

BOOK REVIEWS

Mario Carassai (ed.), with contributions by Antonio Conti, Vieri Favini and Alessandro Savorelli, and illustrations by Massimo Ghirardi. *Le Marche sugli scudi. Atlante storico degli stemmi comunali*. Fermo: Andrea Livi Editore, 2015. 246 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 88-7969-353-0. €40.



In a rare intersection between hagiography and heraldry, it is recounted that the civic arms of Sarnano in the Province of Macerata were designed by Saint Francis himself. Encountering deep discord among the citizens (it was the height of the Guelf/Ghibelline controversy) the saintly friar took a sheet of paper and, using the end of the cord that secured his habit, painted a seraph's head surrounded by wings. The emblem shone brightly and the citizens, setting their differences aside, adopted it as the sole charge on their communal shield.

This fascinating book is a lavishly illustrated guide to the municipal heraldry of the five provinces (Macerata among them) making up the modern Italian administrative region of the Marche. The name means 'marches' or 'borderlands', deriving from the area's frontier

THE COAT OF ARMS

position between Lombard and Byzantine, and subsequently Papal and Imperial, spheres of influence. Popular accounts of the region's character often seek to square a perceived cultural homogeneity with a political and social multiplicity reflected in this plural-form name. To the west of a coastal strip of varying breadth rise the central Apennines, dotted with small towns. Large urban centres are few: Ancona is the only one with more than 100,000 inhabitants; other sizable towns include Pesaro, Ascoli, Macerata and Fano. But other famous and once powerful places, such as Urbino or Recanati, remain much smaller. Politically, it is a centripetal region: in 2009 seven communes in Montefeltro, in the upper valley of the Marecchia river to the north of Urbino, voted to leave the Marche and join Emilia-Romagna. This is the only case in recent Italian history of a successful severance of this kind, and the Marche region challenged it in court, but to no avail.

As explained by several of the contributors to the book, this monocultural, plurifocal character dogs and undermines questions of identity – and identity symbols – throughout the region's history. Recurrent attempts to map the region onto ancient Picenum (often used as a classicizing label for the whole area on early modern cartography, and seriously considered as an alternative name in the 1930s) failed, but have left traces in popular consciousness and official armory: the woodpecker (*picus*) used as a symbol, and supposedly claimed as an ancestor, by the Picenes of Antiquity remains the central element in the decidedly unattractive logo of the modern region, as well as in the shield of the Province of Macerata. Ancient symbolism is also preserved in the provincial arms of Ancona, showing an embowed arm holding a strawberry branch; this is taken from reverse types of the Hellenistic coinage of the Syracusan colony of Ancona, being a reference to the *ankōn* or 'elbow' in the coast that gave the settlement its name.

Most of the actual coats of arms are pretty undistinguished. There are plenty of triple mounts (in that schematized, jelly-mould guise beloved of Italian heraldry), towers and castles in profile or perspective, individual saints doing their respective saintly things, displayed eagles left over from imperial times, and the occasional *chef d'Anjou*. The communes around the town of Jesi almost all use variations or developments of its arms, *Gules a lion rampant crowned or*. Examples of extreme landscape heraldry are found for Colbordolo (p. 79: a simplified view of the village), Civitanova Marche (p. 153: St Maron on the beach in front of the town) and Roccafluvione (p. 230: a view of the River Fluvione spanned by the Ponte Nativo). Seascapes are not wanting: Gabicce Mare (p. 73) offers a small sailing boat; Sirolo (p. 123) a lonely fish – said to be a sea bass – with a bank of cloud rising on the distant horizon. Many of these designs derive from non-heraldic or quasi-heraldic compositions: seals, vignettes on early modern frontispieces, figurative cartouches in churches or town halls, other architectural or monumental decoration. This of course is a standard origin for municipal heraldry everywhere.

Sometimes, however, deliberate intervention can be blamed. Pesaro (p. 71) is a sad case. The city once had simply *Quarterly argent and gules* (or *gules and argent*). Red and white are the fundamental (one might say foundational) colours of Italian municipal heraldry. But in 1574, as he lay dying, Guidobaldo II della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, granted the citizens a new shield that combined this simple design with his own canting family arms of an oak tree; for good measure the resulting hotch-potch also includes two pairs of clasped hands, a motto on a scroll in front of the tree, and an inscribed border recording the Duke's generosity in ruining a fine old piece of civic heraldry.

BOOK REVIEWS

Some bold and striking designs do remain. The town of San Ginesio (p. 183) has *Gules a squadra argent*, where the *squadra* is a right-angled piece formed by the bottom two thirds of a pale conjoined at its top to the sinister half of a slightly enhanced fess. (A similar charge was in arms granted a few years ago in England to a Mr Corner.) Fano (p. 105) has what might very loosely be blazoned *Per pale embattled argent and gules*; but since the vertical ‘crenellations’ are drawn so large as to allot only three dentils to each side of the shield it looks more like two interlocking monkey wrenches or – more heraldically – partially visible labels. The small town of Pioraco (p. 203) has *Gules a crayfish argent*. It is an excellent choice heraldically, and evidence for it seems to date back to the eighteenth century. But the authors suggest persuasively that it is really a misunderstanding of a schematic frontal view of the town’s patron, St Victorinus of Camerino, in his self-inflicted penitential position: arms raised and lashed to the branches of a tree that curve and arch down above and around him.

Another case of misinterpretation would seem to be the unofficial arms used by Montecalvo in Foglia (p. 68). Currently the shield has a white field with three mounts in base, behind which rises a red castellated wall, issuant from the sinister side of the shield and reaching halfway across it, though not stretching up to the top. This curious arrangement seems to derive from a simpler, older version: *Per pale argent and gules three mountains issuant in base or*. To this design, in 1933, was added the ‘lictorial chief’ imposed by the Regime on all municipal arms: a chief with the *fasces* of a Roman *lictor*. After the fall of Fascism, the whole chief might have been removed, but evidently in some cases only the *fasces* went, leaving a blank chief which was then read as conjoined to the *argent* dexter half of the field. Finally, the resulting red rectangle was interpreted as the wall of a square fortress or tower – the commune has more than one to offer – and accordingly ‘masoned’ and given crenellations.

A short essay at the front of the book by Mario Cassai and a longer one by Vieri Favini and Alessandro Savorelli add considerably to its utility and interest. Favini and Savorelli in particular do not stint on offering opinions, never to the disadvantage of the information they have to impart. For this reader, a representative of heraldic authority, it was entertaining and salutary to read their persuasive remarks on the baleful influence had on communal heraldry by the Consulta Araldica. Between 1896 and 1943 that official body attempted to resolve uncertainty and chaos in armorial matters by intervention and decree. Suffice it to say that it did not do so with the same inspiration, or the same success, as Saint Francis. The illustrations are excellent except for the maps.

Clive Cheesman
Richmond Herald

Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss (edd.) *A Companion to Chivalry*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2019. Hardcover. x+338 pp. 28 black and white and colour illustrations. ISBN 978-1-78327-372-0. £60.00.

More than most aspects of medieval life, the subject of chivalry continues to attract interest across a wide spectrum – from academic researchers and students, to amateur

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President

His Grace The Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal

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John Tunesi of Liongam

e-mail: honsecheraldrysociety@googlemail.com

Membership Secretary

Jane Tunesi of Liongam

e-mail: membership@theheraldrysociety.com

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