

MALTA PAULINE CENTENARY STAMPS

By: PAUL A. PACE

One of the most important anniversaries in the annals of Maltese history was no doubt the year 1960. The Island celebrated the 19th centenary of the Shipwreck of St. Paul. The official programme of these festivities in Malta was long and varied, lasting from January to July. To commemorate this great event both the Civil and the Ecclesiastical authorities decided to issue a special set of six stamps depicting various episodes of the life of Paul, with special reference to his shipwreck one thousand nine hundred years before. The stamps were released by the Malta Post Office on Feb. 9th 1960.

Malta has a long and traditional history. It is presumed by some historians that the Island was the "Hyperion" or "Ogygia" of Homer. It has been ruled at one time or another by one of the greatest nations of the world. The first inhabitants were believed to be the Phoenicians, followed by the Greeks, and Carthaginians who ruled over a residue of locals. During the second Punic War the Island came under the influence of the Roman Civilisation, and it was during this period that Paul was shipwrecked on the Maltese shores.

This was not the first time that Malta has had stamps showing the image of St. Paul. In fact there were eleven other issues. The first appeared in 1889, and from the year 1914 up to the present day there was always a high value portraying the Saint. This means that for the last seventy years (with the exception of a few intervals) there has always been an issue including the Patron Saint of the Island of Malta; this point very seldom passes unnoticed by the larger section of collectors.

The following list gives year of issue and describes the different emissions during the seventy year period:—

- 1889: 10/- black with a slight tinge of blue, St. Paul during the shipwreck. This is from an engraving by Paul G. Dorè.
- 1918: 10/- Grey-black, same as before but with an alteration in the frame and wording; Block CA watermarked paper.
- 1922: 10/- pitch black, same as the 1918, but with a script CA watermark.
- 1922: 10/- same as the 1889, but overprinted "Self-Government."
- 1926: 10/- black and carmine, reproduced from a statue venerated in the Church of St. Paul Shipwrecked Valletta. The statue is the work of the famous Maltese sculptor Melchiorre Gafà. The stamp is inscribed "Postage."
- 1928: 10/- same as 1926 but overprinted "Postage and Revenue."
- 1930: 10/- same as 1926 but inscribed "Postage and Revenue."
- 1938: 10/- Black and red, with same image of St. Paul as in the 1926 — 30, but with K. George VI medallion.
- 1948: 10/- same as 1938, but overprinted "Self-Government."

1957: 10/- same image of St. Paul, depicted on more modern lines artistically, and with the portrait of the Queen to one side.

1965: £1 showing the three Patron Saints of Malta designed by Cremona: St. Paul, St. Publius and St. Agatha.

The episode of the shipwreck took place in the year A.D. 60. Paul, the Apostle of Christ, and great prophet in the early years of the Christian Religion, was imprisoned while at Jerusalem, charged with creating a riot. After two years in prison he appealed to Rome on his citizen's rights, resulting in his being sent to Rome under guard. On his way, he was shipwrecked on the North East coast of Malta; but after a short stay of three months he sailed again ultimately reaching Pateoli. He was imprisoned again in Rome, but apparently thereafter acquitted of the charges.

The centenary stamps commemorating this event were the task and responsibility of the Malta Government Stamp Advisory Board, and were printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons of London, on paper watermarked CA in block capitals.

The 1½d vertical, and coloured blue and fawn, 46 by 27 mm. depicts the actual shipwreck on Malta's shores, presumably at a place called "Selmun" on the mainland adjoining the "Gżejjer" in St. Paul's Bay. It is an adaptation by Chev. Cremona, from a fresco by Palombi found in St. Paul's Church Valletta.

The 3d, vertical, mauve and light blue, 46 by 27mm. depicts as Cremona imagined it, the Consecration of St. Publius First Bishop of Malta. The Maltese welcomed St. Paul and the rest of the crew; Publius, a well-to-do non-believer, gave hospitality to Paul, and was later converted to the new Faith as the stamp shows, reaching a high state of affairs on his consecration.

6d, vertical, carmine and silver grey, 46 by 27mm. St. Paul remained in Malta for three months, preaching and performing miracles. After spending the winter on the Island he and the other shipwrecked men sailed again towards Rome. The Maltese honoured their 'guests', and put on board all the provisions required. The stamp is also Cremona's adaptation from another fresco by Palombi in the mentioned Church, and shows the departure of Paul.

8d, diamond shaped, black and white in colour, 35.5 by 35.5 mm., describes the statue of St. Paul in the Grotto at Rabat, where the Apostle is believed to have stayed. Souvenir hunters formed the habit of taking away with them fragments of the rocks, yet this quarrying cave has never altered in shape to this present day. The art-work of the stamp is again Cremona's.

The 1/-, diamond shaped, coloured bordeaux, 35.5 mm. on all sides, shewes an allegorical design taken from the Acts of the Apostles, again the work of Cremona.

Before the shipwreck took place, Paul had a vision: an Angel of the Lord told the Apostle that all the crew would be saved and that they had to go unto a certain Island; later they discovered the Island was called Melita. Now Malta.

The 2/6 is also diamond shaped and of the same size as its predecessors. Bluish-green in colour the stamp is the result of Cremona's imaginative powers, and describes St. Paul with the Scripture in his hand, against a background of the islets of St. Paul's Bay.

The whole set is by and large one of the most attractive ever produced by the Malta Post Office; even at the time of writing (eight years after the commemoration) it is most keenly sought after by Philatelists the world over.

Adapted from 'A Weekly Magazine of Philately' published in New Jersey, by kind permission of the writer.

DR. E. AQUILINA from Valletta writes:—

With reference to the article by W.L. Freshwater on the Circular Village Stamps of Malta, I would like to make the following additions:

1. BIRCHIRCARA — The capital letters in the circular date mark are not limited to A, B, and C; the letter D can also be found as some of my Specimens show.
2. NOTABILE — Similarly the letter G can also be located.
3. PAULA — The size of the dater was 21 mm. in diameter; whereas the time was denoted by AM or PM. These details were not included in the list shown in the Journal.
4. XEUCHIA — This Gozo Postal Branch also made use of the AM sign besides the PM described.

The instances just described can be substantiated by specimens which are in my possession. I am, therefore, certain that they will be accepted very satisfactorily by keen collectors in the spirit of philatelic research.

In connection with St. Paul's landing after being shipwrecked on the North East Coast of the Island of Malta in A.D. 60, I consulted Mgr. Knox's Version of The Holy Bible and came to the conclusion that the snake (viper) that attacked Paul did so at the landing of the Apostle; and not "later on" as Mr. B. Hamilton states in his article.

To substantiate this, I quote The Acts Chapter 28 verses 1 — 3 from The Holy Bible referred to:

"When we were safe on land, we found that the Island was called Melita. The kindness which the natives shewed to us was beyond the ordinary; they welcomed us all by making a fire for us, because rain was coming on, and it was cold. Paul had collected a bundle of faggots and had just put them on the fire, when a viper, coming out to escape the heat, fastened on to his hand....."

The conclusion from the above is rather unmistakeable, and needs no further comments.