompanies flat passages emulating rich brocade. Two particular features of St. Paul's brocade are also relevant here. It has been simulated by the application of gold to a preliminary

National Gallery, Bologna (see catalogue, Bologna 1987, no.44 p.29); and in works attributed to Niccolò di Pietro (documented 1394–1430), for example the lateral wings of a polyptych of St. Francis and St. Louis of Toulouse, now in the Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon (see M. Boskovits, *The Martello Collection*, Florence 1985, p.124).

¹² Amongst examples of the style, in Trieste: fresco of the Death of the Virgin, end of the 14th century, now in Museo Civico, Trieste; in Serbia: frescoes in the Monastery of Gračanica, Kosovo, of 1321 (illustrated in O. Bihalji-Merin, *Byzantine Frescoes and Icons in Yugoslavia*, London, 1960, e.g. Plate 57: The Raising of Lazarus); and frescoes signed and dated by Micajlo and Eutichije in the Church of St. George, Staro Nagoričino, of 1317–18 (illustrated in O. Bihalji-Merin, op. cit., e.g. Plate 52: The Mocking of Christ (detail, standing figure in foreground)). For examples in Cyprus: the mid-14th century fresco of the Nativity in the Church of St. Nicholas of the Roof, Kakopetria (south arm of the nave), illustrated in A. & J. A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*, London, 1985, Fig. 28; fresco of the Ascension of Christ, of the third quarter of the 14th century (after 1353) in the Church of the Holy Cross, Pelendri (north side of the east vault), illustrated in A. & J. A. Stylianou, op. cit., Fig. 129); and fresco of the Donor presenting the church to Christ through the Virgin, of the same period, in the Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa of Asinou, central nave, illuminated in A. & J. A. Stylianou, op.cit., Fig.57. Amongst many examples from the furthermost regions of influence, is a late fourteenth century Novgorod icon of The Descent into Limbo, now in the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; illustrated in D. Likhachov et al., *Novgorod Icons 12th–17th Century*, Oxford-Leningrad, 1980, Plate 58. For the addition, in byzantine painting in general, of broader patches of light colour for modelling, as introduced in the 13th century and refined by the Paleologue painters of the early 14th century, see John Stuart, *Ikons*, London, 1975, chap. 4.

ground colour (the Venetian method¹³); and the way the regular pattern of gold arabesques packs the prescribed area closely, and without foreshortening, points to a stage in decorative patterning stylistically near to the early work of Paolo Veneziano (?–1362) and his workshop, and quite consistent with versions by the less experimental of his many followers. It is notable also that a particular version of decorative ‘Kufic’ lettering used by Paolo is identical to that on the golden cuffs of St. Paul Enthroned¹⁴.

St. Paul’s throne accords well with these findings: it is a single-arched adaptation of the throne in the great fresco of the Coronation of the Virgin by Guariento di Arpo (documented 1338 - 1370), that decorated the end wall of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Ducal Palace in Venice from 1365/7–1577 (when it was damaged by fire¹⁵). Guariento, a well-established Paduan artist, had been called to Venice to decorate this sala. His ultimate source for the throne lay fifty years earlier in the pinnacled structure that Simone Martini and his brother-in-law Lippo Memmi had created for the *Maestà* for the Palazzo Publico at Siena (1315)¹⁶. Guariento introduced unprecedented spatial depth, by using strongly defined orthogonals, and by showing the shafts of the side arcading in recession—all features repeated here. The vast composition proved to be his masterpiece, and the throne in particular was much imitated¹⁷. By 1367 Guariento had returned to Padua, so we have a *terminus post quem* for the Mdina derivative.

II The Four Lateral Scenes

The four lateral scenes (the Baptism, Disputing, Healing and Raising) are all interiors, and their common architectural setting marks them off as a group (Figs. 5,6,7 and 8). I shall first analyse this somewhat complex background. I shall then consider aspects of figural style and items of furniture, relating these features to the main panel.

The layout of all four scenes is identical, pointing to the repeated use of the same *cartone*, and this was a favourite Paduan method for producing narrative, found in frescoes of the 1360s and 1370s. It was used by Guariento in his St. Philip cycle (c. 1368) in the Church of the Eremitani¹⁸, and in the mid-1370s Giusto de’ Menabuoi (documented 1363–87), a highly successful newcomer to Padua from Florence, used it in his decorative programme, the *Stories of Esau*, in the drum of the baptistery of Padua cathedral¹⁹. It has been

¹³In Tuscany, on the other hand, artists perfected the *sgraffiato* technique, where the ground, rather than the motif, is gold. For the development of these techniques, and more sophisticated examples by Sienese artists, see Simone Martini’s *Maestà* of 1315 and works of Pietro Lorenzetti of the 1320s, illustrated in Paul Hills, *The Light of Early Italian Painting*, Yale University, 1987, Chapter VI, Fig. 60 and Colour Plate XXII.

¹⁴See Paolo Veneziano, with sons Luca and Giovanni: The Finding of the Body of St. Mark, 1345. Venice, panel of the covering of the Pala d’Oro, Museo Marciano.

¹⁵It is often referred to simply as the ‘*Paradiso*’, and its full title is: The Coronation of the Virgin and the Court in Heaven; see J. White, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1250-1400*, Pelican History of Art, Harmondsworth, 1987, illus. 350 (detail); also F. F. D’Arcais, *Guariento, Tutta la Pittura*, Venice, 1974, Figs. 121-127. For the documentation, see F. F. D’Arcais, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

¹⁶See *L’Opera Completa di Simone Martini*, op. cit. above (note 9), loc. cit. It was copied by Memmi in his *Maestà* for the Palazzo del Podesta at San Gimignano, in 1317; see *La Pittura dell’Italia Centrale nell’età Gotica*, op.cit. above (note 9), Fav.20.

¹⁷Derivatives include those in works by Jacobello del Fiore (1370-1439): his Coronation of the Virgin of 1438, commissioned by the Bishop of Ceneda (Vittorio Veneto) and now in the Galleria dell’Accademia, Venice (see Ildiko Ember, *Music in Painting*, Budapest, 1984, No. 9); and Giovanni D’Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini: Coronation of the Virgin, signed and dated 1444, in the Church of San Pantalon, Venice (see G. Lorenzetti, *Venice and its Lagoon*, Rome, 1961, illus. p. 572). Jacobello and artists of his workshop have recently been brought together under the name of the ‘Master of Ceneda’; they belong to the group I have designated in Part II as the ‘Veneto group’. Jacobello is also amongst members of this group who may have worked with Gentile da Fabriano on the second stage of decoration of the Sala del Maggior Consilio during the early years of the 14th century (see below note 81).

¹⁸See C. L. Ragghianti, *Pittura tra Giotto e Pisanello: Trecento e Primo Quattrocento*, Civiltà artistica a Ferrara, 2, Ferrara, 1987, illus. 14, St. Philip Ordered to Sacrifice to the Idol, and The Miracle of the Cross. The date is disputed: on stylistic grounds some scholars consider this fresco cycle to come before the Venice *Paradiso* of 1367/8; others, including Ragghianti, consider it to be post-1368.

¹⁹See C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), illus. 19. Giusto’s own origins lay in Florence, but he is documented as



Figure 5: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, The Baptism of St. Paul. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.* © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 6: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, St. Paul Disputing. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.* © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 7: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul*, lateral panel, *The Healing of the Father of Publius*. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 8: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, The Raising of Eutychus, or of Patroclus.* The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

explained, not as a means of economy of work, but as presenting a *persistenza ambientale* that developed out of medieval drama, where successive scenes would be shown, sometimes with minor modifications, against the same background, even when distances of time and place were being presented²⁰.

It is not implied by this that a Paduan artist produced the *cartone* for the background matrix. The latter has one feature, in fact—the blind arcading for the walls of these interiors – that is too widely dispersed in art by the second half of the fourteenth century to be any guide as to provenance. The same could be said in general regarding the insertions above these walls of the external roofs of buildings. In respect of the domes however, in the Baptism and Raising panels, these are a particular hallmark of church architecture in Venice and in Padua, and studies by H. Buchtal on Sicilian illumination have suggested that artists were prone to take models and give them a local *ambiente* (by the addition, in the case of Palermo, of Mohammedan-type domes)²¹. The Mdina matrix may well have been modified for the same reason. A fresco in Ferrara of the first decades of the fifteenth century certainly has similar domes placed in this way. Again, the flat-roofed arcaded building in the Healing panel has its closest parallel in a *frontale* of the same period painted in Padua, depicting the Legend of S. Giovanni Boccadoro. (Fig.9) Both fresco and panel painting have recently been attributed by C. L. Ragghianti to an artist active in Padua during the first decades of

living in Padua by 1370, and his most important works, of the 1370s, are there. See also, M. Gregori, ‘La Presenza di Giusto a Viboldone’, in *Paragone*, 293, 1971, pp. 3 ff. and Tav. 21. Gregori refers to a more complex theory that Giusto’s *persistenza ambientale* stemmed from the late antique method of narration used in the mosaics of the Genesis cycle of the early 13th century in St. Mark’s, Venice—a cycle said, in its turn, to reflect an ancient byzantine prototype, the Cotton Genesis.

²⁰Regarding dramatic performances, it is interesting that the Dominicans (prominent protagonists in the Mdina Baptism scene) were the first to stage mystery plays—in Milan—from 1366; see E. Mâle, *L’Art Religieuse de la fin du Moyen Age en France*, Paris, 1922, p. 69 ff. See also C. Molinari, ‘Spectacoli Fiorentini del Quattrocento’, in *Racolta Pisana*, 5, Venice, 1961, p. 128.

²¹See H. Buchtal, ‘Early Fourteenth-Century Illuminations from Palermo’ in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 20 (1966), p.108-109.



Figure 9: *The Compagno Ferrarese (attrib.): The Legend of S. Giovanni Boccadoro (detail)*, c. 1420-40. Modena, Galleria Estense.

the fifteenth century, whom he refers to as the ‘Compagno Ferrarese’²². To sum up, these architectural additions are a first indication that, just as the repetitive use of a matrix for a narrative cycle was common in Padua, the interiors themselves may have been produced by an artist or artists working in the same milieu. It is when the rest of the background architecture is fully examined that a number of other stylistic features imposed upon the matrix are all found to be part of the Paduan repertoire of the followers of Guariento of the succeeding generation.

During the fourteenth century two particularly influential artists evolved systems by which architectural forms were used to indicate the interior of a building. One was Giotto (?1267–1337), particularly active in Padua and in Naples, and the other was Ambrogio Lorenzetti (active 1319–1347). The Mdina matrix is a combination of both systems. Solutions to the problem of creating three-dimensional interior space were often a combination of several prototypes, which were imperfectly understood.

The Giottesque element in the lateral panels consists in the way all four interiors are framed each side by narrow sections of exterior wall (complete with paired openings) shown in elevation: this is an abbreviated reference to Giottesque solutions in which the exterior of a building was always shown. Precisely the same design is seen in Angevin Naples, in work of the 1330s and 1340s attributed to ‘Giottesque’ artists: for example, the sculptured scenes of the Story of St. Catherine of Alexandria from Santa Chiara²³, and again in a panel depicting the Birth of St. Nicholas of Bari, in the predella of an altarpiece in Sardinia by the ‘Maestro delle Tempere Francescane’²⁴. By the late 1350s it had appeared in Italianate frescoes at the Imperial Court of Bohemia²⁵. In the case of the Mdina matrix, these narrow forward sections are therefore evidence of the carrying over of an old-established system into a later context, by an artist whose true interest perhaps lay in balanced rectilinear pattern-making.

The second architectural element is the distinctive so-called ‘diaphragm’ arch²⁶. Ambrogio Lorenzetti introduced this into panel painting in a highly sophisticated form in 1342, in his *Presentation in the Temple*, (Fig.10) and by 1405-8 it had been taken up by the artist (probably Flemish) known as the ‘Boucicaut

²²The fresco, *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, from the Church of S. Guglielmo, Ferrara, and now in the Casa Romei, Ferrara, was previously attributed to the GZ Master (a Veronese or Paduan artist in the circle of Altichiero), and to the circle of the Ferrarese artist Antonio Alberti. The Ferrarese *frontale*, the *Legend of S. Giovanni Boccadoro*, is now in the Galleria Estense, Modena. Both fresco and panel painting are illustrated in C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), illus.78 and illus. 210 respectively.

²³Attributed to Giovanni and Pacio da Firenze, documented 1343-45; see J. White, op. cit. above (note 15), p. 451 and Fig. 277.

²⁴In the cathedral of Ottana, Sardinia, dated c. 1340; see F. Bologna, *I Pittori alla Corte Angioina di Napoli, 1266-1414*, Rome, 1969, Tav. VI-26, 32. Bologna refers to the spread of “the Giottesque culture of the Maestro delle Tempere Francescane” to Sicily, Aragon, and Avignon, around this date.

²⁵For example in the Chapel of the Virgin in Karlstein Castle, Prague, dated 1357 (right hand of east wall). Prague was the emergent artistic and cultural centre of Bohemia, and owed much to artists trained in Italy by the Emperor Charles IV.

²⁶I have adopted the term introduced by E. Panofsky: see his *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, New York, 1972, p. 142 and note 2; for the way the arch cuts down the spectator’s field of vision and hides the point where the orthogonals would touch the margins, see his *Early Netherlandish Painting*, New York, 1971, Vol. One, *Text*, pp. 58-59.



Figure 10: Ambrogio Lorenzetti: *Presentation in the Temple* (detail), 1342. Florence, Uffizi Gallery.

Master', in the Hours of the Maréchal de Boucicaut²⁷. It is a device to lend spatial depth to a composition: an arch painted in as if overlapped by the wood frame of the panel, thus coming between the frame and the picture space. In the Mdina panels this 'diaphragm' component varies. In the ecclesiastical scenes of the Baptism and the Raising it stands out clearly: for the Baptism a pinkish brown, contrasting with the brownish grey of the three church domes appearing above it; and the colour scheme is reversed for the Raising scene. (Figs.5 and 8) It duly cuts across the upper part of these two panels, but then instead of disappearing behind the wood frame to left and right (in order to increase the visual depth of the scene 'beyond'), it is made to merge with the orthogonals of the side walls, and thus becomes of one piece with the painted building, thereby negating its original function. Whatever form any previous wood frames may have had, it is unlikely that they ever masked completely the ambiguity of these upper corners.

The diaphragm arches of the secular interiors, the Disputing and Healing scenes, on the other hand, have been modified so that they do bridge the picture space independently of the lateral strips of 'outside' wall. The Disputing has been given a slightly deeper-cusped diaphragm, and its striated surface completely fills the remaining upper section of the panel. (Fig.6) In thus including neither 'sky', exterior roofs, nor gold ground, it becomes the kind of 'proscenium' favoured by Giusto de' Menabuoi in the 1370s, for example, in his frescoes with *persistenza ambientale* in the baptistery of Padua cathedral²⁸. (Fig.11) The Healing (its rear wall almost totally taken up by a decorative curtain for Publius' father's bedchamber) has been modified to a still different design: a smaller-cusped diaphragm, cutting across the panel horizontally to clear the taller figures, the space above it showing the flat roofs of the secular building (Publius' palace?) against a gold ground. (Fig.7) In both these modified scenes the artist certainly shows each end of the diaphragm disappearing beneath the wooden frame, and neatly masking the corner orthogonal intersections of the painted architecture, in true Lorenzettian fashion.

The form of the matrix itself is thus of mixed parentage, and has suffered from a flux of evolving theories. These theories were circulating widely not only in Italy, but equally in Burgundy and Bohemia during

²⁷The Ambrogio Lorenzetti work is the centre panel of a triptych, now in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence; see E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, op. cit. above (note 26), Fig. 101. For the Boucicaut Hours, now in Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André (MS.2), see E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op. cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig. 62: Vigils of the Dead (fol. 142v.). Panofsky discusses their style and approximate dating in op.cit. Vol. One, *Text*, p.53 ff., and refers to the Boucicaut Master's possible stay in Milan, loc.cit.p.58, note 1. A different use of a diaphragm, where it frames the view into the interior of a free-standing building, occurs in a panel of The Flagellation and Other Scenes, of the school of the Marches, dated to the mid-14th century. It is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Malta; see D. Cutajar (ed.), *Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta*, Malta, 1991, illus.p.7.

²⁸See C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), illus. 19.



Figure 11: *Giusto de' Menabuoi: Stories of Esau*, mid-1370s. Padua, Duomo (Baptistery).

the latter part of the fourteenth century. The Mdina version however, has been given certain decorative details that were used by artists who worked in the Veneto during the 1360's and 1370's. First, the use of deep or pinkish red for coping and dado edges in all four scenes, nicely stressing three-dimensionality: this had appeared early in the century in Padua, in Giotto's influential decorative scheme in the Arena Chapel, completed about 1313²⁹. Guariento's follower, Nicoletto Semitecolo (active ?1335–1381)—an artist whose name will be mentioned several times in this survey—used the pink coping in panels of the *Life of St. Sebastian*, painted for Padua cathedral and dated 1367³⁰ (for example Fig.12). Secondly, the starlit sky glimpsed



Figure 12: *Nicoletto Semitecolo: The Burial of St. Sebastian (detail)*, 1367. Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare.

through the cusped arches of the diaphragm arch in the Baptism and Raising scenes (but here illogically placed below the domes) is found in work of both Guariento and Semitecolo (also in his St. Sebastian panels)³¹. In addition, the unusual dull greyish-brown for walls in these two scenes (in lieu of the pale pinks

²⁹See *L'Opera Completa di Giotto*, Classici dell'Arte Rizzoli, nuova serie, Milan, 1978: Presentation at the Temple and Cleansing of the Temple, Tav. XX and Tav. XXX respectively.

³⁰See Paolo Veneziano e il Suo Tempo, I Maestri del Colore, No. 241, Tav. X, The Burial of St. Sebastian by Santa Lucina and her Companions. The panels are in the Biblioteca Capitolare in Padua.

³¹For Guariento, see his (attributed) fresco of The Coronation of the Virgin, formerly decorating the tomb of Jacopino da Carrara in the Church of St. Augustine, Padua, dated c.1351, and now in the Church of the Eremitani, Padua; illustrated in

and ochres of Lorenzetti followers) is a particular characteristic of Giusto's painted architecture, for example in his cathedral baptistery frescos referred to above. The box-like interiors of the Mdina scenes have a high view-point, resulting from the way the side walls are made to recede sharply upwards. This perspective seems retardaire for the 1370s: at the same time it is an occasional feature of the paintings of Stefano Veneziano (*plebanus*, di Sant'Agnese, active c.1369–1384), an artist who was working with Semitecolo in Venice 1380–1381. The backgrounds of these lateral scenes in fact show stylistic devices that are not always fully understood, but they are all, nevertheless, consistent with the sources identified in the main panel of St. Paul Enthroned, and with its post-1368 dating.

The same can be said of another decorative detail that has appeared at some stage in the Disputing and Healing scenes, and that creates further spatial ambiguity. This concerns the diaper pattern, in black upon a brown ground, and which has also been inserted differently into each scene. In the Disputing it is placed above a horizontal rear wall (decorated with small cusping) and below the proscenium-type arch. It thus fills the space which the modern eye reads as 'sky'. (Fig.6) In the Healing the diaper is placed not above, but below a horizontal diaphragm with small cusping. The patterning thus tends to be read as 'wall-paper', filling the narrow space above the brocade curtain. (Fig.7) These intrusions into complex background architecture that is Italian in origin, suggest the intervention of an artist, quite possibly a non-Italian, more used to the older and simpler convention of filling backgrounds (both external and interior spaces) with abstract pattern³². But they do not rule out the Veneto as provenance, because foreign artists often worked side by side with Italians: for instance under the patronage of the ardent francophile Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan (1351–1402), who already by the 1380s ruled Verona and Padua. Furthermore, a series of illuminated manuscripts of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, datable to c. 1380–1400 and from this region, includes examples of the self-same black-on-brown diaper design as the Mdina scenes (e.g. Fig.13). The series will



Figure 13: Workshop of Giovannino de' Grassi (attrib.): *Aqua Calida* (detail), from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, c. 1380-c. 1400. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis, Series Nova, 2644, fol. 89.

be discussed later in reference to similarities in figural style and technique, all of which make more likely some connection between the Mdina panels and a Visconti workshop³³.

It is clear from the foregoing that the backgrounds of these lateral scenes point to artists conversant with works of the Veneto of the last decades of the fourteenth century or the first years of the fifteenth, and an analysis of the figure styles will show that they also are consistent with these sources and with their dating. They are not, however, related—like the matrix—to the work of Guariento or his followers, and differ in

F. F. D'Arcais, *Guariento*, op. cit. above (note 15), Tav. 32. For Semitecolo, see his panel depicting The Burial of St. Sebastian, cited above (note 30).

³²On the use of background patterns, see M. S. Bumim, *Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective*, New York, 1940.

³³See below note 55.

two important respects: in their disposition, which still derives ultimately from long-established medieval formulae for narrative, and in individual features of build, stance, and physiognomy. The latter owe nothing to the new dynamism of Guariento's compositions, nor to his heavier neo-Gothic figure style.

To begin with the general disposition of the figures: the Mdina work follows a tradition in which the creation of a pleasing pattern was the prevailing interest, and, given the exigencies of the chosen iconography, this was achieved by means of the balanced arrangement of the figures, largely uncluttered, and set close to the picture plane. The demand for narrative clarity was met by placing the main protagonist(s) either centrally (as in the Baptism), or setting them slightly apart from the rest (in the Disputing, Healing, and Raising), and by massing any subsidiary figures into closely packed, often isocephalus, groups. Action was limited to the gestures of hands, the positioning of feet, and direction of gaze, all of which usually gave, as here, an impression of arrested movement, and a certain tenseness of expression. That this remained the accepted narrative form in Venice for some important commissions in various media, is shown by the miniatures of a Venetian *istoria* of c.1340-70 considered by scholars to reflect an important fresco cycle within the Ducal Palace complex³⁴, and by the mosaics added to the Basilica of San Marco at around the mid-century³⁵. (Fig.14)



Figure 14: Venetian School: *St. Isidore Preaching*, mosaic of 1342-54. Venice, San Marco, Cappella di Sant'Isidoro.

Regarding the figures in these subsidiary panels individually, no single gratuitous swirl or sway of drapery been brought in anywhere for dramatic emphasis. Displaying no concern with any such artifice, garments are made to fall in simple vertical folds, in accordance with a continuing, older-established tradition. In the Baptism and Healing panels this calm, dignified style is associated not only with monumental works in Venice itself, such as the miniatures and mosaics already cited, but with a range of fresco cycles of the second half of the fourteenth century by Lombard artists that has survived in provincial centres of the Veneto, Emilia, and Lombardy. These cycles, like the Mdina panels, include elongated figures with a

³⁴The manuscript, in Venetian dialect, is the *Libro della Leggenda degli Apostoli Pietro e Paolo, di S. Albano e della venuta a Venezia di Papa Alessandro III*, Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Cod. Correr I, no. 383 (=1497); see P. Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*, Yale University, 1989, Plates V-VIII. Its date is disputed; Fortini Brown (op. cit., p. 260) favours a date near to 1370. The frescoes, in the Church of San Nicolò, were completed by 1329, and were still in place in 1400 (later destroyed); for full documentation see P. Fortini Brown, op. cit., pp. 37-38, notes 17 and 18, and Catalogue II.

³⁵Illustrated in S. Bettini, *Mosaici di San Marco*, Milan, 1968, pp. 44 and 45 (Chapel of St. Isidore), and p. 46 (baptistery).

specifically northern feature: this is the characteristic ‘northern’ or ‘Lombard’ head, having rounded contours, a sharp, often retroussé nose, a high forehead, and often red ‘bobbed’ hair. It was a style common to the whole of northern Italy (not limited to the boundaries of modern Lombardy) and Bohemia³⁶. (Fig.15) The head of St. Paul in each panel, on the other hand, has the gaunt, pinched physiognomy associated with



Figure 15: *Lombard School: Translation of the Body of St. Stephen (detail)*, 1375-80. Lentate, Oratorio di Santo Stefano.

the Veneto-byzantine idiom that was adhered to by followers of Paolo Veneziano. The most renowned of these was Lorenzo Veneziano (active 1356? – 1372)³⁷. (Fig.16) Otherwise the traditional Lombard head appears throughout the retable for female figures and for the unbearded males, giving the latter the typically ‘boyish’ appearance seen in many of the frescoes mentioned above.

In the Disputing and Raising scenes, heavy beards are combined with a different broad physiognomy (Fig.17). These heads bear the unmistakable stamp of the new Franco-Flemish naturalistic style that appeared in Italy, in various media, towards the end of the century. They show a striking likeness, in fact, to robust heads by André Beauneveu (1330 – 1403/13, working for Jean, Duc de Berry) and by Claus Sluter (c. 1350 – 1406), whose work at the Burgundian court at Dijon was widely influential in disseminating this new trend³⁸. The Veneto need not be excluded as a source: miniatures of certain specifically Venetian

³⁶ Amongst numerous examples in northern Italy, see those illustrated in *Gli Affreschi Gotici Lombardi*, Part 2, I Maestri del Colore, No. 225, Milan, 1966. For Bohemia, see (ed.) E. Bachmann, *Gothic Art in Bohemia*, London, 1977: for example, Plate VI, Jan Ocko von Vlăším votive panel of c. 1371-1375, now in the National Gallery, Prague. It is notable that when Prague became the Imperial capital, the Emperor Charles IV (d. 1377) brought in mosaicists from the Veneto to embellish new buildings. Semitecolo, for example, is thought to have supplied the *cartone* for the mosaic of Christ the Judge placed on the south transept facade of the Cathedral of St. Vitus: the figure of St. Vitus has a typical ‘boyish’ northern head. See R. Pallucchini, *La Pittura Veneziana del Trecento*, Venice-Rome, 1964, Fig. 710. The influx of Italian styles into east-central Europe generally, is extensively covered in M. Prokopp, *Italian Trecento Influence on Murals in East Central Europe, particularly Hungary*, Budapest, 1983.

³⁷ Early examples include the main central panel of the Santa Chiara Triptych, attributed to the Master of the Santa Chiara Triptych, and sometimes linked with contemporary Venetian miniatures (see M. Boskovits, *The Martello Collection*, op.cit. above note 11, pp 90-93). The triptych comes from the church of the Poor Clares of Santa Maria della Cella, Trieste, and is now in the Museo Civico, Trieste; see exhibition catalogue *Pittura su tavola dalle collezioni dei Civici Musei di Storia ed Arte di Trieste*, Trieste 1975, section II.1.

³⁸ In this paper I shall use the term ‘Franco-Flemish’ to include artists from Flanders who spent periods in Paris, and so came under the influence of French styles. For Sluter, see for example the figures of his Well of Moses, executed for Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, at the Chartreuse de Champmol, near Dijon, dated 1395-1400 (now in the grounds of the Psychiatric Hospital, Dijon, with replica in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon); see E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London, 1950, Fig. 152: The Prophets Daniel and Isaiah. For Beauneveu, see The Psalter of Jean de Berry, c.1386 (24 grisailles): e.g. fol.19, The Prophet Joel, illustrated in M. Thomas, *The Golden Age, Manuscript Painting at the Time of Jean, Duke of Berry*, New York, 1979, Plate 12; also see sculptures of prophets dated 1392–1405 attributed to his circle (now in the Municipal Museum, Bourges); illustrated in exhibition catalogue *Les Fastes du Gothique, le siècle de Charles V*, Paris, 1981, Cat. 224. The new style was introduced into Tuscan monumental sculpture by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378 or 1381 to 1455), for his figures on the north doors of the baptistery

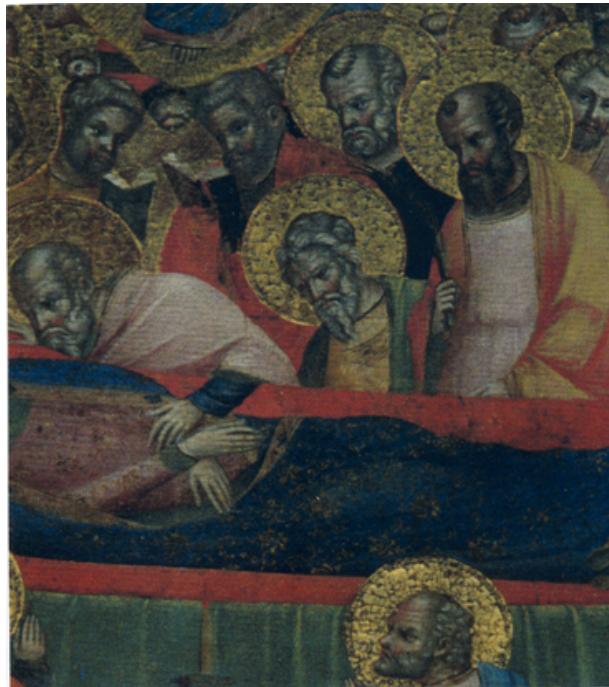


Figure 16: *Lorenzo Veneziano: The Death of the Virgin (detail) 1366. Vincenza, cathedral, Proti chapel.*



Figure 17: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, The Raising of Eutychus or of Patroclus (detail).* The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

manuscripts dated from c.1385 show the same technique of long loose brush strokes for beards that similarly cover half the cheek³⁹. (Fig.18) Also, amongst contemporary panel painters of Venice and the Veneto



Figure 18: *Venetian School: The Ascension of Christ and Two Prophets, a page from a Book of Hours (detail), last quarter of the fourteenth century. Florence, Private collection.*

whose broad Flemish facial types carry the heavy characterisation of the Mdina ‘elders’, two named artists are particularly relevant. They are Zanino di Pietro Veneziano (active 1389–c. 1406), and a Veronese artist, Giovanni Badile (1379–1451), connected with Zanino’s circle early in his career. The precise identity of Zanino is unclear. The catalogue of his reported activities is typical of many artists of this ‘international’ period. It encapsulates, in fact, most of the artistic influences that will be identified within the retable: he was possibly French; he is said to have had contacts with Flemish artists, including the influential Melchior Broederlam (court painter from 1385 to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in Dijon); he probably spent a long period in Bologna before his arrival in Venice in 1405; in Venice he designed tapestries for St. Mark’s for execution by Franco-Flemish workers, and executed his only signed work, a triptych of the Crucifixion, dated 1405⁴⁰. However, closest stylistically to a bearded Mdina ‘elder’ (especially the red-bearded figure with white hood in the Disputing and in the Raising scenes) is a head of St. John the Evangelist in a panel attributed to the early years of Badile: here, unmistakably, is the peculiar sharpness of facial features of Mdina, that produces a characteristic expression of watchful intensity⁴¹. (c.f. Figs.17 and 19)

So far our investigation has traced the design of both St. Paul Enthroned and the architectural backgrounds of the lateral panels to sources current in the Veneto from the late 1360s onwards. Some types of physiognomy seen in the panels then suggested a collaboration between artists trained in several different milieux: the traditional north Italian (common to Lombardy and Bohemia); the Veneto-byzantine; and a non-Italian, Franco-Flemish tradition that is datable to c. 1400. It remains to consider how details of dress, stance, and finally interesting differences in painting technique, relate to these conclusions.

In isolation the style of dress for secular figures would be of little help in a situation where fashions—like art forms—were common to different European courts, and which, moreover, were not always perfectly ‘in step’. The French styles worn by the young companions of St. Paul in the Healing scene are a case in point:

of Florence cathedral; he won the competition for this commission in 1401; the doors are recorded as almost finished in 1417. See K. Clark and G. Robinson, *The Florence Baptistry Doors*, London, 1980, Fig. 149, Panel XIX, The Entry into Jerusalem. Ghiberti’s use of this style reflects either close contact with French artists at the Angevin court in Naples, or else direct knowledge of northern developments.

³⁹See M. Boskovits, *The Martello Collection*, op.cit. above (note 11) Cat. 43, p. 147: illuminated leaf with the Ascension of Christ and Two Prophets.

⁴⁰Now in the Museo Civico, Rieti; see (ed.) L. Magagnato, *Da Altichiero a Pisanello*, Venice, 1958, Tav. LVII. Recent scholarship suggests that Zanino should be identified with the artist Giovanni di Piero Charlier, or Giovanni di Francia, documented in Venice between 1404 and 1432, and again with Zanino Peroni, documented in Bologna between 1389 and 1406. See S. Padovani, ‘Una Nuova Proposta per Zanino di Pietro’, in *Paragone*, nos. 419-421-423, 1985, pp. 73-81; and M. Boskovits, *The Martello Collection*, op. cit. above (note 11), p. 148.

⁴¹See M. Boskovits, *The Martello Collection*, op. cit. above (note 11), p. 31, St. John the Evangelist.



Figure 19: *Giovanni Badile (attrib.): St. John the Evangelist (detail), beginning of the fifteenth century.* Private collection.

for one a belted *supertunica* just covering the knee⁴², and, for the other, just behind St. Paul, an ankle-length *houppelande*⁴³. Similar examples in dated French, Bohemian and Italian manuscripts span at least half a century from around the 1360s, and the bonnet known as a *calette* or *kalle* worn by Publius' father was popular even longer⁴⁴. Fortunately, in the Mdina scenes important clues as to dating and source are provided by certain stylistic details of hands and feet. These include the boat-shaped feet of the standing figures in the Baptism scene; also a particular arrangement for a group of walking figures, where the long shoes are placed in 'sloping' parallel rows, as in the Healing scene. (Fig.20) They reflect French compositions of the second

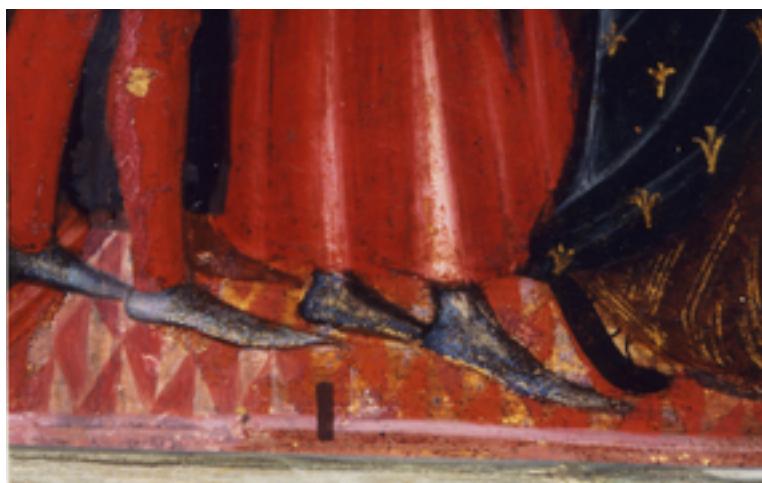


Figure 20: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, The Healing of the Father of Publius (detail).* The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

half of the fourteenth century⁴⁵, but at the same time such stylistic features, as well as identical details of

⁴²This garment tended to become shorter as the fourteenth century progressed; covering the knees, it would indicate, when worn at court, a date not later than c. 1380. In art, however, the possibility of a later imitation of a prototype, or of a provincial or *retardaire* milieu, must equally be borne in mind.

⁴³A loose wide-sleeved collarless gown. The version in the Mdina scene, where the sleeves are left ungathered at the wrist, was worn in court circles until c. 1410.

⁴⁴It was worn by men from the twelfth to the fifteenth century in all Latin countries, and could occur in the art of neighbouring regions (e.g. the Balkans), not necessarily from a prototype, but merely to indicate an elegant (i.e. 'French') lifestyle; see A. Grabar, 'Un reflet du monde latin dans une peinture balkanique du 13e siècle', in *Byzantion*, I, 1924, pp. 229-243.

⁴⁵Amongst many examples are those in the miniatures of The Coronation Book of Charles V of France (BL. MS. Cotton, Tib. B.VIII), dated 1365; see (ed.) E.S. Dewick, *The Coronation Book of Charles V of France*, London, 1899, especially Col. Plate

dress, are attested in miniatures executed in Verona and Padua during the same period. Examples include those of a recension of Petrach's *De Viris Illustribus*⁴⁶, a *Titus Livius* of c.1373⁴⁷, and others also attributed to the influential school of Altichiero, the acknowledged successor of Guariento. The long French shoes *à la poulaine*, protruding from the regal robes in the Disputing and Raising scenes, whilst reminiscent of French and Franco-Flemish examples, also appear in late fourteenth century work by Lombard artists, who in particular favoured such extremes of fashion, even for religious scenes⁴⁸ (Fig.21). Both the Lombards



Figure 21: *Lombard School: The Dispute of St. Catherine with the Philosophers(?) (detail), last decades of the fourteenth century. Piacenza, Museo Civico.*

and their Bohemian colleagues working in the border regions of the Alto Adige and South Tyrol, featured the *poulaine* in their lively scenes of courtly life-scenes that also included other figural details of the school of Altichiero. In the Alto Adige, for example, at Trent (a cycle of *The Months* in the Bishop's apartments in the Torre Aquila), and at nearby Castelroncolo, there are well-preserved examples amongst the vast programmes carried out in fresco by these artists for their wealthier patrons⁴⁹. To sum up, then, the subsidiary figures in these Mdina scenes show features of the north Italian courtly style of the late fourteenth century.

The same cannot be said of the figure of St. Paul in these panels, whose classicizing ecclesiastical garb has not been exchanged for contemporary courtly dress, as was the case for holy persons from the 1360's in the St. Sebastian panels by Semitecolo, for example (Fig.22), and in the sophisticated milieu of Verona⁵⁰. However, the ancient traditional iconography—that is to say, the depicting of all sacred figures

I, and black/white illus. 1 and 2; also those of the *Grandes Chroniques de France de Charles V* (Paris Bib. Nat., MS.fr.2813) of c. 1375-1379; and the *Pelerinages* by Guillaume de Digueville (Paris Bib. Nat., MS.fr.823), dated 1393; see *Les Fastes du Gothique*, op. cit. above (note 38), Cat. 284 and Cat. 294 respectively.

⁴⁶Darmstadt, Landesbibliothek, MS.101, illustrated in G. L. Mellini, 'Disegni di Altichiero e della sua Scuola, 1' in *Critica d'Arte*, 51, 1962, p.1 ff., Figs 14-27.

⁴⁷Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Cod. 214 inf. (Prima Deca); see, for example, R. Pallucchini, op.cit. above (note 36) figs. 702-705.

⁴⁸For instance, the late fourteenth century fresco cycle of the Life of St. Catherine, attributed to a Lombard artist, from the Church of S. Lorenzo, Piacenza (Chapel of St. Catherine), and now in the Museo Civico, Piacenza; see catalogue, ed. S. Pronti, *Il Museo Civico di Piacenza in Palazzo Farnese*, Piacenza, 1988, illus. pp. 120 and 122, and Tav. VI.

⁴⁹The frescoes in Trent were commissioned by the Bishop, and are dated c. 1400; see E. Castelnovo, *Il Ciclo dei Mesi di Torre Aquila a Trento*, Trent, 1987, especially p. 57: Maggio (second floor, south wall). For those at Castelroncolo, dated 1388-1395, and c. 1400, see M. Frei, *Castelroncolo*, Bolzano, 1984, illus. 3.

⁵⁰For Semitecolo, see Maria Prokopp, *Great Masters of the Trecento*, Budapest, 1986, No.45: Saint Sebastian Encourages Two Christians. A courtly style for saintly figures had long been part of the Veronese tradition: a fresco in the Church of S. Zeno, St. George Frees the Princess, sometimes attributed to the young Altichiero, is one notable example. St. Paul is also shown in 'cavalier' dress in miniatures by the Veronese artist Turone and his workshop: e.g. Corale MXVII and Corale MXLVIII, in the Biblioteca Capitolare, Verona; see E. Sandberg-Vavalà, 'Turone Miniaturist', in *Daedalo*, X, 1929, p. 15ff. Turone's only securely-dated work is an altarpiece of 1360, and the *corali* are considered to be dated slightly later.



Figure 22: *Nicoletto Semitecolo: St. Sebastian Encourages Two Christians (detail), 1367. Padua, Biblioteca Capitolare.*

as ecclesiastics—was still current in northern Europe during the second half of the fourteenth century, and in work of Italian artists influenced by northern contacts, including much provincial church decoration in northern Italy. The same applies to a small stylistic detail of St. Paul's drapery in the Disputing scene, which remained a northern convention for painting floor-length garments that in Italy was more commonly seen in northern regions. This is the fold at ground level which wraps the protruding foot closely, creating a 'tube' or 'funnel' motif. It is part of a long-established repertoire, referring back to Romanesque models, and more often introduced, as in the Mdina Disputing, for a full-length figure, when it was deemed necessary to show at least one foot⁵¹. (Fig.23) Not unexpectedly this motif is one of the northern features seen in a tapestry



Figure 23: *Bohemian School: St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas (detail), from the Epitaph of St. John of Jeren, 1395. Prague, National Gallery.*

design for St. Mark's, Venice, attributed to Zanino, one of the artists referred to above in connection with his Franco-Flemish figural types⁵².

⁵¹ Examples in English illumination occur in the so-called Douce Apocalypse of c. 1270: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 180, p. 66, The Angel with the Fifth Vial of Wrath; see G. Henderson, *Gothic*, Penguin Books, 1978, Fig. 45. Mid-14th century Bohemian examples include the Vyssi Brod altarpiece of c. 1350; see J. Pesina, *Mistr Vysebrodského Cyklu*, Prague, 1987, Fig. 35, The Crucifixion (the figure of St. John). In the Parisian Angers Apocalypse tapestries of 1375-1381, examples include a Scene at the Chateau, Angers; see A. Martindale, *Gothic Art*, London, 1979, Fig. 173.

⁵² See *Il gotico internazionale in Italia*, I Maestri del Colore, No. 255, Milan, 1966, Doc. 2: The Incredulity of St. Thomas. The tapestry is now in the Museo Marciano, Venice.

A final piece of evidence links the figure of St. Paul in the lateral panels to the Alto Adige. This concerns a Bohemian artist, Meister Wenzeslaus, or ‘Venclaus’, who signed a fresco cycle in the cemetery chapel adjacent to the Church of Our Lady at Riffiano, near Merano, dated 1415⁵³. The cycle, like other provincial art in the region, has figures with physiognomy close to that of Mdina. Meister ‘Venclaus’ is thought by some scholars to be the artist of the courtly cycle of *The Months* mentioned above in connection with the *poulaines*; this was commissioned by the Bishop, George of Lichtenstein, for the Torre Aquila in Trent, and is dated to c. 1400. Whether or not this particular theory is entirely convincing, it is reasonable to suppose that parts of such a vast programme were the work of a team. And it is at Trent, amongst the subsidiary decoration on the second floor of the Torre Aquila, that attention is drawn to a morphological detail that is also a salient characteristic of the Mdina figures of St. Paul: a thin wrist, and, for the right hand (the ‘speaking’ hand) exceptionally long, curved ‘squared-off’ fingers⁵⁴. (Fig.24) These small details



Figure 24: Unknown artist: wall decoration (detail), c. 1400. Trent, Torre Aquila.

help to reduce the wide field introduced by the designation ‘Lombard’ for build, stance and physiognomy of certain Mdina figures. The evidence now suggests, in effect, a date near the turn of the century, with current French fashions set in the context of the border regions of the Alto Adige.

The fact that the courtly element in northern Italy at this time was Lombard reflects in general terms the supremacy, over other northern courts, of the court centred on Milan and Pavia under Giangaleazzo Visconti, powerful patron of the arts (Fig. 25). One group of illuminated manuscripts, produced in a workshop under his patronage, not only shows figures with all the general characteristics of St. Paul’s companions in the Healing scene (Lombard heads with ‘bobbed’ hair, court dress in blues and reds) but, in the case of the manuscript now in Vienna, the particular style of the *poulaines*, which are characteristically reduced to mere wisps of red colour (e.g. fol.10v, *Nespula*, Fig.26). The group is a series of recensions of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, and was referred to earlier in this section, in that several miniatures feature the same diaper pattern that has been inserted in the architectural backgrounds of the Disputing and Healing scenes. The *Tacuinum Sanitatis* was a reference book of herbal medicine translated from the Arabic, circulating in the Lombardy and Veronese regions. All the known illuminated versions were produced in the aristocratic ambience of either Verona or Pavia between c.1380 and c.1400⁵⁵. They were illuminated by different artists,

⁵³The precise identity of ‘Venclaus’ is disputed; for references to past discussions see *L’Opera Completa di Gentile da Fabriano*, Classici dell’Arte, Milan, 1976, p.93, catalogue nos.59-62, with bibliography and with illustrations of works variously attributed in the past to Venclaus, Nicolo di Pietro, the young Pisanello, as well as to Gentile.

⁵⁴See E. Castelnuovo, op. cit. above (note 49): frontispiece (detail of frieze round west window).

⁵⁵The rich libraries of Pavia and Verona were amalgamated after 1387, when Giangaleazzo conquered Verona from the ruling Scaliger family. For the Vienna manuscript, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis, Series Nova, 2644, see (ed.) J. Spencer, *The Four Seasons of the House of Cerruti*, New York and Bicester, England, 1988. The manuscript bears the

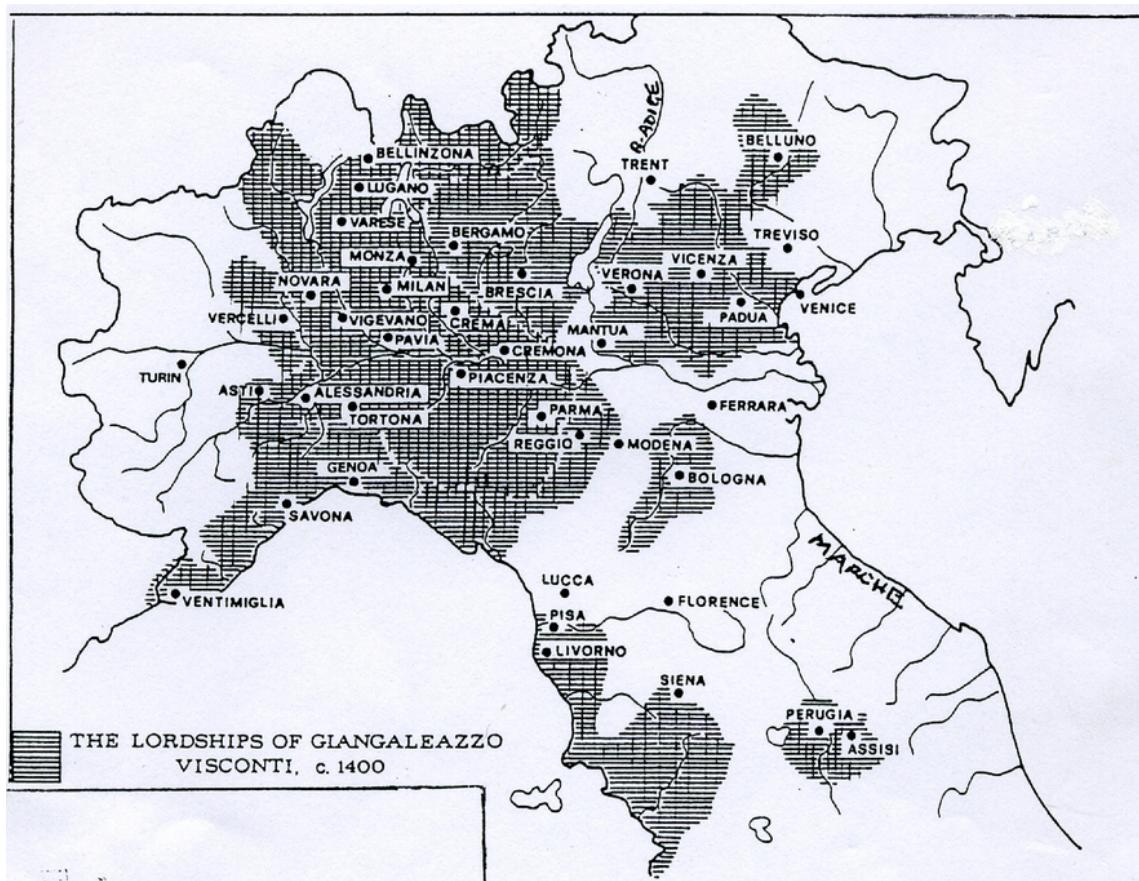


Figure 25: *The Power of the Visconti, c.1400.*



Figure 26: Workshop of Giovannino de' Grassi (attrib.): *Nespolo*, from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina* c. 1380-c.1400. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis, Series Nova, 2644, fol. 10v.

their common source probably being a pen and ink version of c. 1380, only partly coloured, and bearing the name of Giovannino de' Grassi (c. 1340 - 1398), a pre-eminent miniaturist and architect at Giangaleazzo's court, and the whole group has recently been ascribed to Giovannino's workshop.

In the light of the evidence linking Mdina figure styles to this prestigious workshop as well as to the Alto Adige, it is particularly interesting to find that precisely the Vienna *Tacuinum*, mentioned above, has been shown to have been acquired around the turn of the century by the wealthy Bishop of Trent—the same Bishop George of Lichtenstein, in fact, who during his bishopric (1390–1407) commissioned the cycle of *The Months* for his newly-converted apartments in the Torre Aquila. With this manuscript not only in Trent, but in the possession of a notable patron of the arts, the Alto Adige becomes a candidate as the source not only for northern characteristics (which were found to relate to artists such as Badile, Zanino and Wenzeslaus), but for a well-defined courtly element as well.

If specifically Venetian features seem less obvious at this point, the balance begins to be redressed when modelling is taken into account, and here again the *Tacuinum* miniatures serve as a useful comparison. In the miniatures, for instance, the modelling technique is tonal, with changes in tone following the natural shape of objects. This produces modelling reminiscent of the so-called ‘soft style’ of Bohemia, a painterly, naturalistic style, adumbrating the delicate atmospheric effects that became a hallmark of the Lombard school of illumination. Patterned objects, as well as those in plain colours, are discreetly modelled in this way⁵⁶. In the Mdina panels, on the other hand, for areas in plain colour there are two systems in operation: the Lombard modelling of the *Tacuinum* is juxtaposed with sharp Veneto-byzantine motifs on the shoulder and knee areas of the figures in blue—the Veneto-byzantine technique, in fact, of St. Paul’s blue robe in the main Mdina panel. The contrast between the two systems is particularly striking in the Raising scene. (Fig.8) The patterned areas in the panels, notably the bed-cover in the Healing scene, and the decorated copes of the prelates in the Baptism, have large gold motifs on a saturated ground and are not colour-modelled at all. They thus correspond, in turn, to the system used for St. Paul’s brocaded tunic in the main panel, that was found to belong to the less sophisticated decorative system used by Venetian followers of Paolo Veneziano.

The Veneto-byzantine technique that thus links the four lateral scenes with the main votive panel of St. Paul Enthroned is not unexpected. By the same token, the style and presentation of the furniture in these four scenes (regal thrones, ambo, and font) are as consistent with a source in the Veneto, as is the great throne of St. Paul. Although not uniquely Venetian, similar types all appear in works executed in the Veneto during the fourteenth century⁵⁷. Amongst smaller objects, the carafe on the bedside table in the Healing scene is, moreover, the classic Venetian type featured as such in the Glass Museum, Murano, and shown there with examples from paintings that include again a miniature from the Vienna *Tacuinum* owned by the Bishop of Trent⁵⁸. To sum up, our comparison with the courtly *Tacuinum* goes a long way towards

arms of Bishop George, and available evidence suggests it was completed before 1403. The various copies are fully discussed in L. Cogliato Arano, *The Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, London, 1976 (also Milan 1979).

⁵⁶ Examples in Bishop George’s copy include a table-cloth and a bed cover; see J. Spencer, op. cit. above (note 55), p. 125 (chapter heading) and p. 133 (‘Wakefulness’) respectively.

⁵⁷ The form of the regal thrones, and of the ambo, are common to the fourteenth century art of France and the Veneto. The simple throne occurs in the St. Ursula altarpiece by Paolo Veneziano (see R. Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Trecento*, op.cit. above (note 36), Fig. 42); and the ambo features in sculptures of the Life of St. Peter Martyr on the west facade of the Church of St. Anastasia, Verona, as well as in miniatures of a French work, The Coronation Book of Charles V of France, dated 1365, cited above (note 45), fol.64; illustrated in J. White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, London, 1972, Plate 51c. The design depicted on the side of the Mdina ambo appears as a motif in wall decorations of 1354–1376 in the Castelvecchio, Verona. The Mdina font is a simplified version of the font in the fresco cycle attributed to Altichiero and other artists in the Oratory of St. George, Padua, completed in 1378 (in the scene where St. George baptises the King of Cirene, on the south wall).

⁵⁸ See J. Spencer, op. cit. above (note 55), p. 63, Vinum album. The carafe continues to be featured, not only in Italy (for example by Bartolomeo di Giovanni, active 1485-1510, in A Legend of St. Andrew, illustrated in the foreign catalogue of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, *Plates*, p.10), but in distant regions where Venetian influence on church decoration persisted: in Cyprus, for instance, in a fresco depicting the Hospitality of Abraham in the sanctuary of the Church of the Panagia Theotokos, Kakopetria, dated 1520; see A. and I. A. Stylianou, op. cit. above (note 12), Fig. 32.

unravelling and evaluating certain stylistic components of the lateral panels: the Veneto-byzantine element is startlingly inconsistent, but small; at least one artist of the Mdina team had an intimate knowledge of the court styles attributed to the Giovannino workshop; and the combination of the ultra-fashionable placed in an otherwise traditional religious context is typical of Lombard art towards the end of the fourteenth century.

III *Decorative Motifs*

Decorative details throughout the main and lateral panels are divided between the Italian, from the Veneto, Emilia and the Marches, and the Franco-Flemish. It is a division that reflects, in fact, the various figural elements already identified.

A Franco-Flemish element was indicated by the swarthy figures of the Disputing and the Raising scenes, and Franco-Flemish illuminations provide parallels for several decorative details datable to the very early years of the fifteenth century. The canopy of the Imperial throne in the Disputing scene has a fringe, arranged in separated ‘tufts’ along its upper edge (the corresponding area in the Raising scene is considerably abraded, but the two canopies may well have matched originally). Canopies fringed in just the same manner are found in work of the Westphalian artist, Conrad de Soest, dated 1404⁵⁹, and in miniatures by Franco-Flemish artists of around 1400 or soon after. These include Johannes, important in English book production⁶⁰; Paul Malouel (Maelweel), one of the Paris-educated Limburg brothers, who worked for Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, at Dijon⁶¹; and the so-called ‘Boucicaut Master’, of unknown identity, but considered to be of Flemish origin. A *Tite Live* illuminated by the Boucicaut Master, and completed in Paris during the Maréchal Boucicaut’s term of office as governor of Genoa (1401–1410), includes a fringed throne canopy whose side hangings are decorated with scattered sprigs of foliage similar to those decorating the mantle of St. Paul in the central Mdina panel⁶². There are also brocade designs in two of the lateral scenes with characteristically Flemish motifs (set amongst large-leaved foliage that is datable to the same period): the phoenix of the rear curtain in the Healing, and the dragon of the imperial robe in the Raising scene. Parallels to both these are found in the miniatures of the *Livre de Chasse* of Gaston Phebus of c. 1407⁶³ (Figs.27 and 28), from a Paris workshop, and stylistically close to the Flemish Jacquemart de Hesdin, who worked for the Duc de Berry, brother of Philip the Bold, from c.1380. A similar phoenix motif also appears later in a section of the *Très-Belles Heures de Notre Dame*⁶⁴, commissioned by the Duke and completed prior to 1417. Also, in all the lateral panels, the mantle of St. Paul is scattered with motifs in gold of summary fleurs-de-lys. These do not necessarily have any heraldic significance. Studies have shown that they sometimes served as a convenient ‘status symbol’ used to distinguish the important figure of a group. I have found them used in this way in a religious context in provincial Flemish art⁶⁵.

⁵⁹In the left wing of his Wildungen altarpiece (the Annunciation scene); see F. Deuchler, *Gothic*, London, 1989, Fig. 199.

⁶⁰For example, the frontispiece to *Li Romans du Boin Roi Alexandre*, attributed to Johannes and an assistant, and dated to the opening years of the 15th century: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 264, fol. 2v; see R. Marks and N. Morgan, *The Golden Age of English Manuscript Painting, 1200-1500*, London, 1981, Plate 35. This folio was executed in England.

⁶¹Two of the brothers, Paul (Pol) and John (Jehanequin), were in the service of Philip the Bold at Dijon from 1402, before becoming established at the nearby court of Philip’s brother Jean, Duc de Berry. A fringed canopy appears in a miniature by John Malouel in the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, now in the Musée Condé, Chantilly; the manuscript was left unfinished in 1416; see E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op.cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig. 88 (the Calendar: January).

⁶²This edition of the *Tite Live* is now in Paris: Bib. Nat., MS.fr. 259; see E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op.cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig. 79: The Coronation of Hannibal as Emperor of Carthage (fol. 253).

⁶³Now in Paris: Bib. Nat., MS.fr. 616; illustrated in G. Bise, *The Hunting Book by Gaston Phoebus*, trans. J. Peter Tallon, Fribourg-Geneva, 1978-1984, p.14 (phoenix). and p.40 dragon).

⁶⁴Formerly in Turin, Royal Library (destroyed by fire); see E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op. cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig. 294: The Virgin Amongst Virgins (the motif appears in the upper border of acanthus rinceaux - the only case of substitution for the original borders executed for the Duc de Berry).

⁶⁵For example, in the Musée Municipale at Bastogne (Bastenaken), in present-day Belgium. A looser, more plant-like motif does occur once in the copy of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* that belonged to the Bishop of Trent; see J. Spencer, op. cit. above (note



Figure 27: *Franco-Flemish School: Prologue (detail), from the Livre de Chasse of Gaston Phebus, c. 1407. Paris, Bib. Nat., MS.fr. 616.*



Figure 28: *Franco-Flemish School: Training the Huntsmen (detail), from the Livre de Chasse of Gaston Phebus, c. 1407. Paris, Bib. Nat., MS.fr. 616.*

Common to the main and the lateral panels is the geometric pattern used for the podium, and for the floors of each interior. This is a version of a chequered design in which the squares are divided to form triangles of alternating colour. The Mdina version, where the triangles are set ‘on end’ in vertical strips, is unusual in Italy, but it does appear around 1400 for ceilings: in Lombard frescoes in the border regions of the Alto Adige, and in embroidered panels executed for Bishop George of Trent (which are listed in his inventory as French) (Fig.29); and in a recension of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* now in Paris⁶⁶. Also, the lack



Figure 29: French School: embroidered panel, *Scenes of the Life of St. Virgil (detail)*, c. 1390-1407. Trent, Museo Diocesano.

of any diminution in size in the Mdina pattern as it ‘recedes’ is consistent with most north European work until well into the fifteenth century, and examples as a floor pattern identical with the Mdina version come in miniatures by Flemish artists, including Jacquemart de Hesdin, and a little later, sometimes with slight diminution in size, by the Master of Gilbert of Metz and the Master of Jean Mansel⁶⁷.

Finally, an unusual feature of the throne of St. Paul appears also to derive from Flemish sources, namely the tall vertical shafts at extreme left and right, with regularly-spaced, paired projections on their outer edges. These represent, in outline, the architectural framework that is typical of Flemish illumination of this period, as a surround for sacred figures. Clear examples, with three-dimensional mouldings and cornices in positions corresponding to the Mdina silhouette, can be seen in miniatures attributed to Herman Scheerre, an artist now identified with the ‘Herman of Cologne’ who worked as an assistant to Malouel at the Dijon court, from 1401–1403; also in miniatures by his Flemish collaborator, known as the Master of the Beaufort Saints⁶⁸. (Fig.30)

The upper section of the panel of St. Paul Enthroned, that lies above the Flemish type of architectural shafting just mentioned, combines motifs used by Flemish and by Veneto artists. For instance, the acorns seen in the design of the gold background are not common in Italy as a decorative motif, and have patterning on the cup section that points to Franco-Flemish work, such as the so-called Mérode cup (Fig.31). A cup

55), p. 80, *Livistichum* (mountain celery). This, however, is a secular context, and the subject requires further investigation.

⁶⁶Frescoes include those at Bressanone, in the cathedral cloisters: for example, Arcade XI, dated 1400-1410, The Emperor Charlemagne. The embroidered panels, now in the Museo Diocesano, Trent, depict scenes of the Life of S. Vigilio. For the Paris recension of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, (Paris Bib. Nat. Nouv. Acq. lat. 1673), see E. Pirani, *Gothic Illustrated Manuscripts*, London, 1970, Plate 39, The Tailor’s Shop.

⁶⁷For Jacquemart de Hesdin, see the *Très-Belles Heures de Jehan de France, duc de Berry* (‘The Brussels Hours’), Brussels, Bib. Royal, MS. 11060/61, second dedication page; illustrated in E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op. cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig. 41. Regarding the Master of Gilbert of Metz see E. Panofsky, loc. cit., Vol. One, *Text*, p. 121 and note 9. The Mdina floor pattern is used in an illuminated Decameron of Boccaccio, Paris, Bib. de l’Arsenal, MS. 5070; illustrated in E. Pognon, *Boccaccio’s Decameron*, trans. J. Peter Tallon, Fribourg-Geneva, 1978: e.g. Day IV–8, Neiphile by the Master of Jean Mansel (p. 53), and Day IV–9, Philostrato by the Master of Gilbert of Metz (p. 54).

⁶⁸Both artists use the architectural framework in the miniatures of the Beaufort/Beauchamp Hours, London, BL. MS. Royal 2 A., XVIII; see R. Marks and N. Morgan, op. cit. above (note 60), Plate 31: Saint John of Bridlington (fol. 7v.) by the Master of the Beaufort Saints; and Plate 32: The Annunciation (fol. 23v.) attributed to Herman Scheerre.



Figure 30: *Master of the Beaufort Saints: St. John of Bridlington*, from the *Beaufort / Beauchamp Hours*, first decade of the fifteenth century. London, British Library, Ms. Royal 2 A.XVIII, fol. 7v.



Figure 31: *French School: The Mérode Cup (detail)*, early fifteenth century. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

similarly decorated appears in the inventory of Jean Duc de Berry in 1417⁶⁹. The leafy arabesques recall those found in the Calendar illustrations of another Flemish work, the Hours of John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, of 1406–15⁷⁰. At the same time, similar fleshy foliage does also occur in the Veneto around 1400, and Guariento is one of several artists who provide parallels for the characteristic strings of ‘seedlings’ that emerge in curvilinear fashion from open tulip-like flowers amongst the Mdina foliage⁷¹.

Before proceeding to discuss further decorative features – those that come uniquely from the Veneto region – it is useful to recall the names of Semitecolo, Giusto de’ Menabuoi and Altichiero, all of whom have already been mentioned, particularly with reference to the lateral panels. They belong to the generation after Guariento (who gave the source for the throne of St. Paul), and they all worked in the Veneto. Zanino and Badile, whom we linked with the Mdina lateral panels because of their use of a similar Franco-Flemish physiognomy, also worked there and are included in this group. Others will be identified, and are documented in Emilia and the Marches as well as in the Veneto and Venice itself, and I shall refer to them occasionally in abbreviated form as the ‘Veneto group’.

To return to the upper section of St. Paul’s throne, the complete assembly of red pinnacles, large crockets, and finial can be ascribed to prototypes in the Veneto, Emilia and the Marches. It is a design, also, that has exact parallels in the monumental sculpture of Bologna of the second half of the fourteenth century, and the close interdependence of Bolognese and Venetian sculpture during this period is well documented⁷². The crockets, taken in isolation, also feature in contemporary sculpture and in painting in various other centres of Emilia and the Marches, as well as the Veneto, being composed of acanthus leaves with a stubby, twisted outline that is characteristic of this region. In one such case, a Trinity panel in Ferrara by the Master GZ, the stern, aulic frontality of the figure of God-the-Father, and traces of prong-like Veneto-byzantine highlights in the drapery, are additional features that suggest an *ambiente* similar to that of the Mdina St. Paul Enthroned. This artist is considered, in fact, to be either Veronese or Paduan, in the circle of Guariento’s successor Altichiero, and this work has been dated to c. 1380⁷³. (Fig.32) At this point it is worth noting that the method of depicting the marble seat of the throne comes again from the same *ambiente*. At this time there were several conventions in painting for simulating marble: by packing the surface closely with broad circular shapes; by covering it with painterly streaks of colour; or as it appears here: small diamond

⁶⁹This covered beaker of the early fifteenth century was originally owned by the ancient Belgian family of Mérode, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; see (ed.) P. Williamson, *The Medieval Treasury*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986, illus. p.229 (detail), and text p. 228.

⁷⁰Paris, Bib. Nat., MS.lat.nouv. acq. 3055; see J. Harthan, *Books of Hours and their Owners*, London, 1978, no. 98, St. Andrew (fol. 172v.) and no. 99, Pentecost (fol. 28v.).

⁷¹For the foliage, *alla mano libera*, see a Venetian *Portolano* (sea chart), in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 390, illustrated in catalogue: *Italian Illuminated Manuscripts from 1400 to 1500*, Oxford, 1948, Plate I. For the tulip-like flowers with ‘seedlings’, examples include Guariento’s Virgin and Child of c.1338–45, now in the Museo Civico, Padua; see B. Klesse, *Seidenstoffe in der italienscher Malerei des 14 Jahrhunderts*, Bern, 1967, Kat. Nr. 161. Also in the region, are examples by Stefano da Zevio (Stefano da Verona) in his Adoration of the Magi dated 1435, now in the Pinacoteca Brera, Milan (the Virgin’s mantle), illustrated in S. Macioce, ‘Il gotico internazionale’, *Art e Dossier*, No. 34, Rome-Milan, April 1989; by the much-travelled Taddeo di Bartolo (documented 1386–1422), in a Virgin Lactans dated 1395, now in the Hungarian National Gallery, Inv. No. 53,500 (decoration of predella frame); and in ceiling decoration of the fifteenth century in Ferrara (Via Palestro, 70).

⁷²See R. Grandi, ‘La scultura tardogotica. Dai Masegne a Jacopo della Quercia’, in catalogue (ed.) R. Diamico and R. Grandi, *Il tramonto del Medioevo a Bologna. Il Cantiere di San Petronio*, Bologna, 1987, p. 127 ff., with reference to further studies. Amongst the memorial tombs of eminent doctors of Bologna, that of Bartolomeo da Vernazza (died 1348), in red Veronese marble, has crockets similar to those of the Mdina throne of St. Paul. The tomb is from the Church of St. Peter, Bologna, and now in the Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna.

⁷³The panel is now in the Pinacoteca, Ferrara; see C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), illus. 66 and illus. (in colour) p. 331. The Master GZ was referred to above (note 22) in connection with a Ferrarese fresco showing exterior domes above an interior scene. Other works featuring the Mdina crockets are: the Trinity, a polyptic of 1360 by the Lombard artist Turone, a work now in the Museo, Castelvecchio, Verona, best illustrated in (ed.) R. Chiarelli and L. Magnato, *Castelvecchio e le Arche Scaligere*, Florence, 1969, Fig. 22 (detail: central panel); also a fresco fragment of a Virgin and Child Enthroned from the Convent of San Francesco, Cesena, by the Master of Castrocaro, of the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th century, now in the Pinacoteca Comunale, Cesena (inv. n.226); illustrated in the catalogue of the Pinacoteca, Cesena, 1984 n.2.

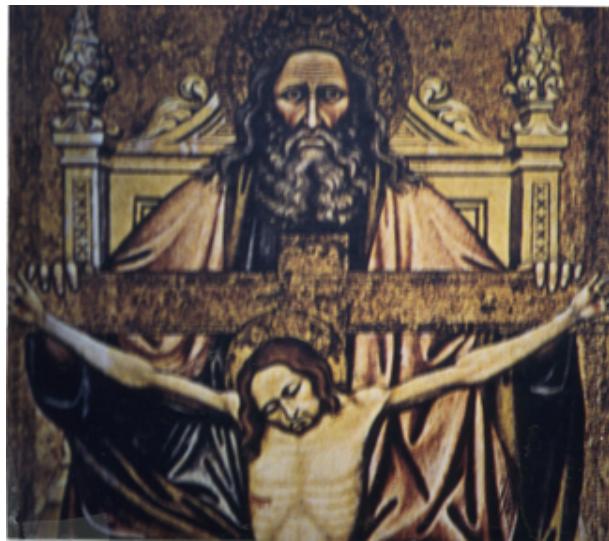


Figure 32: *The Master GZ: The Trinity (detail)*, c. 1380. Ferrara, Pinacoteca.

and triangular patches of colour set within a network of spidery diagonals. This pattern appears in byzantine painting⁷⁴, and is not common in Italy, but has a parallel in Semitecolo's Padua panel of *St. Sebastian Encourages Two Christians*, dated 1367 (Fig.22), and (with more regular reticulation) in miniatures from Ferrara now considered to belong to the last years of the fourteenth century and attributed to the Master of the Battuti Neri⁷⁵.

A series of precise copies of Italian motifs is also to be seen in the four lateral scenes, where some of the striking gold decoration is recognisably different from the Franco-Flemish types identified above on canopies, curtains and regal robes. The artist does not use naturalistic foliage forms, either in loosely scattered sprays on clothing, or densely packed for overall brocade effects. Instead, motifs on clothing (for example, the prelates' copes in the Baptism) are more abstract, and include stylised rosettes and the form known as 'pineapple'; they are also placed in a regular pattern. The overall design of the bed cover (in the Healing scene) uses the same motifs, again in an ordered arrangement. These decorative features are unquestionably of Italian origin. They are not unknown outside Italy, but in such cases usually lack the tiny 'commas' that form part of each separate motif in the Mdina panels, and which seem to have appeared in Italy from the late 1360s. As it happens, the detailed analysis of Italian designs made by B. Klesse⁷⁶ enables the Mdina versions to be traced not only to Italy, but to specific artists. These artists all belong, moreover, to the 'Veneto group'. For instance, there are two types of pineapple pattern in the lateral panels: in one the pear-shaped centre section is reticulated, as in the Healing panel (the bedcover, Fig.7); and in the other it is plain, as in the Baptism panel (the cope of Ananias, Fig.33). Both types, equally surrounded by 'commas', are used by Semitecolo in his panel *St. Sebastian Encourages Two Christians* (Fig.22), already mentioned for his depiction of marble—a convention also used in the Mdina panels. Other artists of the 'Veneto group' who use the reticulated version include Semitecolo's collaborator in Venice, Stefano Veneziano (*plebanus di Sant' Agnese*), who was also active in Friuli and Padua, as well as Ferrara; Marco Catarino, who worked with Stefano; and Simone dei Crocifissi (documented 1355 - c.1399), a Bolognese connected with Guariento in Venice (Figs.34 and 35). The plain version is used in the Vienna *Tacuinum*, and by the Modenese artist

⁷⁴For example, the marble columns in the fresco of The Dormition of the Virgin, dated c.1265 at Sopocani, Yugoslavia; see D. Tasic, *Byzantine Painting in Serbia and Macedonia*, Belgrade, 1967, Fig. 23.

⁷⁵The marble design by Semitecolo is best illustrated in M. Prokopp, op.cit. above (note 50), No. 45: *St. Sebastian Encourages Two Christians* (the table leg in the right alcove). For the Master of the Battuti Neri, see miniatures of the *Libro della Confraternita dei Battuti Neri di Ferrara*, now in Venice, Coll. Vittorio Cini; illustrated in C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), Fig. 132: Resurrection of Christ.

⁷⁶B. Klesse, op. cit. above (note 71).



Figure 33: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, lateral panel, The Baptism of St. Paul (detail).* The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 34: Stefano Veneziano: *Virgin Enthroned with Saints*, s/d 1385, Venice, San Zaccaria; Caterino Veneziano: *Coronation of the Virgin with Angels*, s/d 1375, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia; Simone dei Crocifissi: *Coronation of the Virgin*, s/d 1382, Bologna, Santa Maria Incoronata. From B. Klesse, op.cit. above (note 71), Kat. Nr. 171.

Figure 35: Caterino Veneziano: *Madonna of Humility*, c. 1380. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery. From B. Klesse, op.cit. above (note 71), Kat. Nr. 172.

Figure 36: Serafino Serafini: *Coronation of the Virgin*, s/d 1384, Modena cathedral. From B. Klesse, op.cit. above (note 71), Kat. Nr. 173.

Serafino Serafini (c.1324–c.1393) (Fig. 36).⁷⁷

Other features of gold decoration, relating to both technique and design, again point to work of the ‘Veneto group’. One concerns the gold striations used to heighten the tunic of St. Paul in the panels. These are not linked at intervals with ornamental cross-bands, like many ‘byzantinising’ striations in this region of Italy, but fill an allotted area with plain rays from a single bar, or from a single point, like those of Stefano Veneziano, Marco Catarino, and Donato (a collaborator of Marco Catarino in the Marches as well as in Venice). Also, the curvilinear form of the gold striations that fill the lower drapery of St. Paul in the Healing scene, and that are more freely drawn than is usual, are a particular characteristic of work by the latter two artists.⁷⁸

Finally, there is one feature common to all four scenes, and repeated in the predella and the three upper panels with arched tops. This is the design of the halos, an arrangement of quatrefoils on a stippled ground. Its use in isolation would be of little use as evidence, because it appears widely in Italy. However, it does occur in works by Simone dei Crocifissi of the Veneto group, and by other Bolognese artists of the same period, and so represents a link of all these subsidiary panels with Emilia. An Emilian source has already been identified in the main panel, with reference to the red pinnacles, crockets and finials. Emilian sources, therefore, emerge as a minor unifying feature in a retable whose style we can now summarise as follows: basically north Italian in conception, carried out by a team of north Italian-trained artists (both traditional north-Italian and courtly), working alongside others who followed Franco-Flemish models.

IV *The Upper Register*

The same elements can readily be identified in the rest of the retable, and we may begin with the panel of the Virgin and Child which, with the predella panels, is ‘traditional Veneto’. In one respect, the style of the two central figures, the composition is *retardaire*. That is to say, the underlying iconography of the Virgin and Child reflects back to a tradition of the mid-fourteenth century that survives in Verona churches in frescoes attributed to the so-called ‘Second Master of San Zeno’. The Virgin’s unbending stance and general lack of affectivity, the scroll held by the Child, and the position of His slightly splayed-out legs, are all part of this older tradition.⁷⁹ Quite within the limits of this basic formula, the drapery of the Virgin’s voluminous mantle provides an immediate link with the main panel, in that its stylised byzantine modelling, wide arabesques accentuated by a heavy gold border, and scattering of Franco-Flemish motifs, all mirror that of St. Paul. There are reflections in the sweep of this drapery of the most illustrious of all the artists working in Venice around the turn of the century: Gentile da Fabriano (c.1370–1427)⁸⁰. Recent scholarship has suggested, in fact, that Gentile, while engaged on the second stage of the decoration of the Sala del Maggior Consilio, had members of the ‘Veneto group’ working with him.⁸¹ There are other features of this panel clearly associated with the group: the Lombard physiognomy of both Virgin and Child is seen in female heads by artists of the circle of Altichiero, and by Veronese artists of the following generation, including Stefano da Verona (c.1375–1451), who also occasionally imprinted facial features with the peculiarly circumspect

⁷⁷See B. Klesse, op. cit. above (note 71): e.g. Kat. Nr.171.i (Stefano Veneziano), Kat. Nr.172 (Catarino), Kat. Nr.171b (Simone) and Kat. Nr.173 (Serafino). For the Vienna *Tacuinum* see *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis, Series Nova*, 2644, fol. 104v. (tablecloth).

⁷⁸For example, see R. Pallucchini, op. cit. above (note 36), Fig.603 and Tav. XXVII, The Coronation of the Virgin, dated 1372, now in the Palazzo Querino Stampalia, Venice (the lower folds of Christ’s gown).

⁷⁹See E. Sandberg-Vavalà, *La Pittura Veronese del Trecento e del primo Quattrocento*, Verona, 1926, especially Chapter IV, where all these features are illustrated.

⁸⁰Comparisons can be drawn from the following early works: The Valle Romita polyptic, now in the Brera Gallery, Milan; and the Virgin and Child with Two Angels, now in the Philbrook Art Centre, Tulsa (Oklahoma); see *L’Opera Completa di Gentile da Fabriano*, op.cit. above (note 53), Tav. III and Tav. XIV respectively.

⁸¹Artists of the ‘Veneto group’ possibly working with Gentile on the Sala paintings include Jacobello del Fiore, Michelino da’ Besozzo and Zanino; see P. Fortini Brown, op. cit. above (note 34), p. 246, note 41. Gentile was the recipient of high honours by the Venetian Senate by 1408, and remained in Venice until 1414.

expression that characterises the Mdina Virgin, as well as female figures elsewhere in the retable. Again, the fact that the crowned Virgin wears no veil, or other vestige of the byzantine maphorion, usually indicates a northern artist, and this type was favoured increasingly in north Italy by the turn of the century: Michelino da Besozzo, of the ‘Veneto group’ (active Pavia and Milan 1388–1415), a prestigious Lombard court artist documented with Gentile just after 1400, is a case in point. Finally, angel musicians accompanying a Virgin *Assunta* were not a novelty by this time, and Guariento and artists of the ‘Veneto group’, Stefano Veneziano and Jacobello del Fiore, all include angels playing the same versions of the shawn, portative organ, viol and lute. These instruments also appear in the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* ascribed to the workshop of Giovanino de’ Grassi – our important source for the courtly companions of St. Paul in the Healing scene.

The two other upper panels with arched tops, the Road to Damascus and the Miracle of the Viper (Figs. 37 and 38), also feature the courtly figures of this same *Tacuinum*. In the Road to Damascus, in fact,



Figure 37: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Road to Damascus. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.*
© The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

St. Paul is accompanied across country by a cavalcade, and watched by a passing countryman, all familiar from *Tacuinum* scenes of the courtly country life of the Padana. The inclusion of a black servant, seen here against the neck of the brown horse, emphasises the grandeur of courtly life, and is not rare (for instance in scenes of the Three Magi): artists of the ‘Veneto group’ from Altichiero onwards furnish several examples⁸². The fact that the Limburg brothers, in an illumination in the Très Riches Heures of the Duc de Berry, show a black servant in the same contrapposto attitude, may indicate a common model⁸³. (c.f. Figs.37 and 39)

⁸²For example, Altichiero, in the Beheading of St. George, a scene in the cycle of frescoes by Altichiero and other artists in the Oratory of St. George, Padua, of c.1377–84. (This particular scene is attributed to Altichiero himself.) A black servant is also included by Jacobello del Fiore (alluded to above, note 17) in his Adoration of the Magi, now in the National Museum Stockholm; illustrated in *Il Gotico Internazionale in Italia*, op.cit. above (note 52), Doc.4.

⁸³Fol.51v; now in the Musée Condé, Chantilly, France; illustrated in *Les Tres Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, trans. D. Macrae, Musée Condé, n.d. The scene is the meeting of the Three Magi at the crossroads near Golgotha—a scene unknown before the very end of the 14th century; see E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op.cit. above (note 26), vol. One, *Text*, p.64 and note 4. It should be noted here that constant traffic between one centre of patronage and another—in this case between the Limburgs in Dijon and the Visconti workshops—has sometimes led to disagreement as to the place of origin of an image.



Figure 38: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Miracle of the Viper*. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.
© The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.



Figure 39: *The Limburg Brothers: The Meeting of the Three Magi* (detail), from *Les Très Riches Heures of the Duc de Berry*, c. 1411- c. 1416. Chantilly, Musée Condé.

In the Viper panel St. Paul's low forward lunge is again the trademark *par excellence* of *tacuinum* men and women as they engage in their different country pursuits⁸⁴ (Fig.26); on the other hand his stance may come from an ancient prototype⁸⁵. The secular costumes, like those in the Healing panel, have parallels in miniatures attributed to Altichiero and his circle⁸⁶, being French styles common to northern courts: Publius in the Viper scene, for instance, is a mirror-image of a sculpture of Casimir the Great (1370–1380) now in the Gothic Museum, Cracow. (Fig.40) Again, a Veneto-byzantine element is indicated by some barely



Figure 40: *Casimir III 'The Great'*, sculpture dated c. 1370-80. Cracow, Gothic Museum.

detectable byzantine modelling (notably for the standing figure on the extreme left of the Viper scene), and by the pinched physiognomy of St. Paul, with oversized cranium, associated with the 'byzantinising' art of the region of the Veneto.

The artist responsible for the rural backgrounds of these two scenes, on the other hand, has followed a well-attested Franco-Flemish design: a traditional arrangement found in fact in all the Franco-Flemish miniatures we have already cited as sources for Franco-Flemish features elsewhere in the retable (fringed canopies, decorative sprigs and phoenix and dragon motifs). It is a landscape in which trees of various types are always inserted without regard to their natural size, and are smaller within the lower zone so as not to obscure the action of the figures placed on the first 'ledge', where the action takes place. The key to the specific source of the Mdina design lies in the particular form of the clumps of trees: bearing yellow and orange fruit, these trees are tightly bunched together with their slender trunks curving in parallel. Such clumps feature in miniatures executed for Giangaleazzo Visconti (d.1402) and attributed to artists of the 'Veneto

⁸⁴For many examples of the forward-thrusting stance in the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* of Bishop George see (ed.) J. Spencer, op.cit. above (note 55).

⁸⁵One such prototype stylistically close to the St. Paul figure in the Viper scene would have been a scene in the fresco cycle of the Lives of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Church of S. Paolo fuori le Mura, Rome, of c.1278-9. In many cases these frescos were a repainting of an earlier fifth century cycle; they were destroyed by fire in 1823, but are known from seventeenth century copies; see S. Waetzoldt, *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Wandmalereien in Rom*, Rome, 1964, Fig. 406. A later example, but less close stylistically to the Mdina version, is the fresco fragment in Canterbury Cathedral (St. Anselm's Chapel, north wall) of c. 1150–1175; see J. Azzopardi, 'St. Paul's Malta Shipwreck in Art', in (ed.) J. Azzopardi, *St.Paul's Grotto, Church and Museum at Rabat, Malta*, Malta, 1990, p.481; see also O. Demus, *Romanesque Mural Painting*, London, 1970, p.509 and Plate p. 121.

⁸⁶For example, the Darmstadt *De Viris Illustribus* (see above note 46), and a Paduan Bible of c.1400: Rovigo, Accademia dei Concordi, MS.212, illustrated in Pallucchini, op.cit. above (note 36) Fig.470. For an example of the round hat of Publius being worn by a French dignitary, see the sculpture of Jean Bureau de la Rivière on the exterior of Amiens cathedral (north tower) of the end of the fourteenth century; illustrated in (ed.) R. Huyghe, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine Medieval Art*, London, 1974, illus.832.

group', Michelino da Besozzo and Giovannino de' Grassi, and, a little later, to Belbello da Pavia (Fig.41). With features in the other narrative panels so clearly traceable to the Visconti workshops, this comes as



Figure 41: *Belbello da Pavia, The Creation of Eve (detail), from the Visconti Hours, (second stage), c. 1428. Florence, Bib. Naz. Ms. LF.22, fol. 46v.*

no surprise. The ultimate source for the style lies in illuminations attributed to the so-called 'Maître aux Boquetaux' (lit. 'little clumps'), for example, The Hours of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, of c.1370. He worked in the influential Paris workshop of Jean Bondol (John of Bruges, active Paris 1367–c.1381). It was Bondol's interest in creating naturalistic three-dimensional landscape that produced the arrangement of step-like ledges to give depth, punctuated by trees in little clumps that often resembled overgrown mushrooms or umbrellas. A series of prestigious manuscripts flowed from this workshop, commissioned by all the wealthy patrons of the day, and the landscape style was widely imitated.

These backgrounds later underwent a striking transformation: sweeping changes that brought the landscapes right into line with the latest theories being worked out first in Dijon and then in Venice just after the turn of the century⁸⁷. (Figs.42 and 43) The extensive overpainting was removed recently when the panels were cleaned, but the photographic record provides ample evidence of these innovations, pointing unmistakably in fact to the influence of Gentile da Fabriano, who was working in Venice until 1414. It is worth pointing out the most significant changes.

The earliest exponents of these important developments were Flemish, and a *terminus post quem* of c.1394 for the overpainted Mdina landscapes is provided by panel paintings by Melchior Broederlam of Ypres, a contemporary at the Dijon court of Claus Sluter⁸⁸, a sculptor already linked stylistically to the retable in connection with the robust 'elders' of the lateral scenes. In the interests of recession the Mdina artist, like Broederlam, used an oblique perspective for buildings when these were shown isolated in a landscape. Also, the artist inserting a city in the Viper panel took the ancient polygonal format, in 'bird's

⁸⁷Whether the changes were made by order of the patron who originally commissioned the retable, or later at the suggestion of a new owner, need not concern us here; narrative paintings not infrequently had features of landscape inserted at various times after their initial execution.

⁸⁸Broederlam's panels decorate the external wings of a celebrated carved altarpiece, paid for in 1394 and installed at the Chartreuse de Champmol in 1399, and now in the Musée de Beaux Arts, Dijon. See especially the Annunciation and Visitation, also the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and Flight into Egypt, illustrated in E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, op. cit. above (note 26), Vol. Two, *Plates*, Fig.104 and Fig.105. For Claus Sluter, and the spread of a new Franco-Flemish figure style, see above (Section II and note 38).



Figure 42: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Road to Damascus: overpainting (detail).* Mdina, Malta, Cathedral Museum.



Figure 43: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Miracle of the Viper: overpainting (detail).* Mdina, Malta, Cathedral Museum.

'eye view', masking the furthest walls with the city's interior buildings, and showing the forward sections of wall in elevation. Studies on this subject have shown that by 1430, after a relatively short experimental period, this particular perspective for a distant city seems to have disappeared from all the more important centres of the West⁸⁹.

Broederlam's contemporary Gentile da Fabriano was amongst the Italian artists who took up the same system for landscapes. His contacts with a court painter to the Duke of Burgundy during the opening years of the fifteenth century, as well as with members of the 'Veneto group', are documented. Though few paintings from Gentile's early period in Venice and in Brescia have survived, the landscapes in his altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi of 1423 have many details that are repeated in the overpainted Viper panel: for example, the centre panel of Gentile's predella has similar naturalistic mountains (steep, with flattened tops and colour differentiation, and soft modelling), as well as a city with rectangular towers, and, within its walls, blue-domed buildings⁹⁰. Here again, his country house with gabled roof and arched doorway, just outside the city walls, was repeated in this scene, behind the figure on the extreme left of the panel. Similar architecture is also seen in more ornate versions by the Limburg brothers, two of whom were employed at the Dijon court from 1402. Most important of all, although a few 'boquetaux' were still discernible, the land mass as a whole became a series of shallow overlapping curves in carefully varied shades of green, giving the impression of vast gently undulating meadowlands. Trees and mountains, placed in opposition at the margins of the Viper scene served as 'coulisses' for the central, more distant view, and buildings and distant figures were shown in appropriate sizes along a series of winding pathways. Gone were the tiny foreground trees, to be replaced by a scattering of small plants reminiscent of the flowered meadows beloved of Gentile.

It is worth noting that the device of placing small figures along winding pathways that became standard practice in this new organisation of landscape, sometimes merely involved a few touches of red sinopia, as in the repainted panels. Red sinopia was used, for example, by Antonello da Messina, who acquired Flemish techniques before his visit to Venice in 1475, and in his case through contacts with Flemish artists at the Angevin court in Naples⁹¹. The same device appears as one of the hallmarks of the Italianate landscapes that came to be inserted as background in paintings in Crete, and in Cyprus, while these islands were under Italian influence⁹².

The developing realism did not extend to the sky, which remained gold, as in all Gentile's early works, and the hovering figure of Christ kept the red hair and facial features that merely repeat those of St. Paul's companions below (Fig.42). On the other hand, He emerges from a swathe of convoluted clouds, beneath a carefully delineated segment of the 'dome of Heaven' with its golden rays. The clouds are of particular interest, because they mark a transition in style: their basic formation harks back to stylised Romanesque models seen all over northern Europe and Northern Italy (the Alto Adige, for example)⁹³, but their execution

⁸⁹For a wider treatment of the representation of cities, see A. Cutler, 'Forma Urbis', in *Transfigurations; Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography*, Pennsylvania State University, 1975, p. 122ff.

⁹⁰See *L'Opera Completa di Gentile da Fabriano*, op. cit. above (note 53), Tav. XXXVI–XXXVII and Tav. XXXVIII, The Flight into Egypt.

⁹¹For example, in his Crucifixion, signed and dated 147-(sic), now in the National Gallery, London; see M. Lucco (ed.), *Antonello da Messina, L'Opera Completa*, Milan, 2006, pp. 184–5, where the precise date is fully discussed.

⁹²For example, a Cretan icon of Christ and the Samaritan Woman of 1475–1480, now in Athens, Byzantine Museum, T. 737; see exhibition catalogue, *From Byzantium to El Greco, Greek Frescoes and Icons*, London, Royal Academy, 1987, Plate 50, and text by N. Chatzidakis, p. 181–182, with bibliography. This landscape also includes, not far from the city walls of Samaria, the small house of Gentile's Flight into Egypt. In Cyprus examples are found in frescoes attributed to the Italo-byzantine school, dated c. 1500, in the so-called 'Latin Chapel' of the Monastery of St. John Lampadistis, Kalopanayiotis; see A. and J. A. Stylianou, op. cit. above (note 12), especially Fig. 88, Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, and Fig. 189, Moses and the Vision of the Burning Bush (frescoes in the apse, left and right spandrels respectively).

⁹³Examples in the Alto Adige include the fresco cycle at Riffiano of 1415 by Meister Wenzeslaus, a Bohemian artist already cited above, Section II, for his figural style. For Guariento, see the stylised clouds beneath the feet of a group of Principalities in a panel from the Cappella Carrarese, Padua, attributed to Guariento and dated to the 1350s (now in the Museo Civico, Padua); illustrated in R. Pallucchini, op.cit. above (note 36).

was now painterly, and naturalistic in effect.

Finally, the number of bare trees dispersed in the new Viper landscape deserves a mention. Bare trees had a symbolic function, to signal a stark mood but also eventual rebirth. They were prominent in Flemish miniatures from the Bondol workshop and occur in paintings by Guariento and by Gentile⁹⁴. By about 1400, however, landscape was sometimes given a seasonal aspect (an early Italian example can be seen in the Rome recension of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*), and such may be the case in both these overpainted panels, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul being celebrated in both East and West on January 25th; and the ‘Miracle of the Viper’ having taken place around a fire, kindled “because it had begun to rain and was cold”⁹⁵.

The design incised on the gold backgrounds of these two panels establishes links with both St. Paul Enthroned and the central panel of the predella. (Fig.44) This appears to have a northern source, in that



Figure 44: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, predella (detail)*. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

it includes daisy-like flowers that are seen in English illumination, including some border decoration in a group of manuscripts of the early 1380's now at Westminster Abbey, London, as well as those of the Master of the Beaufort Saints, already quoted for architectural framework for figures that is identical to that of the Mdina St. Paul Enthroned (c.f. Fig.30)⁹⁶. In the diamond-shaped decoration that fills the spandrels of the frame of the Mdina predella (Fig.44) similar flowers form a design seen on line-impressed tiles of the fourteenth century, found in England, that may be French⁹⁷. Furthermore, on some tiles in the same collection the flower motif is replaced by an acorn, with the Franco-Flemish patterning as acorns already identified in the gold background of St. Paul Enthroned (Fig.45). However, in addition to all this

⁹⁴For Guariento, the bare tree appears in The Vision of St. Augustine, part of a fresco cycle now unanimously attributed to Guariento and dated 1360-1365, in the Church of the Eremitani, Padua (left wall of presbytery); see F. F. D'Arcalis, *Guariento*, op.cit. above (note 15), Fig. 100. For Gentile, the predella of his altarpiece The Adoration of the Magi, left panel, The Nativity (Joseph sits apart under a bare tree); see *L'Opera Completa di Gentile da Fabriano*, op.cit. above (note 53), Tav. XXXIX A.

⁹⁵Acts 28.2.

⁹⁶Examples are in the *Liber Regalis* of ?1382, London, Westminster Abbey MS. 38, e.g. fol.20: The Coronation of a King and Queen; and in the English Lytlington Missal, London, Westminster Abbey Ms. 37 of 1383-4 e.g. Vol.II, fol. 157 v.: The Crucifixion; see R. Marks and N. Morgan, op. cit. above (note 60), Plates 24 and 25 respectively.

⁹⁷See E. Eames, *English Medieval Tiles*, British Museum, London, 1985, no. 34; also E. Eames, *English Tilers*, British



Figure 45: French(?) line-impressed tiles, fourteenth century. London, British Museum.

evidence for a northern design, the Mdina flowers also occur occasionally in Emilian illumination, including a miniature now attributed to the Compagno Ferrarese, an artist already mentioned in connection with the architectural setting of the Healing panel, and in some illuminated *corali* in Ferrara⁹⁸. The design on the gold backgrounds of the upper panels and the predella also share a technique usually considered northern and similarly seen in Emilia during the same period: motifs are composed of strings of tiny ‘dots’, incised with a small metal roller⁹⁹. In conclusion, it is clear that Italy cannot be ruled out as a source for the subsidiary decoration in both upper panels and predella. It is as eclectic as the background to St. Paul Enthroned, which was also seen to include features found in more than one milieu.

V The Predella

Many features of the predella panels combine to support the general designation ‘traditional Veneto’, and in the case of the left and right hand panels, two irrefutable sources are particularly helpful. Most notable of these is the sarcophagus in the scene of the *Veneration at the Tomb of St. Paul* (Fig.46). It has a distinctive structure (see Points of Iconography, Addendum, p. 8 above) also found in dated works by two artists of the ‘Veneto group’ already mentioned for their use of other features seen in the Mdina panels: Semitecolo and Gentile da Fabriano. For instance, there are two similar sarcophagi in one of Semitecolo’s panels in Padua of 1367: in the scene of *The Burial of St. Sebastian* they are placed high on their special marble plinths in the apses of adjoining side chapels¹⁰⁰ (Fig.12). Gentile’s version is perhaps better known: it dominates his Washington panel of 1425: *A Miracle of St. Nicholas*, high focal point for the lame and sick as they ascend the sanctuary steps to touch the tomb of the saint¹⁰¹.

The Venetian feature in the panel of the Sea Voyage is a small detail, but nevertheless informative: it concerns the unusual double anchor, attached to a single ring, drawn up against the prow of the boat. This

Museum, London 1992, no.25.

⁹⁸For the Compagno Ferrarese, see above Section II and note 22. For the flowers in a miniature attributed to the Compagno Ferrarese, see the dedication page of the *Historia Angliae* by Galasso, dated 1442 (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS. lat. 6041), illustrated in C. L. Ragghianti, op. cit. above (note 18), illus. 224. For similar versions of the flower see also *Libro Corale K* of 1400-1450, from the Convent of San Giorgio, Ferrara, now in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara.

⁹⁹Examples include the decoration of a polyptic of the Virgin and Child and Saints by Antonio di Carro (documented in Piacenza 1392-1410), now in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris; see catalogue, ed. M. Laclotte, op.cit. above (note 10), No. 16; also a panel of St. George by the Maestro delle Storie di Elena (stated to be ‘of the Veneto’, active 1440-70), now in the Pinacoteca, Ferrara.

¹⁰⁰See Paolo Veneziano e Il Suo Tempo, op. cit. above (note 30), Tav. X.

¹⁰¹This panel, now in the National Gallery, Washington, formed part of the predella of his signed Quaratesi polyptic of 1425, dismantled in the 19th century. In Italian the scene is usually given its full title: *Infermi e pellegrini alla tomba di San Nicola*; see L’Opera Completa di Gentile da Fabriano, op. cit. above (note 53), Tav. LIX.



Figure 46: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Veneration at the Tomb of St. Paul. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.* © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

type, with curved-back prongs and extra long shanks appears in a Venetian watermark of 1376¹⁰².

On the question of dating, once more the paintings of Altichiero and his followers and the artists of the ‘Veneto group’ provide many of the sources. In Altichieran miniatures are found, not only the sarcophagus of the Veneration, but features of the Sea Voyage: the painterly, rounded waves, the Roman official in corium and winged helmet¹⁰³. The left-hand coastline is a design used by Giusto de’ Menabuoi in his cycle in the baptistery of Padua cathedral (Fig.47), a design which itself has an earlier source in Ambrogio



Figure 47: *Giusto de’Menabuoi: The Calling of Andrew and Simon Peter, mid. 1370s. Padua Cathedral, Baptistry.*

Lorenzetti¹⁰⁴; it has been repeated, neatly reversed on the right hand side of the Sea Voyage, to provide the

¹⁰²See F. Moll, *Das Schiff in der bildenden Kunst*, Bonn, 1929, Fig. E.II.g.

¹⁰³In addition to the Milan *Titus Livius* cited above (note 47), see the miniatures of the Paris *De Viris Illustribus* of 1380, Paris, Bib. Nat., MS. lat.6069G, in Pallucchini, op.cit. above (note 36), Fig.479.

¹⁰⁴Giusto’s sea scene in the baptistery cycle, Padua cathedral, is The Calling of Andrew and Simon Peter. For Ambrogio

shore of the island of Malta.

The disparity between the two separate scenes making up the left hand predella panel is emphasised by their different diaphragm arches. That of the Veneration on the right is a Venetian trefoil arch, consistent with the Veneto sarcophagus. The composition of the Beheading scene has been organised, on a smaller scale, to match the matrix of the four lateral scenes, and its horizontal diaphragm is not dissimilar to that of the Healing panel, and has the same diaper pattern inserted above it. Also, St. Paul's gown in this panel has a version (with finer detailing) of the Flemish phoenix motif that was identified in the curtain design of the Healing (Fig.48). The scene also includes the *poulaines*, and a Flemish fringe for the canopy over



Figure 48: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Beheading of St. Paul (detail)*. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

the throne. At the same time it is interesting to note that, amongst the Emperor's entourage, the two central figures, by their dress and gestures, appear to represent Bolognese lawyers (Fig.49)¹⁰⁵.

In one notable respect both these predella interiors differ from the lateral scenes: they show a more advanced understanding of perspective. In both, the arrangement of the arcading produces a deeper space that is less ambiguous. The Veneration goes further, in having 'two-room recession'; also, a marble plinth with convincing perspective and naturalistic lighting replaces the vertically-patterned floor tiles of the lateral scenes. From what is known of workshop organisation and practice, however, stylistic differences of this order do not necessarily infer a different date, nor even a different artist.

In the final panel to be examined, the central component with its three enthroned saints, it is a question of 'the mixture as before'; that is to say, as identified throughout our survey of the central section of the retable: Lombard and Venetian, and again a Flemish contribution and possible references to Emilia.

In the first place, the female saints are by now readily recognisable by their physiognomy as Lombard princesses. A *cartone* used for the seated figure of St. Agatha has been reversed and adapted for St. Catherine; and its lower drapery section has also been reused for the central figure of St. Peter. All three thrones have the marble patterning of St. Paul Enthroned, as used by Semitecolo. At the right hand side of the panel there are various small differences: the tonal modelling of St. Catherine's mantle is more sophisticated than that of her companions; her throne is aligned differently, being slightly wider and deeper, with additional

Lorenzetti's prototype, see part of his Pala di S. Procolo (lower scene), illustrated in E. Carli, *I Lorenzetti, I Maestri del Colore*, No. 71, Milan, 1965, Tav. X.

¹⁰⁵From the time of the official foundation of Bologna University in 1343, doctors of civil law wore scarlet, and doctors of canon law wore blue; the latter sometimes wore a turban-like cap, similar to the Mdina figure in blue. In the Beheading scene both these figures appear, by their explicit gestures, to accept the sentence passed (the open hand), and even, in the case of the figure in scarlet, to reinforce this (the pointing finger).



Figure 49: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul, The Beheading of St. Paul (detail)*. The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

slender pointed finials (placed far back, leaving a longer arm-rest). The *cartone* for the seated figures would normally have included some sort of throne or seat, and these differences suggest that the St. Agatha figure and throne are original. The throne is a simplified version of a gabled type with ‘squared-off’ carpentry that is not confined to north-east Italy, but is common throughout that region.

The particular eclectic nature of the background design (shared with the narrative panels of the upper register) has already been analysed, and again a combination of styles (Flemish, Bolognese and Venetian) is evident throughout this central section of the predella. For instance, St. Peter’s throne is outlined with the same paired projections as St. Paul’s throne in the central panel of St. Paul Enthroned, which were found to resemble the rounded mouldings of canopy shafting in Flemish paintings. Other features, such as the form of the key, with its very long shaft, are Bolognese; and the throne itself, as seating, has a form reminiscent of the *cathedra* of a Bolognese university professor¹⁰⁶, and so may reflect the aspect of St. Peter conveyed by his raised right forefinger—the gesture of authority in teaching.

The severe outlines of the row of thrones make, to modern eyes at least, a perfect foil for the delicacy of treatment of the head of St. Peter. (Fig.50) It is fitting that we should conclude with this fine votive figure, whose human aspect belongs to a different world from the aulic St. Paul Enthroned with which we began. In fact the two heads represent two different Venetian styles to be found around the year 1400: the one only tentatively modifying an ancient formula, the other much more naturalistic. Venice’s first great ‘western’ master, Paolo Veneziano, supplied the vital link between the two, a link that we also found represented in the retable by the Veneto-byzantine heads of St. Paul in the narrative panels. As a votive figure, the Mdina St. Peter encapsulates the advances towards naturalism being made by the ‘Veneto group’: the high-domed forehead has gone; there is a roundness of face, and the depiction of the beard is painterly. One continuing reference to ancient iconic prototypes is the importance given to the ears, turned forwards to receive the True Word; the hair style (a shallow curve downwards over the high forehead, and swept back to left and right at the temples) is also a hallmark of byzantine iconography for St. Peter, as used by Paolo Veneziano and retained by many of the ‘Veneto group’. The Mdina artist has also retained the traditional stylised furrows on the forehead. These features, together with the penetrating gaze of the eyes, and the placing of ‘spiky’ highlights on the bridge of the nose, give St. Peter a facial expression as well as a physiognomy that is typical of paintings by Paolo’s successors in the later Trecento.

¹⁰⁶For example, in a miniature signed by Nicolo da Bologna, in a manuscript now in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.lat. 1456, dated 1353; see (ed.) O. Capitani, *L’Università a Bologna*, Bologna, 1987, p.117: folio Ir, ‘Incipit’ della ‘Novella’ di Giovanni d’Andrea sul primo libro delle Decretali di Gregorio IX (lower section: the professor’s study).



Figure 50: *The Mdina retable of St. Paul*, central predella panel, St. Peter (detail). The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta. © The Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.

4 Conclusion

It is characteristic of this ‘international’ period that in one retable should thus be found a ‘byzantinising’ St. Paul, accompanied by ‘boyish’ figures of Lombardy, ‘elders’ from Flanders, under the guidance of St. Peter—a figure developed from a truly indigenous Venetian style. As has recently been pointed out, in Venice collaborative enterprises were the rule, not the exception; and there is also an almost complete dearth of documentary evidence for the opening years of the fifteenth century¹⁰⁷. The present analysis has not only shown the Mdina retable to be a typical case in point, but has identified the various backgrounds of the artists who came together to carry out the commission. It was a collaboration, from the first, between artists representing styles to be seen in the north of Italy around the year 1400—this is its ‘Italian dimension’. Some of these artists had been trained, and remained, in the Veneto-byzantine ethos, others were interested in the latest courtly trends from Lombardy, and yet others were Franco-Flemish, or adopted Franco-Flemish ideas.

It is worth reiterating at this point that our task has been to reveal the stylistic sources of these unknown artists, and not the provenance of the retable. Indeed the evidence clearly shows, as far as provenance is concerned, that a non-Italian workshop cannot be ruled out, because the surviving works of the ‘Veneto group’, as well as scraps of documentary evidence, suggest that some of them at least travelled to foreign centres of culture. It follows from this that one of the notorious ‘black holes’ for art historians—Avignon, Catalonia, Bohemia—could still be involved.

However, the likely composition of the team producing the retable has been established; various alterations and additions to the matrix and elsewhere have been placed in their art historical context; and all the various elements have been found to be consistent with the art of the particular ‘international’ milieu of the Veneto. In identifying some of them, in fact, the retable, through its very complexity, has served in a unique way to uncover many of the steps by which artists progressed, and even some of the thought processes behind their endeavours, during a forty-year period when artists, especially in western Europe, were striving to create religious images as part of the ‘real world’.

¹⁰⁷ See K. Christiansen, ‘Venetian Painting of the Early Quattrocento’, in *Apollo*, 125 (March 1987), pp. 166-177.

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