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The Frescoes from the Life of St. Paul in San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome: Early Christian or Mediaeval?

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The search for the original iconography of the nave frescoes of San Paolo fuori le mura remains one of the most vexing problems in art-historical research. We know from the *Liber pontificalis* that the church was renovated – and perhaps given frescoes – after a fire during the pontificate of Leo I (440-461),¹ that it suffered further damage in an earthquake of 801 and in another fire in 1118, that it was repainted, according to Ghiberti, by Cavallini in the late 13th century,² that the paintings were copied on the orders of Cardinal Francesco Barberini in 1634, and finally that the church was destroyed by fire on the 17th of July, 1823.³

In addition to the watercolour copies of individual scenes, now bound into an album in the Vatican Library (cod. Barb. lat. 4406), a series of paintings and engravings of the 17th to the 19th centuries depicting the interior of the church – including those reproduced here by Seroux d'Agincourt (Fig. 4),⁴ by N.M. Nicolai (Fig. 1)⁵ and by Francesco Barbazza

after a painting by Pannini (Fig. 2) – provide a certain amount of information about the subject-matter and arrangement of the wall-paintings in the nave. These consisted, at the time of the 17th-century copying, of two sequences of scriptural scenes, the Old Testament along the right wall and the New Testament along the left. A similar system prevailed in Old

1 *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1886), 239.

2 J. von Schlosser, *Lorenzo Ghiberti's Denkwürdigkeiten* (Berlin, 1912), I, 39.

3 The salient facts and bibliography up to 1964 are given in S. Waetzoldt, *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Malereien in Rom*, Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Hertziana, 18 (Vienna and Munich, 1964), 56-61. See also the review of Waetzoldt by B. Brenk, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 58 (1965), 400-401; J. Gardner, 'San Paolo fuori le mura, Nicholas III and Pietro Cavallini,' *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 34 (1971), 240-48; P. Hetherington, *Pietro Cavallini* (London, 1979), 81-106; L. Eleen, *The Illustration of the Pauline Epistles* (Oxford, 1982), 4-8, *passim*.

4 Bibl. Vat., cod. Vat. lat. 9843, fol. 4.

5 N.M. Nicolai, *Della Basilica di S. Paolo* (Rome, 1815), pl. 1.

FIGURE 1. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, left wall (after Nicolai).

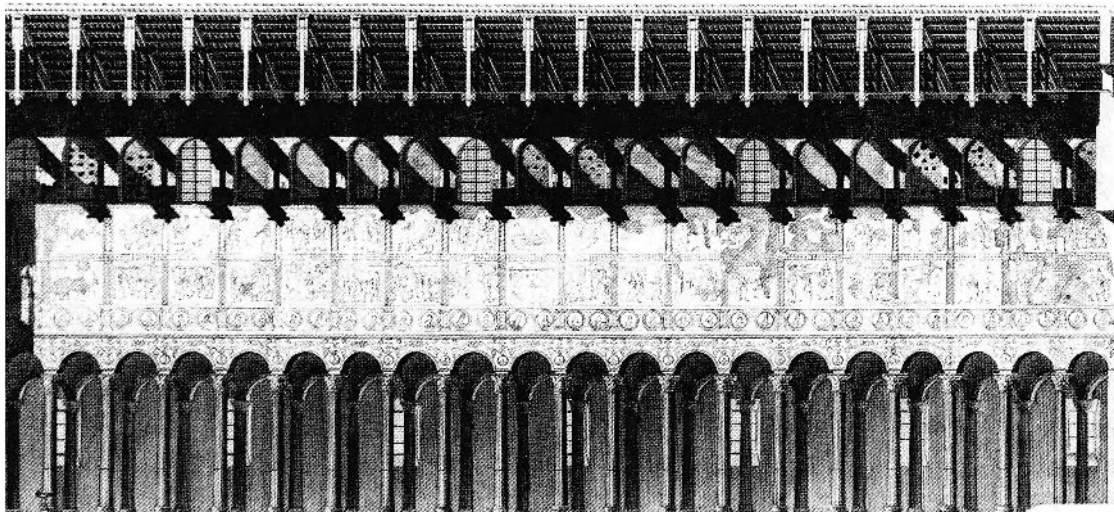




FIGURE 2. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, left wall (eng. F. Barbazza after a painting by P. Pannini).

St. Peter's,⁶ the difference being that the New Testament subjects in the latter were christological, whereas in San Paolo the imagery was drawn from the life of its titular saint, as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles.

Most authorities accept the possibility that the Old Testament subjects on the right wall at San Paolo went back to the 5th century, and that traces of the original iconography were still present after the 13th-century restoration and can even be discerned in the copies. The original imagery of the left wall, the principal interest of the present article, has been the subject of debate.

Since the discovery by Eugène Müntz of the water-colour copies in 1893,⁷ discussion of the Pauline frescoes on the left wall has ranged between two

extremes. One group of authorities accepts Müntz' contention that the iconography, as revealed by the watercolours, goes back to the 5th-century campaign of painting, perhaps restored ca. 700, and copied or restored by Cavallini.⁸ The opposite position is represented by Garber, writing in 1918, and others who maintain that it was unlikely that the nave of San Paolo should have been decorated in the 5th century with scenes from the life of its titular saint, since a similar honour was not accorded St. Peter in the church bearing his name.⁹ The original frescoes on the left wall must, according to this argument, have been christological on the model of St. Peter's, having been replaced with a Pauline cycle in the 13th century. This is an important objection, one that Herbert Kessler and William Tronso have recently countered by introducing evidence that there was indeed a 5th-century Peter sequence in St. Peter's, thus by analogy supporting the possibility of Pauline imagery in San Paolo at this date.¹⁰

What do we know about this Pauline sequence, as it appears in later copies? Is it possible to separate remnants of the earlier imagery from the contribution of the workshop in which Cavallini participated, so as to suggest criteria by which 5th-century elements can be identified?

The order in which the scenes were arranged on the wall is one such criterion. It is possible to reconstruct the San Paolo cycles from the instructions noted on some of the drawings¹¹ and from the engravings depicting sections of the wall. Both Paul Hetherington and I have written on this subject,¹² coming to the conclusion that both the Old Testament and Pauline cycles proceeded from the triumphal arch to the entrance wall in a parallel progression. The Old Testament episodes on the right wall read from left to right: that is, in the normal order of multiple scenes in narrative sequences. These scenes followed the texts of Genesis and Exodus (with only

6 Waetzoldt, 69-71; more recently, see W. Tronso, 'The Prestige of St. Peter's. Observations on the Function of Monumental Narrative,' *Symposium on Narrative Art* (in the press). I wish to thank Professor Tronso for making his brilliant article available to me in typescript.

7 E. Müntz, *Revue de l'art chrétien* 41 (1898), 1-19.

8 In addition to Waetzoldt, 58, see J. White, 'Cavallini and the Lost Frescoes in S. Paolo,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956), 84-95; H. Buchthal, 'Some Representations from the Life of St. Paul in Byzantine and Carolingian Art,' *Tortulae: Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1966), 43-48; L. Eleen, *passim*; Hetherington, 95-96. Gardner cautions against the attribution to Cavallini of sole authorship of the 13th c. work on the left wall.

9 J. Garber, *Wirkungen der frühchristlichen Gemäldezyklen der alten Peters- und Pauls-Basiliken in Rom* (Berlin and Vienna, 1918), 27-28; E. Dinkler-von Schubert, 'Per Murum Dimiserunt Eum' zur Ikonographie von Acta ix, 25 und 2 Cor. xi, 33, *Studien zur Buchmalerei und Goldschmiedekunst des Mittelalters* (Usener Festschrift) (Marburg, 1967), 79-92, is a more recent exponent of this position.

10 Tronso, 'The Prestige of St. Peter's.'

11 Waetzoldt, cat. 590, 607, 608, 648, 649, 670, records the notes regarding the beginnings and endings of each register and their placement on the wall.

12 Eleen, 6; Hetherington, 86, 100-101, figs. 124-25.

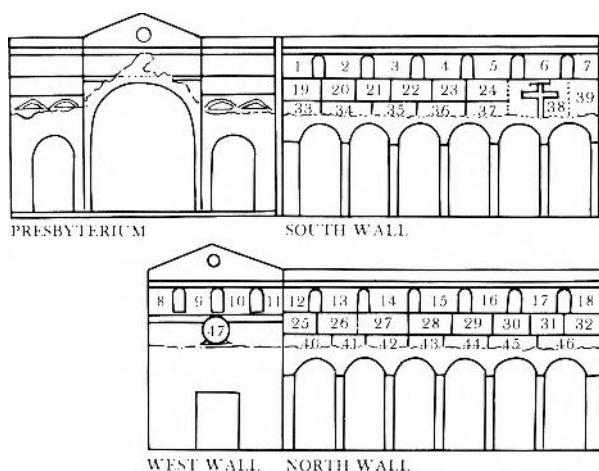


FIGURE 3. Rome, San Giovanni a Porta Latina, scheme of wall-paintings (after Manion).

one minor disarrangement) from left to right on the top register and then again from left to right on the lower.

The Pauline cycle on the more difficult to deal with left wall followed the text of the Paul sections in the Acts of the Apostles, again from the triumphal arch to the entrance wall, advancing this time from right to left. The orderly progression of the Old Testament scenes on the right wall was absent here however, and the arrangement is full of anomalies. The cycle nevertheless began with a continuous sequence of the first nine scenes, and eventually with a certain amount of jumping back and forth, arrived simultaneously at the entrance wall and the end of the Acts text.

The Seroux engraving (Fig. 4) depicts the first six scenes on both registers. These correspond with fols. 87-92 and 108-13 in cod. Barb. lat. 4406 (Waetzoldt cat. 628-63 and 649-54). Considering for the present only the six scenes in the upper register, the sequence begins at the right with the Choice of the Seven Deacons (Acts 6:1-6, fol. 87), and continues with Stephen before the Council (Acts 6:12-13, fol. 88), the Stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:58-60, fol. 89), Saul Persecuting the Christians (Acts 8:3, fol. 90), the Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:4-8, fol. 91; Fig. 5), the

Vision of Ananias and Paul Healed by Ananias (Acts 9:10-17, fol. 92). A similar relation to the watercolours and right-to-left progression of the narrative can be observed in the Nicolai engraving (Fig. 1) when enlarged, and even in the engraving of the Pannini painting (Fig. 2).¹³

I shall return to the question of the significance of the right-to-left arrangement, but first let us consider the implications of the haphazard order of the later scenes. There are several possible explanations. One is that the wall had been repainted several times previous to the late 13th-century effort, resulting in disruption of the original order, but with a number of scenes left untouched. A related possibility is that falls of plaster between the 13th and 17th centuries exposed earlier layers to the copyists. A third and less likely explanation is that the restorers copied some scenes without completely understanding their import. All of these alternatives point to preexisting Pauline imagery on the left wall. The discontinuity of the sequence, therefore, itself supports the notion that the Cavallini workshop had some kind of cycle of the life of St. Paul to follow.

Let us now return to the consideration of the narrative progression on the wall from right to left. One of the consequences of this arrangement is a tendency for the composition of some scenes to read from right to left: that is, to be reversed from their more standard forms. A case in point is the depiction of the multi-episode series of events connected with the conversion of Paul. If we compare the version in the drawing (Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 91; Fig. 5) with the more usual disposition of the same episodes in the 9th-century San Paolo Bible (Fig. 6),¹⁴ the three moments reading from left to right on the top register and the beginning of the middle register in the manuscript read from right to left in the copy of the wall-painting: Saul receives letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem, he is struck blind, and then he is led to the gates of Damascus by a disciple. (In the

¹³ See note 12, for an evaluation of the pictorial evidence.

¹⁴ H.L. Kessler, *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours* (Princeton, 1977), 111-24; Eleen, 11-16, 20, 30, 33-34.

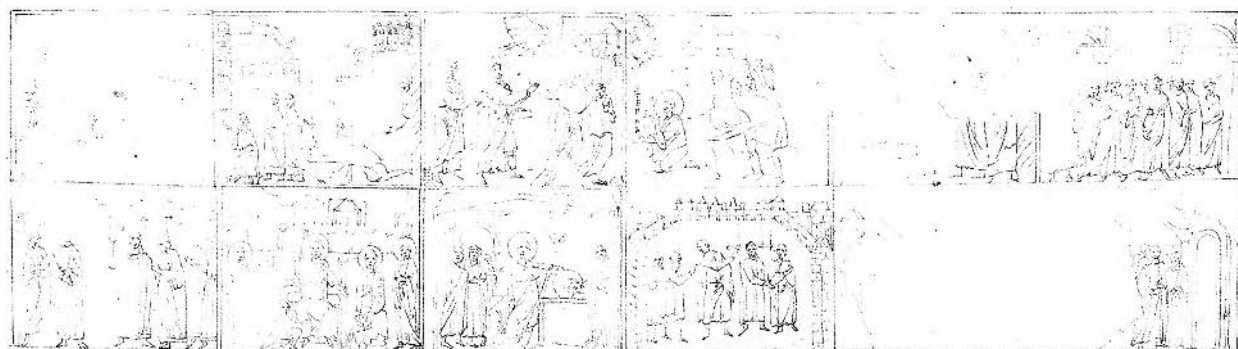


FIGURE 4. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, section of left wall (Seroux d'Agincourt, Bibl. Vat., cod. Vat. lat. 9843, fol. 4).



FIGURE 5. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, Conversion of Paul (Bibl. Vat., cod. Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 91).

fresco cycle, following the interpolation of a figure that does not appear in the manuscript, we have four separate panels with scenes that continue the narrative progression from right to left: Paul Healed by Ananias, the Baptism of Paul, Paul Preaching in Damascus, and Paul's Escape from Damascus – Barb. lat. 4406, fols. 92-95.¹⁵)

Of the forty-two Pauline scenes on the left wall at San Paolo, I have estimated that in no fewer than seventeen either the action or what might be called the 'narrative impetus' proceeds from right to left. There are also twelve scenes composed in the more normal left-to-right order and thirteen centralized. That is to say, almost half of the compositions have a right-to-left impetus. If we compare this situation to that prevailing on the right wall of San Paolo, with its left-to-right reading of the narrative, the majority (twenty-eight) are correspondingly left-to-right in composition, with eight centralized, and only two reading from right to left. At San Paolo, therefore, each side apparently was dominated by a type of composition determined by the direction of the narrative.

Are these practices that we have discovered to have been followed at San Paolo generally prevalent in either of the periods we are investigating, the 5th or the 13th century? The arrangements of some other nave cycles, most of them in Roman churches, provide a partial answer to this question.

Old St. Peter's was already partly demolished when it was copied by Grimaldi in the 17th century.¹⁶

¹⁵ Waetzoldt, figs. 371-74; the first 2 episodes in the sequence are visible in my Fig. 4.

¹⁶ Giacomo Grimaldi, *Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano*, cod. Barb. lat. 2733, ed. R. Niggl (Vatican City, 1972), fol. 114; Waetzoldt, 69-71, figs. 484-485a.

¹⁷ Garber, 27-28, is the principal exponent of a 5th-century date; Waetzoldt, 70, suggested a date in the 9th century, a proposal supported by Brenk in his review; more recently, Tronso has cogently argued for the 7th century.

¹⁸ B. Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in Santa Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 152; J.G. Deckers, *Der alttestamentliche Zyklus von S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Bonn, 1976), pls. 8, 21.

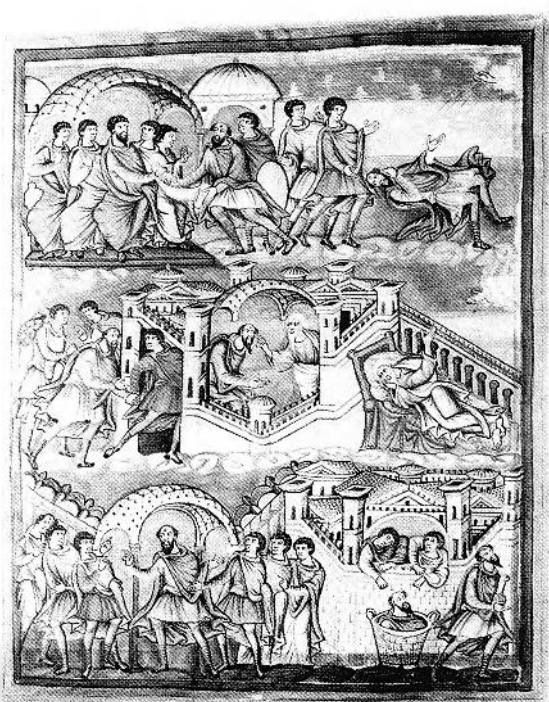


FIGURE 6. Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura, frontispiece to Acts (fol. 307v).

Enough of the frescoes were still *in situ*, however, to indicate that, as in San Paolo, the right wall was occupied by an Old Testament sequence reading from the triumphal arch to the entrance. On the left was a christological cycle proceeding again from the triumphal arch to the entrance, although many details of the iconography at the time of copying obviously were devised later than the 5th century, the date accepted for the frescoes by one group of scholars, the 7th century, as recently proposed by Tronso, or even of the 9th century, another date figuring in the literature.¹⁷ One can assume that renewal of individual elements in the scenes did not affect the overall narrative organization on the wall, which was similar to that of San Paolo.

In Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome, decorated with mosaics under Sixtus III in the fourth decade of the 5th century,¹⁸ both nave sequences are of the Old Testament. That on the right wall is devoted to Moses and Joshua and proceeds from left to right from the triumphal arch to the entrance, as in San Paolo. The sequence on the left wall (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) goes in narrative text order, with one exception, from the triumphal arch to the entrance wall, again like that in San Paolo. Investigation of the narrative impetus reveals a slight preponderance of the same sort as at San Paolo, but with more emphasis on centralized compositions. About one third of the remaining scenes on the left wall are composed in the direction of the narrative.

Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna,¹⁹ also of the 5th century, is similar. Both walls here have New Testament scenes, those on the right depicting the passion of Christ proceeding from the triumphal arch to the entrance wall, with a majority of left-to-right compositions. On the opposite wall in narrative order, where the scenes from the ministry of Christ are apparently based on liturgical readings, about half of the compositions originate from the right. Since we do not yet know the source of the order of the scenes, we cannot be sure that they were meant to be read from right to left, but the orientation of the composition suggests that this was indeed the case.

The evidence of other Early Christian cycles, therefore, indicates that the organization from right-to-left of scenes on the left wall at San Paolo would have been consistent with an early date. Compositions on that left wall emphasizing a narrative impetus from the right also seem to have been a feature of the period.

A consideration of scriptural cycles of the later Middle Ages reveals a different type of arrangement. In the great majority of monuments in which episodes from Old and New Testaments are used,²⁰ the tendency is to organize the cycles in a concentric or clockwise fashion, starting at the right side at the triumphal arch, continuing across the entrance wall, and then down the left side back to the arch, with this progression perhaps repeated several times when there are multi-tiered cycles. In Sant'Angelo in Formis near Capua of the late 11th century,²¹ for example, the New Testament cycle starts on the right wall at the Triumphal arch with the Annunciation and continues in a concentric arrangement through three registers, ending with the Ascension on the bottom register of the left wall at the arch. The badly damaged Old Testament scenes on the aisle walls apparently followed a similar progression.

San Giovanni a Porta Latina (Fig. 3),²² is a Roman example of this type, painted in the 12th century with a similar concentric arrangement, this time with the Old Testament on the top register. The sequence begins with the Creation on the right next to the triumphal arch, continues along the right wall, across the entrance wall, and back along the left wall to the arch. On the second and third registers there are christological scenes, again in a concentric arrangement.

The change to the concentric arrangement, as opposed to the parallel, must have taken place some time between the 5th and the 11th centuries. I cannot, of course, offer at this time a complete account of that transformation, but it is noteworthy that the 8th-century frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua already are arranged concentrically, rather than in a parallel progression,²³ as are those of Müstair, generally regarded as a reflection of Roman models, of the late 8th or 9th century.²⁴

The concentric system was the prevailing one in the later 13th century, when the workshop in which

Cavallini participated undertook the restoration of San Paolo. In his later scriptural cycle on the nave wall in Sta. Cecilia, Cavallini himself seems to have used a concentric arrangement. Of the two remaining fragments of the nave frescoes flanking the Last Judgment on the entrance wall, the nearest scene on the right, the Dream of Jacob (Gen. 28:11-12), would have been the last episode in an Old Testament sequence beginning at the triumphal arch, whereas the scene directly opposite it on the left wall, the Annunciation, was no doubt the first in a New Testament sequence starting at the entrance.²⁵ The concentric system, therefore, would have been followed at Sta. Cecilia.

Can the presence of the parallel system at San Paolo be explained as anything other than the survival of an ancient cycle? It is true that in other monuments original to the late 13th century and associated with the Cavallini circle – San Francesco in Assisi²⁶ and Sta. Maria in Vescovio²⁷ – Old and New Testament scenes were arranged in a parallel sequence on the walls of the naves. This can be explained as 'revival': a deliberate imitation of the Early Christian basilicas,

19 G. Bovini, *Mosaici di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna, il ciclo cristologico* (Florence, 1958), 12-13; C.O. Nordström, *Ravenna-Studien* (Stockholm, 1953), 74-77.

20 O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (London, 1950), 205-209; R.P. Bergman, *The Salerno Ivories* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 5-10.

21 J. Wettstein, *Sant'Angelo in Formis et la peinture médiévale en Campanie* (Geneva, 1960), 34-50.

22 J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1917), IV, pl. 252-56; M. Manion, 'The Frescoes of San Giovanni a Porta Latina – The Shape of a Tradition,' *Australian Journal of Art*, 1 (1978), 93-109.

23 The John VII frescoes (705-7) in the presbytery begin in the upper register with Infancy scenes running from left to right on the east side wall (the apse is towards the south), and continuing in the same direction on the west wall. The 2nd register – Passion and post-Passion scenes – is organized in the same way. See P.J. Nordhagen, 'The Frescoes of John VII and their Date,' *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, 3 (1968), 1-125, esp. 22-35, pls. CXXXIII, CXXXIV. The OT and NT frescoes in the aisles of the later 8th century also proceeded in concentric order, the OT running from the entrance to the presbytery on the east wall and the NT from the presbytery to the entrance on the west wall; see B.A. Vileisis 'The Genesis Cycle of Sta. Maria Antiqua,' Ph.D. Thesis (Princeton, 1979), 3-5, for the OT cycle, and Wilpert, II, 703-7, 710-11, for the NT.

24 L. Birchler, 'Zur karolingischen Architektur und Malerei in Münster-Müstair,' *Frühmittelalterliche Kunst in den Alpenländern* (Akten zum III. Internationalen Kongress für Frühmittelalterforschung) (Olten and Lausanne, 1954), 179-243.

25 Hetherington, 47-48, figs. 31, 33, 72, 74.

26 H. Belting, *Die Oberkirche von San Francesco in Assisi* (Berlin, 1977), esp. text fig. C.

27 R. Van Marle, 'Gli affreschi del duecento in Santa Maria in Vescovio. Cattedrale della Sabina, e Pietro Cavallini,' *Bollettino d'Arte*, n.s. 7 (1927), 3-30; recently, S. Marcus, 'Santa Maria in Vescovio: a Study in Old Testament Imagery,' Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1985.



FIGURE 7. Cosmas Indicopleustes, Conversion of Paul (Mt. Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, cod. 1186, fol. 126v.).

especially St. Peter's. The Roman artists would no doubt have learned about this aspect of the late antique approach to narrative in monumental art by studying it in the course of the restoration work at San Paolo. These artists, Cavallini included, would in turn have applied what they had observed when they devised compositions with a narrative impulse from the right on the left wall at San Paolo in works that can be identified as their original contributions, exemplified in several scenes discussed below. The parallel progression at San Paolo, therefore, can be characterized as both survival and revival.

Let us now turn our attention to the imagery itself, searching for ways to establish the date of its creation. Since we are dealing with elements from different periods, there can be no single generalization covering the project as a whole, but I propose through consideration of several examples of iconography to indicate a method by which at least a portion of the picture cycle can be set in a time-frame. The restrictions of space in the present article allow only an outline of the possibilities of this approach, with suggestions for the direction of future research.

The first example is the multi-episode depiction of the Conversion of Paul (Fig. 5), which, as we have already seen, contains the standard components of mediaeval Conversion imagery. If we compare individual motifs in this sequence with those in other Conversion cycles, however, it is evident that the restorer, possibly Cavallini himself, was making use here of middle-Byzantine imagery, rather than that



FIGURE 8. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura. Paul Beaten by the Jews (Bibl. Vat., cod. Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 103).

which, to the best of our knowledge, would have been current in the Early Christian period.

In a comparison of the San Paolo picture with a similar sequence in an 11th-century Byzantine manuscript (Fig. 7),²⁸ several features common to both can be identified. The most important is the pose of the Apostle at the moment of conversion. He is in or moving into *proskynesis*, a pose of ritual obeisance characteristic of Byzantine art.²⁹ Paul's dress, a long tunic and pallium, also is similar in the two representations. In the next episode, where he is depicted being conducted to Damascus, Paul is led by a disciple holding his arm. In contrast to these details, in the Carolingian imagery (Fig. 6), which several recent authors have agreed reflects Early Christian models,³⁰ there is no evidence of *proskynesis*, Paul wears the short garments of a traveller, and he is led by the hand into the gate of Damascus. Cavallini must have had access to a recent Byzantine source when he amended or replaced the earlier Pauline imagery. It is interesting to note that John White has singled out the architectural background in this scene as one that expresses Cavallini's personal innovative experiments with space,³¹ in contrast to the heterogeneous architectural types, including some originating in or copied from 5th century models, that occur, according to White, elsewhere on this wall. Therefore, both the iconographic and stylistic aspects of this scene point to a later period.

When we turn to the next topic, the depictions of Paul being flogged, the situation is more ambiguous. One of the images is in the same category as the Conversion, in that it suggests middle-Byzantine models and Cavallinesque style, while the others present a more mixed picture. The three scenes of flogging,³² while representing separate, identifiable incidents, have certain features in common: in all three, Paul (in one instance accompanied by Silas) is prone, and the beating is carried out by two men wielding sticks or switches. The prone pose for these episodes is found only in San Paolo in Italy, as far as I know, since in other Italian monuments of the Middle Ages Paul is depicted as upright while he is being flogged.³³

²⁸ *The Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, Mt. Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, cod. 1186, fol. 126v.; see K. Weitzman, *Die byzantinische Buchmalerei des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1935), 58-59, fig. 388; Elcen, 26-28.

²⁹ A. Cuttler, *Transfigurations - Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (University Park and London), 53-110, esp. 92-93.

³⁰ Kessler, *Illustrated Bibles*, 112-15; J. Gachde, 'The Turonian Sources of the Bible of San Paolo Fuori le Mura in Rome,' *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 5 (1971), 359-400, esp. 390.

³¹ White, 88.

³² Acts 16:23; 21:31-33; 22:24.

³³ L. Elen, 'Acts Illustration in Italy and Byzantium,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 31 (1977), 253-78, esp. 274.

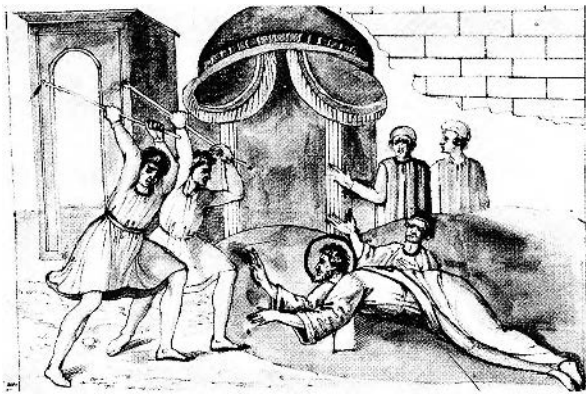


FIGURE 9. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, Paul and Silas Beaten at Philippi (Bibl. Vat., cod. Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 99).

Two of these episodes illustrate the point: one a beating by Jews, the other a beating ordered by Roman magistrates. Both the Jewish and the ancient Roman legal systems made use of judicial flogging, and therefore the question arises as to whether the artists of the frescoes were familiar with either or both of these practices. In one of these episodes, Paul is flogged in the streets by a Jewish mob (Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 103; Fig. 8): 'They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple ... As soon as they saw the commandant and his troops, they stopped beating Paul (Acts 21-31-33).' That this scene is intended to represent a flogging by Jews is made certain by a partially obliterated inscription: '*hic ubi ... iudeis quinque quadragenae*.' This is a quotation from 11 Cor. 11:24: 'Five times the Jews have given me the forty strokes minus one.'

The Jewish manner of flogging is spelled out in Deut. 25:2, which is very specific in requiring that the wrong-doer be prostrate: 'if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten ... the judge shall cause him to lie down.' This prescription is later explicated in the Mishnah:

How do they scourge him? They bind his two hands to a pillar on either side, and the minister of the synagogue lays hold on his garments – if they are torn they are torn, if they are utterly rent they are utterly rent – so that he bares his chest ... They shall not scourge him when he is standing or when he is sitting, but only when he is bending low, for it is written, the judge shall cause him to lie down.³⁴

The depiction in the San Paolo frescoes conforms closely if not completely to the requirements in the Mishnah, in the prostrate pose, in the nudity of the victim, and in the use of a low structure that might be interpreted as a 'pillar,' to which his hands are bound. As we can see, the instrument of beating is different from those used in the beating by the Romans, as is the state of dress of the victim.

In the Middle Ages, Jewish communities continued to use the biblical punishment of flogging, but, influenced perhaps by contemporary Christian and secular practice, with the victim in a crouching or upright rather than prone position.³⁵ The image in

the San Paolo frescoes, therefore, is closer to the ancient than to the mediaeval Jewish usage. It is possible that the depiction of Paul beaten by the Jews was devised by someone who had knowledge of the ancient Jewish community, and that therefore the image itself is of antique origin.

What of the other beating, by the Romans? Does this image conform to what we know of corporal punishment in Rome? One of the San Paolo panels represented the flogging of Paul and Silas in Philippi at the order of the Roman magistrates (Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 99; Fig. 9): 'the magistrates tore off the prisoners' clothes and ordered them to be flogged. After giving them a severe beating they flung them into prison (Acts 16:23).' The presence of two victims makes this identification secure.

Paul himself, in describing his own experiences, differentiated between Jewish and Roman practice. He stated, in the passage already cited: 'Five times the Jews have given me the forty strokes minus one. Three times I have been beaten with rods (*A Iudeis quinque quadragenae una minus accepi. Ter virgis caesus sum*) (11 Cor. 11:24).' Note that Paul uses the term *virgis caedere* to describe the type of punishment he suffered from the Romans, as distinct from the beatings administered by the Jews. This is one of the typical phrases used for a beating of both slaves and free persons in Roman law.³⁶

As was also true in Jewish law, the practice of flogging was institutionalized in Rome. It was an official method of questioning by torture, a type of corporal punishment in its own right, and it also functioned as an adjunct to other punishments. Previous to execution by crucifixion or exposure, for example, the victim was beaten.³⁷ In all of these usages, according to documentary evidence, the victim remained in an upright position, often attached to an apparatus called a *patibulum* or *furca*.³⁸ These devices

34 *The Mishnah*, transl. H. Danby (Oxford, 1933, repr. 1938), 407-8, s.v. 'Makkoth,' 3:12-13. See also, *Die Mishna*, iv *Sanhedrin*; *Makkot*, ed. S. Krauss (Göttingen, 1933), 372-73, where several additional notes lend support to the interpretation of the S. Paolo scene as a Jewish legal act; in an alternate text, the structure on which the wrong-doer lies is called a '*subsellium*' (low bench); a commentary calls for three officials to be present, one wielding the whip, a second counting and a third observing the victim for signs of exhaustion. The three figures surrounding Paul in the drawing might have originated in this way.

35 S. Assaf, *Ha-Onashin ahare; hatimat ha-Talmud* (Penalties in the Post-Talmudic Period) (Jerusalem 1982), 55-56, n° 24; 107, n° 110. I wish to thank Joseph Shatzmiller for telling me about these texts and translating them from the Hebrew for me.

36 C.H. Brecht, 'Furca,' in A.F. von Pauly, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. G. Wissowa and W. Kroll, vii, new ed. (Stuttgart, 1910), 305-7.

37 T. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig, 1899, repr. Graz, 1955), 981-85; E. Saglio, 'Crux,' in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, 1, 2 (Paris, 1887), 1573-75.

38 Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, xx1, 4 (Catania, 1970), 73-74; Saglio, 'Crux,' figs. 2082-83; Brecht, 'Furca.'

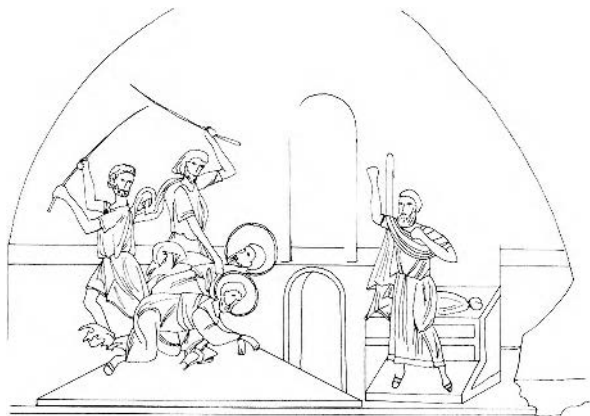


FIGURE 10. Dečani, Monastery Church, Paul and Silas Beaten at Philippi (drawing by Janet Brooke).



FIGURE 11. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, Paul Baptised by Ananias (Bibl. Vat., cod. Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 93).



FIGURE 12. Verona New Testament, Paul Baptised by Ananias (Bibl. Vat., cod. Vat. lat. 39, fol. 92).

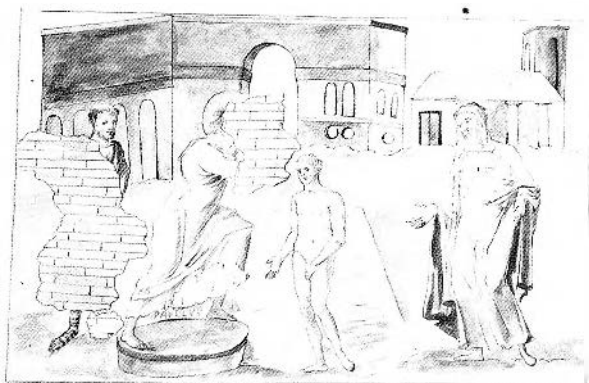


FIGURE 13. Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, Paul Baptises the Jailer's Family (Bibl. Vat., cod. Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 119).

took a variety of forms, ranging from a single stake driven into the ground to an arrangement of two or even four uprights. The earliest extant representations of the Flagellation of Christ in the 9th century appear to be fairly accurate depictions of the Roman method of chastising the victim about to be executed.³⁹ The depictions in the frescoes of Paul and Silas questioned by beating at the hands of the Roman authorities, therefore, fail to correspond with

the practices of Roman law, and perhaps point to a period in which artists would not be familiar with such laws.

In the episode of Paul and Silas beaten at Philippi, indeed, we find strong echoes of Middle Byzantine imagery, particularly in the pose of Paul, again turned into *proskynesis*. In fact the similarities to the depiction in the 14th-century frescoes at Dečani in Serbia (Fig. 10) are close enough to suggest affiliation through a common model, with the composition reversed as usual in the San Paolo version.⁴⁰ As was true for the scene of Paul's Conversion, the architectural background in this panel is one identified by White as pointing to Cavallini's emerging personal style.⁴¹ This, combined with the byzantinizing iconography, points to a 13th-century origin for this scene as well. We know that an extensive middle-Byzantine cycle of

39 E.g., in the Utrecht Psalter, fol. 85v; see S. Dufrenne, *Les Illustrations du psautier d'Utrecht* (Paris, n.d.), 142-43, pls. 90, 10.

40 V.R. Petkovitch, *Dečani*, Monumenta Serbica Artis Mediaevalis, II (Belgrade, 1941); Eelen (note 3), 35.

41 White, 86.

Acts illustrations was imported into Italy in the 11th century, and Cavallini evidently was able to make use of this repertoire of subjects, as he did elsewhere of Byzantine models for christological subjects.⁴²

A third iconographic motif also points to ancient usage. In the three or more representations of baptism in the frescoes,⁴³ the rite is shown as if taking place in the living water of a stream. Such an image of baptism in natural surroundings is characteristic of the Early Christian period,⁴⁴ whereas in the later Middle Ages, most baptisms, except those of Christ or of the few individuals described in Scripture as having been baptised in natural water, are shown as taking place in fonts.⁴⁵

One of the scenes identified as a depiction of baptism in the frescoes is that of Paul by Ananias (Fig. 11), in fragmentary condition when the cycle was copied, but with a surviving figure composition obviously suited to a baptism in natural surroundings. In contrast, the inevitable representation of this subject in the Middle Ages can be seen in an Italian New Testament manuscript of the 13th century (Fig. 12), with Paul crammed uncomfortably into a chalice-shaped font.⁴⁶ When complete, the scene in the fresco must have looked more like the depiction of a later episode from Acts, in which Paul baptises the family of a jailer (Fig. 13). Like the scene of Paul being beaten by the Jews, the depictions of baptism in the San Paolo frescoes suggest an origin in the Early Christian period, rather than the Middle Ages.

The term 'origin in the Early Christian period' needs some clarification. I am suggesting that a selection of the scenes in the San Paolo frescoes, including two discussed in this article, survived from the period of their creation in the 5th century and were closely copied or even left more or less intact during the 13th-century restoration. In contrast to these, other episodes were replaced during this campaign by similar subjects couched in more contemporary imagery, while yet other pictures were newly invented to fill spaces on the wall where the originals had disappeared completely.

Careful examination of the later copies, therefore, enables us to identify the date of origin of some of these images, and to establish that the 13th-century workshop of restorers used remains of an Early Christian cycle of the life of Paul as the starting point of their efforts.

42 For Cavallini's use of Byzantine iconography, see Hetherington 15-20; for the relation between the Byzantine and Italian Acts cycles, see Eleen (note 33).

43 The Baptism of Paul, Acts 9:18, Barb. lat. 4406, fol. 93; Baptism of the Jailer's Family, Acts 16:33, fol. 119; the Baptism (Cure) of Publius, Acts 28:8, fol. 106.

44 J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1903), 259-61, pls. 39, 57-58; 73, s.v. 'Die Taufe eines Katakumbenen.'

45 *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. E. Kirschbaum et al., iv (1972), 244-47, s.v. 'Taufe, Taufszenen.'

46 Bibl. Vat., cod. Vat. lat. 39, fol. 92; Eleen (note 3), 32-33, figs. 11-12, 158-60.