



# *The Tales of St. Paul*

*The paintings of Compagnia's old oratory  
in the Intesa Sanpaolo collections*

 Compagnia  
di San Paolo

INTESA  SANPAOLO



# The Compagnia di San Paolo

## The Brotherhood of the Catholic Faith

The *Compagnia della Fede Cattolica* (Brotherhood of the Catholic Faith) named after St. Paul was founded by seven citizens of Turin (the newly-appointed capital of the Savoy Duchy) on 25th January 1563. Its goal was to help the population after long years of French occupation had left it impoverished and to support Catholicism throughout the anti-Protestant campaign, according to sovereign religious policy. Already in its first century of activity *Compagnia* acted on many levels. On a religious level it promoted the cults of the Eucharist and the Virgin; on a charitable level it distributed economic aid to the needy and downfallen bourgeois, as well as alms to beggars and dowries to poor girls through the *Ufficio pio* (Pious Office). It also managed the *Monte di pietà* (Mount of Piety), which freely lent money under guarantee, and the *Casa del soccorso* (House of Help), which housed destitute young women. On an educational level it financed the *Collegio dei nobili* (Boarding School for Noblemen), which educated the wealthy class and the *Albergo di virtù* (House of Virtue), which integrated beggars into the silk industry. There was a tight link between *Compagnia* and the Municipality of Turin, from which mayors of the city were often chosen. Thanks to this role and inheritances from Piedmontese families, *Compagnia* also became the city's main financial institution and was able to handle the public debt of the State of Savoy from 1653 to 1730.

### Patrons of the Arts

*Compagnia's* artistic patronage was always of the highest standard. In addition to the paintings of the Oratory, it is worth remembering the altarpiece by the great late-mannerist painter **Federico Zuccari** (member of *Compagnia di San Paolo* from 1605 and at the time active in Turin in the Great Gallery of Duke Charles Emmanuel I), in St. Paul's Chapel in the church of the Holy Martyrs in Turin. *Compagnia* also appointed the court scholar Emanuele Tesauero, Baroque author of European fame, to write *'Istoria della Venerabilissima Compagnia della Fede Cattolica, sotto l'invocazione di San Paolo, nell'augusta città di Torino'*, published in 1657.

### The History of *Istituto San Paolo*

A royal decree in 1853 allowed *Compagnia* to continue with religious practices while charitable and credit-related activities were assigned to the newly-formed **Opere Pie di San Paolo** (Pious Works of St. Paul), which in 1932 became a public law credit institution, the future **Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino**. Privatisation in 1991 meant banking activities and artistic works were transferred to **Sanpaolo S.p.A.** (which became Sanpaolo IMI in 1998 then **Intesa Sanpaolo** group in 2007), while the original institution, now a nonprofit entity, took on the old name *Compagnia di San Paolo* and preserved the historical archives.

### *Compagnia* today

One of the most important foundations in Europe, **Compagnia di San Paolo** currently pursues goals of public interest and social usefulness to foster civil, cultural and economic development in the communities it operates in. It is active in the Intervention Areas of Research and Health, Art, Cultural Activities and Heritage, Cultural Innovation, Social Policies, Philanthropy and Territory.





# The Painting Cycle of the St. Paul Oratory

## The Old Oratory

The old Oratory for the private cult of the Compagnia di San Paolo, which opened in Turin in 1578 in the block of the Church of the Holy Martyrs, was adorned by the late-mannerist altarpiece depicting the Conversion of St. Paul (1580) by Alessandro Ardente from Faenza.

## Tesauro and his Project

In 1663, to mark *Compagnia's* centennial the court scholar Emanuele Tesauro was entrusted with the iconography project of a new decorative cycle for the Oratory consisting of -in addition to the altarpiece by Ardente- a series of ten large paintings, each with an inscription, depicting the life of St. Paul from conversion to martyrdom, in a fascinating and theatrical story which also celebrated the activities of the Compagnia.

## The Painters

For such a grandiose project, the most successful painters from the Turinese scene were called upon: Charles Dauphin from Lorraine, who was among the most acclaimed court artists, the Piedmontese painters Giovanni Bartolomeo Caravoglia, member of Compagnia di San Paolo, creator of seven paintings for the Oratory (of which two have been lost) and Giovanni Francesco Sacchetti. Also included were the timely updates on new pictorial tendencies represented

by the Genoese **Pietro Paolo Raggi** and by **Andrea Pozzo** from Trento (creator of a work added in 1689 upon completion of the cycle, today lost). In 1686 the *Compagnia* decided to decorate every painting with the coat of arms of the respective brother patron. In the same period the inscriptions of Tesauro were repainted in elegant cartouches at the base of the paintings.

**The Cycle of the Oratory provides us with an exceptional overview of the protagonists of Piedmontese Baroque in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

Almost all were members of the *Compagnia di San Luca* (professional association of artists operating in Turin, started in 1652). Some, such as Dauphin and Caravoglia, worked in the most important Piedmontese pictorial challenges of that time, i.e. the *Palazzo Reale* and the *Palazzo di Città* of Turin and the *Reggia of Venaria Reale*, whose iconography projects were all created by Emanuele Tesauro.

### **The New Oratory**

In 1703 the painting cycle was transferred to the new Oratory in Via Monte di Pietà in Turin (which closed definitively in 1876), with a layout aimed at highlighting the importance of the families who commissioned the works rather than the chronological order of the stories of St. Paul. The inventories of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries further specify that the paintings had rich wooden frames (now lost), which were carved and gilded onto turquoise bases.

### **The Paintings after 1876**

After the closing of the Oratory in 1876, the painting cycle was deposited in the Archbishop's Palace of Turin. In the following decades three paintings disappeared. In 1963 *Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino* purchased the remaining paintings which were subsequently placed in its Turin offices in *piazza San Carlo* and *via Monte di Pietà*. Between 2010 and 2012 the cycle was restored upon commission by Intesa Sanpaolo and exhibited at the Reggia of Venaria Reale till 2015. In that year *Intesa Sanpaolo* gave *Compagnia di San Paolo* the paintings on a free loan so that they can be permanently exhibited in *piazza Bernini* premises.

The layout proposed here is inspired by the Tesauro iconography projects, offering an interpretation based on the chronological sequence of the stories about St. Paul.





## *The Restorations*

Between 2010 and 2012 the cycle was restored on initiative of Intesa Sanpaolo. Thanks to this intervention, carried out by the laboratories Centro Conservazione e Restauro di Venaria Reale (Venaria Reale Centre for Conservation and Restoration), the works were gathered and studied by a team of restorers, diagnosticians and art historians for the first time in over a century.

The diagnostic testing provided useful information on the painting techniques. Infrared technology, for example, revealed second thoughts in the composition of the works, noticeable in the face of one of the soldiers in the *Martirio dei santi Paolo e Pietro* (*Martyrdom of St. Paul and St. Peter*) by Giovanni Bartolomeo Caravaglia.

Another diagnostic technique used called false-colour infrared, combined with more in-depth analysis, showed that the brown colour we see today in the sky painted by Caravaglia in *San Paolo accompagna santa Tecla nella casa di Trifena* (*St. Paul Conducts St. Thecla into the House of Trifena*) was originally a blue pattern made using a pigment called smaltino, which changes over the centuries and takes on a greyish hue.

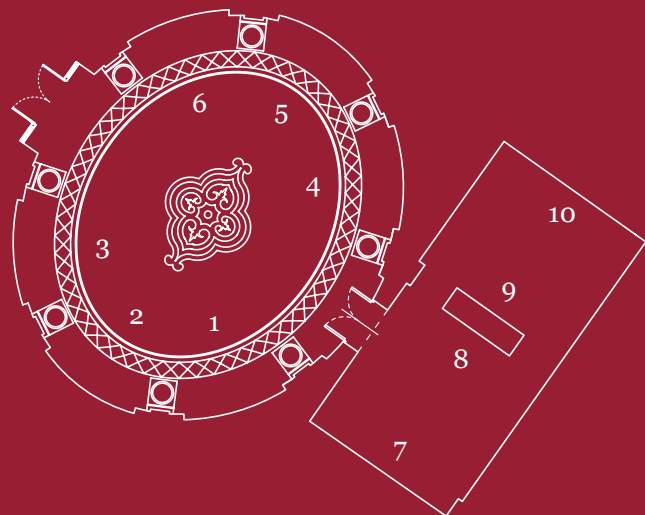
Thanks to multi-spectral analysis new discoveries were made, the painting by Francesco Sacchetti being an example: its cartouche was painted at a

later time, using a strip of canvas which was taken from the top edge of the painting. Radiographs have in fact shown that below the layers of paint there is a seam and a band with painted architectures following the decoration of the upper border.

Cleaning freed the paint surface from previously altered colour tones and additions, allowing a more uniform interpretation of the cycle and the recovery of brighter colours.

The restoration also brought to light portions of the paintings that had been folded back to fit the size of the frames in the Piazza San Carlo premises.





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## *The Paintings*





ALESSANDRO ARDENTE

Faenza, first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century - Turin 1595

## *Conversion of St. Paul*

1580, oil on canvas, 354x230 cm

Paul, Apostle to the Gentles, born in Tarsus (located in modern-day Turkey) in 5-8 A.D., was a Jew of Roman citizenship brought up in Jerusalem. A fervent persecutor of Christians, in 35 A.D. while traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians there, Christ showed himself to him. Paul, blinded by the light of divine vision, fell to the ground and converted to Christianity. Three days after, in Damascus, Christ sent Ananias to restore his sight (from *Acts of the Apostles*, 9:1-19).

This painting, which was placed on the altar of the Oratory in 1580, was commissioned by *Compagnia* to Ardeno, a painter and sculptor from Faenza employed by the Savoy Court. The picture is bustling with figures in shadows who are “chiselled” by the light. The canvas, which portrays the moment in which the Saint «was chosen by Christ to spread the Holy Creed throughout the world», became the starting point for a new cycle of paintings ordered by *Compagnia* in 1663, based on an iconographic project by the scholar Tesauo.



GIOVANNI BARTOLOMEO CARAVOGLIA  
Marentino circa 1615 - Turin 1691

## *St. Paul Conducts St. Thecla into the House of Trifena*

circa 1675-76, oil on canvas, 308x204 cm

*"Thecla, a virgin protomartyr converted by St. Paul, turns the house of Trifena into a holy refuge through her example and life together"*  
(from *De vita et miraculis sanctae Theclae* by Basilius of Seleucia).

Thecla's conversion to Christianity and her choice of chastity occurred during the preaching of St. Paul at Iconium (modern-day Konia, Turkey) in 47 A.D. In the painting, the Saint protects Thecla with a cross, guiding her away from her avid mother who was ready to yield her to the advances of a rich admirer, and leads her to the rich Trifena who, struck by her devotion, afterwards converts to Christianity.

The painting, which is one of Caravaglia's most sombre works, is reminiscent of the *Casa del soccorso delle vergini* (House of Help for Virgins), an organisation managed by *Compagnia di San Paolo* from 1595 for the protection of poor young women, guaranteeing them education and dowries for marriage. This painting was commissioned by the city councilman Ottavio Fontanella, whose family was connected to the *Casa del soccorso delle vergini* from the very beginning of its existence.



GIOVANNI BARTOLOMEO CARAVOGLIA  
Marentino circa 1615 - Turin 1691

### *St. Paul Taken to the Dying Virgin*

circa 1663-64, oil on canvas, 310x201 cm

*“Paul and his companions (the Apostles), reunited by divine will, pray for the dying Virgin”*  
(from the *Annales ecclesiastici* by Caesar Baronius, 48 A.D.).

This painting depicts St. Paul being miraculously flown by four angels to the house where the Virgin Mary is dying while she is aided by the Apostles and pious women. For Tesauro, St. Paul and the Apostles gathering to pray to the Madonna made up the “first Congregation of the Holy Virgin”.

The painting is contemporary with *St. Paul Carried Away to the Third Heaven* by Dauphin (exhibited here, no. 5), whose style influenced it. It celebrates the *Congregazione della Vergine Annunciata* (Congregation of the Virgin Annunciate), established by Compagnia di San Paolo to promote worship of the Virgin Mary in Turin which was rejected by Protestants. It was commissioned by the First President of State Finances Giorgio Turinetti, who directed the construction site of the *Reggia* of Venaria Reale together with Amedeo di Castellamonte from 1659 to 1663.



GIOVANNI BARTOLOMEO CARAVOGLIA  
Marentino circa 1615 - Turin 1691

## *St. Paul Celebrates the Eucharist*

circa 1676, oil on canvas, 315x196 cm

*“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood (of the Lord)”*  
(from the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 11:27).

This painting depicts St. Paul as a priest administering the sacrament of the Eucharist according to the rites of the Catholic Church when, during the prayer, the bread is converted into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The painting celebrates the “frequency of the Holy Sacraments”, one of the main activities carried out by the members of the St. Paul Brotherhood, who participated daily in the Sacrament of the Eucharist (substituted by a Holy Supper in Protestantism). In circa 1686 the painting, which was originally rectangular, was cut into an arch shape (the same change was made to the painting by Sacchetti, exhibited here, no. 6). The round-arched form highlighted the paintings in the Oratory dedicated to *Compagnia*’s two most important activities. It was donated by the wealthy banker Giuseppe Nicola Vittone.



CHARLES DAUPHIN

Metz circa 1625-28 - Turin 1678

## *Saint Paul Carried Away to the Third Heaven*

circa 1663-64, oil on canvas 308x204 cm

*“(He) was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter”.*

*(from the Second Letter to the Corinthians, 12:4).*

Saint Paul, raised to the heaven of God (which in the Bible is the third heaven, beyond the atmosphere and the stars) by angels, looks in the mirror mentioned in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* (3:18): «And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit».

The painting is a vortex of forms and colors, typical of the fiery manner of Dauphin from Lorraine. The sole mystical subject of the Oratory was given to Dauphin, whose paintings with religious themes were greatly appreciated in the most high-ranking devout milieus of Turin. It was commissioned by the Secretary of State and Finance Carlo Bianco, who was one of the backers of the first hydraulic spinning mill built in Turin, a machine which marked a change in the local silk industry.



GIOVANNI FRANCESCO SACCHETTI

Turin 1634 - 1681

## *St. Paul Distributes Alms*

circa 1671, oil on canvas, 316x201 cm

*"I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings"*  
(from the *Acts of the Apostles*, 24:17).

This painting shows St. Paul distributing alms in 57 A.D. in the region of Jerusalem, his adoptive city. He was arrested soon after by Roman soldiers in the temple of Jerusalem, saving him from the Jews who wrongly accused him of blasphemy. The words in the inscription were pronounced by Paul in Caesarea in front of the governor of Judea to defend himself from the accusations brought on by the Jews.

Sacchetti, who was trained in Rome close to the French Nicolas Poussin, was the most refined representative of Classicism in Turin. The painting celebrates "helping the poor and miserable", one of *Compagnia's* most important activities. Originally rectangular, it was cut into an arch shape in circa 1686 (together with *St. Paul Celebrates the Eucharist* by Caravaglia, exhibited here, no. 4), when a band of canvas was transferred from the top to the bottom edge to insert the new inscription (the old one is visible under the sword). *Compagnia* thus distinguished the two paintings in the Oratory which were dedicated to its main activities. It was donated by the city councilman Gaspare Francesco Carcagni, who became *Compagnia's* Grand Almoner in 1671.



PIETRO PAOLO RAGGI

Genoa circa 1627 - Bergamo 1711

## *Christ Appears to St. Paul in Prison*

circa 1672-74, oil on canvas, 313x205 cm

*“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”*  
(from the *Acts of the Apostles*, 23:11).

This inscription is now only partly visible (it continues on the fold of the canvas). The apparition came about the night following St. Paul's arrest in the temple of Jerusalem in 57 A.D. Subsequently, Paul declared that he was a “Roman citizen”, a privileged condition which enabled him to “appeal to Caesar”, ie: not be judged in the local courts but in Rome.

This painting was made by the Genoese painter Raggi at the height of his adherence to the style of his fellow Genoese Domenico Piola (who also designed the title pages of several books by Tesauro starting from 1670). It was donated by Marco Antonio and Tommaso Graneri, who were respectively the Major Almoner and Chief Squire of the Madame Royale Maria Giovanna Battista. When the inscriptions of Tesauro were repainted in cartouches at the base of each painting in circa 1686, it was not possible to do so with this painting for reasons of space.



GIOVANNI BARTOLOMEO CARAVOGLIA

Marentino circa 1615 - Turin 1691

## *St. Paul and St. Peter are Led to Martyrdom*

circa 1680, oil on canvas, 302x199 cm

*“Nero put Paul in chains because he had converted the concubine with whom (the Emperor) was madly in love”*

(from *Adversus vituperatores vitae monasticae* by John Chrysostom).

St. Paul was transferred to Rome in 60 A.D. to be judged by the Imperial Court, which acquitted him. He resumed to preach the Gospel, but was once again arrested during the time of Nero's anti-Christian persecutions. According to some sources, the Saints Paul and Peter were martyred the same day.

The painting is among the last works of Caravoglia. In a crowded scene, jailors with grotesque sneers rage against the two Saints (Peter is portrayed falling to the ground, at the bottom left).

The Catholic orthodoxy of the *Compagnia* is highlighted by the common fate that connects St. Paul to St. Peter, symbol of the Roman Church. The work was commissioned by Giovanni Battista Isnardi di Caraglio, Almoner of the Madame Royale Maria Giovanna Battista.





GIOVANNI BARTOLOMEO CARAVOGLIA  
Marentino circa 1615 - Turin 1691

## *Martyrdom of St. Paul and St. Peter*

circa 1671-72, oil on canvas, 329x202 cm

*“There three fountains of freshwater flow, which they say spouted for the first time when the decapitated head of Paul bounced miraculously three times due to the influence of the (divine) Spirit”*  
(from the *Annales ecclesiastici* by Caesar Baronius, 69 A.D.).

St. Paul was decapitated with a sword, a death penalty reserved for Roman citizens; St. Peter was assigned a much more painful death by crucifixion. The inscription alludes to the spot where St. Paul was killed in Rome, on which the Abbey of the Three Fountains was built.

This is a bustling choral painting made by Caravoglia at the same time as *Anania Gives St. Paul his Sight Back* (the painting has since been lost). The two paintings, which were the conclusion and start of the narration created by Tesauo in 1663 respectively, were prominent on either side of the altar. They were both donated by the city councilman Giovanni Francesco Bellezia, who held the role of First President of the Senate of Piedmont, head of the Magistracy of the Savoy State.



PAINTER ACTIVE FROM THE END OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

## *St. Paul*

end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century - beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, oil on canvas,  
162x115 cm

*“Through faith the saints conquered kingdoms, administered justice”*  
(from the *Letter to Hebrews*, 11:33).

St. Paul, seated in a wood, indicates a sentence which, in the *Letter to Hebrews*, comes after a list of Old Testament paragons of faith. He is accompanied by his traditional attributes, the sword and the book, which allude respectively to his martyrdom and Letters, an essential part of the New Testament.

In the 18th century above the entrance door to the Oratory of St. Paul, was a painting depicting «St. Paul seated with a book in his hand, with a smooth gilded frame», smaller than those of the cycle created by Tesauro. The subject and size are compatible with those of the work exhibited here, which in 1962 was purchased by the *Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino* from a Roman collection. However, it seems unlikely that the painting from the *Intesa Sanpaolo* collection is the one which belonged to the Oratory.

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