



# RELIGION ON MALTA STAMPS

## Part I

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*Several Malta stamps have subjects of religious significance. Shrines, paintings, statues, churches, memorials and monuments provide a subject of immense scope for thematic collectors. More than one hundred Malta stamps issued to date bear a religious theme. Mr. Anthony Fenech takes a closer look and reviews some of our stamps with a religious motif. (Ed.).*

### St. Paul

Malta issued her first postage stamp on December 1st, 1860. It was a simple design showing the head of Queen Victoria enclosed in an octagonal frame bordered by a regular pattern of leaves. During the centenary year of the first Malta stamps, in 1960, the Malta Post Office issued two commemorative sets — one, a set of three stamps marking Malta's stamp centenary, and the other, a set of six magnificent stamps, ably designed by Chev. Emvin Cremona, commemorating the Nineteenth Centenary of St. Paul's Shipwreck, when the Maltese received the message of Christianity.



In fact, no less than nineteen stamps so far released by the Malta Post Office depict St. Paul and his Shipwreck on the Island. Among them we find reproductions of some of the fine paintings on the ceiling of St. Paul's Shipwreck Church in Valletta, by the Italian artist, Attilio Palombi (1860-1912). One, reproduced on the 1½d stamp of the Centenary Issue, showed the Saint, helping the shipwrecked mariners shore.<sup>(1)</sup> A different treatment of the same scene was used on the 10/- of 1899, 1919 and 1922 which also depicted the sinking ship in the background. The wooden statue, sculptured by Melchior Gafà, in 1657, and venerated at the same church of St. Paul Shipwrecked, in Valletta, is featured on six 10/- stamps in the definitive series of 1926, 1928, 1930, 1938, 1948 and 1956. The three diamond shaped stamps in the 1960 commemoratives show respectively the statue of St. Paul at St. Paul's Grotto annexed to the Rabat Parish Church; an angel with the Acts of the Apostles, in which is to be read in gold letters, "We must come unto a certain Island" (27,25) and "the island was called Melita" (28,1); and the highest denomination, the 2/6 blue-green, which also exists with gold omitted, showing St. Paul holding the Second Epistle to the Corinthians in which he wrote, "I have suffered shipwreck in Christ's name" (Ch. 12).

The £1 definitive stamp of the 1965 series, perhaps the most impressive of the whole set, depicts the patron saints of Malta—St. Publius (nominated by St. Paul as the first Bishop of the Maltese Islands), St. Paul and St. Agatha, standing together in solemn dignity. The three saints appear together on the inside of the main entrance to Mdina. The statue of St. Publius venerated in the Floriana Parish Church is shown on the 1/6 issues of 1926, 1928, 1930, 1938 and 1948 definitives. St. Luke, with St. Luke's Hospital in the background, is depicted on the 6d stamp of the Catholic Doctors' Congress set of 1964.

## Monuments and Statues

Sciortino's monument to Christ the King erected during the Eucharistic Congress of 1913 in the Miglio Gardens, Floriana, and the marble masterpiece by Mazzuoli, representing the Baptism of Christ which is found behind the main altar in St. John's Co-Cathedral are featured on the 2/- and £1 stamps respectively of the 1956 definitives. The 1967 stamp commemorating the third centenary of the death of Gafà feature the statue of St. Catherine of Siena

found in the Magna-

napoli, Rome; St.

Thomas of Villanova,

found in St. Augustine's

Church, Rome; and

Christ receiving Bapt-

ism from St. John the

Baptist, found as one

bozzetto at the Żejtun

Parish Church.<sup>(2)</sup>



St. Pius V is featured on the 3d stamp in the series commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the Foundation of Valletta issued in 1966. It was Pope Pius V who, as his predecessor Pius IV, had given his whole hearted support and help to the Grand Master in the building of Valletta on the peninsula known as Shebb-er-rass — “the light of the headland”.<sup>(3)</sup>

On the 28th June, 1967 these stamps commemorating the nineteenth century of the Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul were issued. The 2d value shows St. Peter being crucified head downwards, whilst the 3/- value illustrates the beheading of St. Paul. The coronation of St. Joseph as Patron Saint of the Universal Church was commemorated by two stamps issued on the 24th July, 1967. The stamps are reproductions from a painting by Giuseppe Cali, a Maltese artist, found in Qala Parish Church, Gozo.

## Religious Art



Religious Art is portrayed on some stamps issued by the Malta Post Office. The 1/3 value of the 1965 definitive series shows two angels and a source of light symbolizing the 24th International Eucharistic Congress held in Malta in 1913.

A set of eight stamps was issued in 1970, commemorating the XIIth Art Exhibition of the Council of Europe held at St. John's Co-Cathedral. Among the designs, we find a reproduction of Caravaggio's famous "Beheading of St. John the Baptist", found in St. John's Co-Cathedral; another reproduction of Preti's "The Baptist Clad in the Habit of the Order" found at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta; a reproduction of an allegorical painting showing the three functions of the Order, found at the National Museum; Caravaggio's "St. Jerome" found in St. John's Co-Cathedral; and Favray's "Brother Gerard receiving Godfrey de Bouillon".

The 5c value of the Europa 1974 series illustrates the silver monstrance attributed to Bernini and found in St. John's Museum and representative of the Baroque period.<sup>(4)</sup> Reproductions of de Mura's (1696-1782) "Allegory of Malta" and "Judith and Holofernes" by Valentine de Boulogne (1591-1632) were the two stamps issued in the 1975 Europa set. The theme was Art.

The Malta Post Office has devised four sets in the series dedicated to the Flemish Tapestries of St. John's Co-Cathedral. The sets have been scheduled to appear between 1977-1980. The first four stamps making up the first issue, released on March 30th, 1977 were Rubens': "The Annunciation", "The Four Evangelists", "The Nativity" and "The Adoration of the Magi". The second set in the series were issued on January 26th, last year, and again featured Rubens' "The Entry into Jerusalem", "The Last Supper", "The Raising of the Cross" and "The Resurrection". Two other sets in the series are scheduled for 1979 and 1980.

### REFERENCES:

- (1) and (3) "Malta — The Story of Malta and her Stamps" by James A. Mackay.
- (2) and (4) "Said Malta Stamp Catalogue — 1978" (Glossary of Illustrations).