
SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Carcharoles megalodon* (Agassiz) (Lamnidae: Neoselachae): A historical note.*Carmel Galea Bonavia¹**

The Natural History Museum (London) owes its origins to Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), a cultured English doctor and an avid collector. At his death he bequeathed his collections to the nation. These formed the nucleus of what would eventually become the Natural History Museum (London), the British Museum and the British Library (Anderson 1997; see also online at [http://: www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk)).

When examining the Maltese specimens of teeth of *Carcharocles megalodon* (Agassiz) held in that Museum, I came across several (e.g. 995, 997, 1073, 1279) labelled as belonging to the "Sloane Collection". These particular specimens formed part of the original collections of Sir Hans Sloane and are thus amongst the "oldest" Maltese fossils held in that Museum.

This is not unexpected. Maltese fossil shark teeth, known as "Saint Paul's tongues" were renowned all over Europe for their supposed efficacy as antidotes to poisons (see Zammit Maempel 1989 and references therein). It is certain that Sir Hans Sloane knew about them and had some interest in them, as there is an Italian manuscript, also forming part of the Sloane Collection, in the British Library, arguing for the miraculous nature of Maltese fossils (Zammit-Maempel 1989). It is equally certain that Sir Hans Sloane would have wanted to obtain some examples of these wondrous "tongues" for his collection-which he obviously did.

"Saint Paul's tongues" refers not only to the teeth of *Carcharocles megalodon* (Agassiz) but also to the teeth of other fossil sharks. Furthermore other fossils are associated with Saint Paul, such as "serpent's eyes" (the petrified eyes of the poisonous snakes cursed by Saint Paul) not to mention bits and pieces of his anatomy such as his nipples and his "stick" (see Zammit-Maempel 1989). It would be interesting to find out if there are other fossils associated with Saint Paul in the "Sloane" collection and, particularly from a historical aspect, elucidate how these teeth and other fossils, if any, came to be part of the Sloane Collection.

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