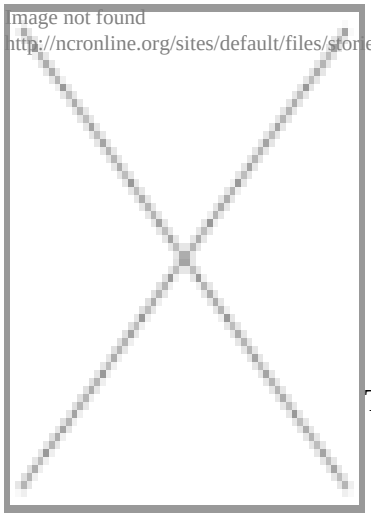
NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Tradition is pope's best protection

Dennis Coday | Jan. 7, 2010 NCR Today

I am not making this up.

Writing in this week's Catholic Herald, [1] the U.K. weekly, security expert Dominic Scarborough urges the Vatican "to draw on tradition to prevent a repeat of the Midnight Mass attack on Benedict XVI." He says that bringing back the *sedia gestatoria* would protect the pope. He means the pope should be carried around on a portable throne.



The Catholic Encyclopedia offers this description of the *sedia gestatoria*

> The Italian name of the portable papal throne used on certain solemn occasions in the pontifical ceremonies. It consists of a richly-adorned, silk-covered armchair, fastened on a *suppedaneum*, on each side of which are two gilded rings; through these rings pass the long rods with which twelve footmen (palafrenieri), in red uniforms, carry the throne on their shoulders. Two large fans (*flabella*) made of white feathers -- a relic of the ancient liturgical use of the flabellum, mentioned in the "Constitutiones Apostolicae", VIII, 12 -- are carried at the sides of the Sedia Gestatoria.

Scarborough writes:

> Popes always used to enter the basilica being carried shoulder high in the sedia gestatoria. Not only that, but there was always a throng of people around the chair, not only the actual bearers but numerous chamberlains and nobility and a large number of guards: Swiss Guards, uniformed Gendarmes, the Palatine Guard and Noble Guard. These comprised the old papal court which Pope Paul VI abolished and which formed a kind of buffer zone between the Pope and the crowds, no doubt as much a practical defence measure as a piece of ceremony. ...
>
> While there are bound to be some who would see the return of the sedia as yet another example of this Pope "turning the clock back", in fact not only would it save an elderly man's tired legs but it would allow

> more of the crowd to see him. Most importantly, it would actually insulate him from the kind of physical assault we saw at Christmas ...

Presumably, in Scarborough's security scenerio the *flabella* would be optional.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/26/2014 - 17:46*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/tradition-popes-best-protection

Links:
[1] http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/features/f0000514.shtml