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Renaissance Heraldry

by

Jennifer Kathleen Mackenzie

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Albert Russell Ascoli, Chair

Professor Frank Bezner

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Summer 2017

Renaissance Heraldry

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Abstract

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Heraldry is well-defined and, almost by definition, a narrow subject; a “feudal language” with codified rules, attributes, and a history that in its broad strokes has been told many times. Originating in medieval Europe around the invention of full-body armor, the culture of jousting and tournaments, notions of heredity, strong corporate institutions, and the practice of genealogy, it was common throughout the so-called *ancien régime*. Its fortunes are widely thought to have declined in the Italian Renaissance because of its incompatibility with some of the very features that have characterized the Renaissance as a distinctive cultural configuration and revolution, including the rise of the humanism, the emergence of the individual, the emancipation of the artist, and the return to classical antiquity.

Renaissance Heraldry calls these theses into question with evidence of the vitality of heraldic forms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy; and with evidence that the definition and history of heraldry as we know them today are constructions of certain strands of Renaissance culture. This was tied to the humanists’ construction of the very concept of the Middle Ages. Our oblique point of entry into the subject is a popular fifteenth-century poet, who has been famously neglected in Italian literary history with respect to the scope of his accomplishments: Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441ca.-1495). Through Boiardo, we approach the subject also from one of the off-center centers of the peninsula’s pre-modern political geography, where Boiardo was born and where he operated: the Este states, with their capital at Ferrara, and their centuries-long tradition of “feudal” rule under a single dynasty.

Specifically, Boiardo’s romance epic, the *Inamoramento de Orlando* (1482/3, 1495), and the history of its Renaissance reception are used as occasions here to investigate the competing discourses that circulated around a whole gamut of images relating to identity, property, authority, and the law, both in the Este states and elsewhere on the peninsula. The words these images were called by, the attributes they were said to possess, their histories, meanings, and the protocols governing their use, were actively questioned and contested. The technologies that eventually became known as philology and antiquarianism shaped the answers, and the means of arriving at them, that we are most familiar with today; our “grammars of signs,” as I call them. However, the Este dynasty nourished a humanism that brought different resources to the task of responding to signs from the past. This dissertation is invested in studying these resources, and in bringing them to light as essential contributions to the humanist tradition in the broadest sense.

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Introduction

Between *Arma* and *Imprese*:

Sign Language and the Romance Epics from the Este States

Nel regno nostro è legie manifesta
Che chiunque porta scudo over cimero
D'un altro campion o d'altra giesta,
È disfamato con gran vitupero
E se non ha perdon, perde la testa.
Ben che 'l statuto sia crudel e fero,
Ché la pena è maggior che la falanza,
Pur è servata per antica usanza.

- Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Inamoramento de Orlando*¹

It makes a great difference which side one approaches a science or a branch of knowledge from;
which gate one enters.

– Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Theory of Colors*²

Matteo Maria Boiardo came from a family of feudatories, allies, and administrators to the Este of Ferrara, the first-established and longest-enduring seigniorial dynasty of the Italian peninsula.³ Born between 1440 and 1442, he inherited the relationships that most critically shaped his life. His castle at Scandiano was near the foothills of the Apennines, a few miles south-east of the city of Reggio.⁴ Today in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, it was then a part of the shifting

¹ *Inamoramento* I.xxix.31 (Trans. mine): “In our realm it is a manifest law that whomever wears a shield or crest of another champion or clan will be dishonored with great insult; and if he is not pardoned he will lose his head. Although the statute is fierce and cruel, since the punishment is greater than the crime, nevertheless it is applied as an ancient custom.” I use throughout this study the most recent critical edition of Boiardo’s *Inamoramento* edited by Tissoni Benvenuti and Montagnani (1999). One of its most important achievements is to have disclosed the poem in a “local” idiom closer to the one in which Boiardo had written it, and which had been virtually suppressed since the sixteenth-century editorial “reforms.” Because of this history, which is discussed within, the *Inamoramento* is the only text for which I do not provide English translations in the main text or in the notes except when it appears as an epigraph, as it does here. English readers can refer to the complete translation by Ross (1989), which is based however on a prior Italian critical edition of the poem by Scaglione (1963). Citations throughout this dissertation follow the Chicago Manual of Style with the important exception that all bibliographic notes are given in short form. Full bibliographic information for all works cited is provided in the Bibliography.

² Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, Einleitung, xlvii (Trans. Mine): “Denn es ist ein großer Unterschied, von welcher Seite man sich einem Wissen, einer Wissenschaft nähert, durch welche Pforte man herein kommt.”

³ Classic sources for Boiardo’s bibliography are Bertoni, *Novi studi su Matteo Maria Boiardo*; Reichenbach, *Un gentiluomo poeta del Quattrocento: Matteo Maria Boiardo*; and Ponte, *La personalità e l’opera del Boiardo*; to which we can now add Zanato, *Boiardo*.

⁴ On Boiardo’s social position, it is hard to resist remembering the wry remarks of John Keats as he compared the careers of English and Italian poets in his correspondence: “One of the great reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world is, that the English world has so ill-treated them during their lives and foster’d them after their deaths. They have in general been trampled aside into the bye paths of life and seen the festerings of Society. They have not been treated like the Raphaels of Italy. And where is the Englishman and Poet who has given

conglomerate of territories under the control of the Este house. Matteo Maria was born and spent the bulk of his life there at the head of the small county he inherited from his father, Giovanni Boiardo (d.1451).⁵ In the early 1400s, Giovanni's father and Matteo Maria's grandfather, Feltrino (d. 1456), had acquired it by helping the Este to regain their hold over the city of Reggio and over some territories along the south-western border of their holdings of which Scandiano was a part. As a gift and reward, he had received the feud from the reigning Marquis, Nicolò III. He subsequently sought out Filippo Maria Visconti, the Duke of Milan and an imperial vicar, to promote its status to that of a county. This provided the title and jurisdiction that allowed Matteo Maria, two generations later, to proudly maintain close and direct relations with his land, administering its laws and mediating between its inhabitants and their overlords, the Este.

Relations with the Este and with the largest cities of their dominions – Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio - provided the other major pole around which Boiardo's life revolved. His education began in Ferrara, the Este capital, under the tutelage of his grandfather Feltrino and his maternal uncle Tito Strozzi (1424-1505), the latter much renowned for his neo-Latin poetry. It was an atmosphere still influenced by Guarino da Verona (1374-1460), the first pedagogue to have developed a comprehensive “political culture of humanist stamp” around the Este dynasty.⁶ Boiardo's adult life thenceforth was punctuated by the same diplomatic ceremonies and events that punctuated the lives of the Este, his lords: the reception of Ippolita Sforza in 1465 as she passed through Ferrara on her way to marry Alfonso of Calabria; the arrival of the Emperor Frederick III in Ferrara in 1469; the trip to Rome in 1471 to accompany Borso as he received the Ducal title and jurisdiction over Ferrara from Paul II; the journey to Naples to accompany Eleonora d'Aragona back up the peninsula to meet her future husband, Ercole I d'Este, the new Duke of the Este states. During the 1480s, again following in his father's footsteps, Boiardo served as the *capitano* of the first and then the second of the principal cities in the Este dominions outside of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio.

Most significantly for present purposes, Boiardo produced one the most diverse, inventive, and famously understudied bodies of writing known to Italian literary history: neo-Latin bucolics, *carmina*, and epigrams; *volgarizzamenti* of classical and medieval prose; a *canzoniere* and bucolics in the vernacular; neo-classical plays; and the *Innamoramento de Orlando*, the so-called romance epic or chivalric epic for which he is principally known today.⁷ It was this poem that incited the author to use the medium of print for the first time in his career, experimenting with a still avant-garde technology, and correctly anticipating the enthusiasm with which his poem would be met.⁸ He entrusted its first two books, between 1482 and 1483, to a

a magnificent Entertainment at the christening of one of his Hero's Horses as Boyardo did? He had a Castle in the Appenine. He was a noble Poet of Romance, not a miserable and mighty Poet of the human Heart.” For this citation see Wilkins, “The Naming of Rodomont,” 599.

⁵ On the Boiardo family, feud, and their relations with the Este see Rombaldi, “Matteo Maria Boiardo feudatario,” 443-446; Rombaldi, “Lo stato estense e Matteo Maria Boiardo,” 549-606; and Montecchi, “Tre generazioni di feudatari a confronto: Feltrino, Matteo Maria e Giovanni Boiardo conti di Scandiano (1423-1523),” 515-548.

⁶ See Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 215-143, here 215 (Trans. mine): “Una cultura politica di matrice umanistica.”

⁷ Boiardo wrote the *Pastoralia*, *Carima in Herculem*, *Epigrammata*; translations of Cornelius Nepos, Xenophon, Riccobaldo, Herodotus, and Apuleius; the *Innamoramento de Orlando*; *Pastorale* or *Canzoniere*; *Orphei tragoedia*, *Timone*; and *Carte di triumpho*. On the latest series of critical editions of the complete works directed by the Centro Studi Matteo Maria Boiardo in Scandiano, see Anceschi, “Dieci anni dopo ...,” 19-58.

⁸ Despite, and some argue because of, its popularity, not a single exemplar has survived from either the first authorial edition of 1482/3 (containing Books I and II) or from the second “authorial” edition, in fact posthumous and prepared by Boiardo's heirs (Scandiano: Pellegrino de Pasquali, 1495). See Harris, *Bibliografia dell'Orlando Innamorato*, Vol.1, 13-28. Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, one of the continuations of Boiardo's poem,

local printer (whose identity is unknown) at either Reggio or Scandiano. Here they would have been printed on paper in all likelihood impressed with one of the many images associated with the Este house: the image of a carnation flower encircled within a diamond-studded ring.⁹ When Boiardo died in 1495, still composing the *Inamoramento*'s third book, he was alarmed at an unfolding event so surprising in its scale and potentially devastating in its effects that it was perceived by many of his contemporaries, arguably by Boiardo himself, and by generations of historians subsequently, as a veritable break in the fabric of history: the invasion of the Italian peninsula by Charles VIII of France.¹⁰ As the political and cultural landscapes of the Italian peninsula changed between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the mixed fortunes – or rather the misfortunes, as Carlo Dionisotti famously put it – of Boiardo's great poem began to take shape.¹¹

This dissertation is not exclusively or even primarily about Boiardo's life and work. Rather it analyzes three sets of relationships that shaped them and that have far broader significance: The relationship between feudal politics and humanist culture; between the discourses of the law and the exercise of imagination; and between local and (proto-)national identities, allegiances, and perspectives. Its topic is a range of images associated with identity, ownership, and authority; the shifting names these images were called by, including *arma* and *impresa*; and a selection of discourses which gave them meaning during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on the Italian peninsula.¹² Its entrance or gateway, as it were, into this topic is Boiardo's masterpiece, the *Inamoramento de Orlando*.

In this sprawling narrative poem, most characters - many already familiar to Boiardo's contemporaries, others new inventions on his part - present themselves to readers and to each other in full suits of armor. This is not in itself surprising; the characters are knights who inhabit the legendary "golden age" of the reign of Charlemagne, the famed Emperor and defender of Christendom.¹³ However, the armor becomes a complex narrative device in Boiardo's hands. It

subsequently became the most widely read and printed work of poetry or fiction in the Cinquecento, and certainly the most prominent cultural export of Este-patronized culture. See Ferroni, "Il modello ariostesco come emblema ferrarese," 483-503.

⁹ See Domenicali, "Il garofano e il diamante nelle *principes* emiliane dell'Orlando Innamorato," 489-500. As Domenicali explains, we have evidence that Boiardo's printer used paper made by a certain Antonio da Bagno for Sigismondo d'Este. Sigismondo, then lord of Reggio and the step-brother of Duke Borso d'Este, had been given an absolute monopoly over the production of paper in the Este states and regularly impressed it with this watermark.

¹⁰ Thus the famous final stanza of the *Inamoramento*, III.ix.26: "(Mentre che io canto, o Dio redemptore, / Vedo la Italia tutta a fiama e a foco / Per questi Galli, che con gran valore / Vengono per disertar non sciò che loco; / Però vi lascio in questo vano amore / Di Fiordespina ardente a poco a poco. / Un'altra fiata, se mia fia concesso, / Raconterovi el tutto per espresso." See also Boiardo's letters about the arrival of French soldiers within the borders of his territories, in Monducci and Badini, eds., *Matteo Maria Boiardo: La vita nei documenti del suo tempo*, 345-410. The corpus of letters provides precious glimpses into Boiardo's activities as an administrator, ambassador, and *capitano* between Scandiano and other Este states.

¹¹ See Dionisotti, "Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo nel Cinquecento," 221-242, an essay that we return to in Chapter One.

¹² Throughout this study, I refer to the whole group of its subjects interchangeably as images and as "signs" (with the latter in quotation marks). I use more specific terms in italics (*insignia*, *arma*, *stemma*, *impresa*, *divisa*, *signa*, and so on) where appropriate to the authors, texts, and contexts under discussion. Modern theories of the sign, as distinct from the image, are not directly invoked here, but could be seen to emerge in part from the Renaissance histories we are investigating. See Potts, "Sign," 17-29, for an overview of the sign as a critical term and concept in the history of art.

¹³ For the *topos* of the golden age under Charlemagne, and its hoped-for return in contemporary times, see *Inamoramento* II.i.1-3, here 2: "Cossì nel tempo che virtù fioriva / Neli antiqui signor e cavalieri, / Con nui stava

not only hides the “bodies” it purportedly protects, but also it acts as a medium of images which indicate characters’ identities, inter-textual and family histories, intentions, and even desires in visual form.¹⁴ Various called *insegne*, *insigna*, *signa*, *divise*, and *armi*, these images are given elaborate storylines of their own through which continuities and breaks can be traced between the *Inamoramento*, the pre-texts it drew upon, and the continuations that drew upon it, including the most celebrated and sensitive continuation of Ludovico Ariosto, the *Orlando furioso* (1516, 1521, 1532). Lost, found, made, destroyed, fought over, traded, legislated, and mourned, these images or “signs” constitute a vivid visual and narrative register with which modern readers, accustomed to the canons of realism, and students of early modern literature, often accustomed to those of allegory, have typically little preparation to come to terms.

There are three fields of study that have shed light on this visual language from different directions: the study of heraldry; of imaginary heraldry; and of *impresa*. Heraldry studies touches on the *Inamoramento* insofar as there are “real” heraldic images, or coats of arms, represented there. The most prominent of these belongs to the poem’s dynastic hero, Rugiero. He is the progenitor of the Este dynasty, according to Boiardo’s story, and he acts as their ancestral link between an ancient genealogy, stretching back to the royal house of Troy, and the family’s living members around Boiardo and his public. Rugiero’s character dons the image of a white eagle on a field of blue throughout most of the poem, and the image itself is given a storyline of its own. It is heraldry studies that has uncovered how ubiquitous this was image was, in and beyond the Este states, in association with the dynasty’s identity, property, and power.¹⁵

“Imaginary heraldry” was established as a new area of heraldry studies by Michel Pastoureau in the late 1970s, initially in connection to his studies of the Old French cycles around Tristan, the Arthurian, and the Carolingian knights.¹⁶ Its premise was that coats of arms began to be attributed to “persons who never existed, or who existed before the time of heraldry’s appearance” contemporaneously with the appearance of “real” coats of arms, in twelfth-century Europe.¹⁷ Just as certain colors and figures became regularly used by individuals and their heirs, so too literary figures and their genealogies became attached to images. Imaginary heraldry, Pastoureau argued, was an ongoing “reflection and model of real heraldry,” and thus a rich area of historical and cultural inquiry.¹⁸ It has begun to be applied to Italian

Alegrezza e Cortesia; / E poi fogirno per strani sentieri. / Sì che un gran tempo smarirno la via, / Né dil più ritornar fèno pensieri. / Hor è il mal vento e qual verno compito / E torno il mondo di virtù fiorito.”

¹⁴ For the distinction between image, image-medium, and body, I am indebted throughout to Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, 9-36.

¹⁵ For a review of the Este “signs” still visible within and outside of their former territorial boundaries see Spaggiari and Trenti, *Gli Stemmi Estensi ed Austro-estensi: Profilo storico*, 1-22.

¹⁶ See Pastoureau, “Introduction à l’héraldique imaginaire (XIIe – XVIe siècle),” 261-315; and *Armorial des chevaliers de la Table Ronde: Etude sur l’héraldique imaginaire à la fin du Moyen Age*, esp.7-53. Other (related) approaches to the subject include Marchand, “L’Art héraldique d’après la littérature du Moyen Age. Les origines : La Chanson de Roland,” 37-43; and Brault, *Early Blazon: Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Heraldry*.

¹⁷ Pastoureau, “Introduction à l’héraldique imaginaire (XIIe – XVIe siècle),” 261 (Trans. mine): “L’héraldique imaginaire a pour objet l’étude des armoiries attribuées à des personnages n’ayant jamais existé ou ayant vécu a des époques antérieurs à l’apparition des armoiries.”

¹⁸ Pastoureau, *Armorial des chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, 22 (Trans. mine): “L’héraldique imaginaire est à la fois le reflet et le modelé de l’héraldique véritable. Elle souligne les liens étroits qui au Moyen Age existent entre la réalité et la fiction et elle confirme combine l’historien, comme le sociologue ou l’anthropologue, ne doit jamais oppose l’imaginer a la réalité” [Imaginary heraldry is at the same time the reflection and the model of real heraldry. It underlines the close connection that in the Middle Ages existed between reality and fiction, and it confirms how the historian, like the sociologist or anthropologist, must never oppose imagination and reality].

literature in recent years, including the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto, which were after all products of longstanding and profound engagements in northern Italy, and in the Este states particularly, with medieval French language, literature, and culture.¹⁹

Imprese are more familiar to students of the Italian Renaissance. They are very much associated with a group of treatises and dialogues written on the peninsula in the second half of the sixteenth-century, beginning with the *Dialogo dell'impresa militari e amoroze* (1551, 1555) of Paolo Giovio.²⁰ The authors of these texts were trained in the *studia humanitatis* and/or in law; many participated in or had founded academies; and many were involved in the flourishing printing industry as editors, translators, and commentators.²¹ The treatises themselves deal with a range of visual languages or “signs,” which they called by a variety of different names in the Italian vernacular such as *armi*, *emblem*, *divise*, *cifre*, *livree*, *ieroglifici*, and others.²² Their preferred type of “sign” and principal focus was almost invariably the *impresa*, in relation to which they generated several competing definitions, practical pieces of advice, and historical accounts.²³ Collectively, their formulations of the properties and rules of “signs” did a great deal to interpret for contemporaries, and for subsequent generations in turn, much of the imagery that had been used already for many decades by Italy’s ruling powers, including the Este, and especially in the decoration of their courts, across visual and verbal media.²⁴ Several of these so-called *impresa* treatises also discussed the “signs” in Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* specifically, a text enjoying unprecedented levels of popularity in the late Cinquecento and just then being canonized as an Italian classic.²⁵ These discussions have encouraged scholars since the beginning

¹⁹ See Rinaldi, “Stemmi di Parole. Araldica e letteratura,” 9-25.

²⁰ Overviews of this group of texts include Caldwell, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Impresa in Theory and Practice*, 3-61; Manning, *The Emblem*, 37-79; and Arbizzoni, “*Imprese* as Emblems: the European Reputation of an ‘Italian’ Genre,” 1-32.

²¹ Caldwell, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Impresa in Theory and Practice*, attends to these authors and their biographies more than most secondary sources. Besides Paolo Giovio (1483-1552), they include Girolamo Ruscelli (1518-1566), Ludovico Domenichi (1515-1564), Ludovico Dolce (1508-1586), Scipione Ammirato (1531-1601), Scipione Bargagli (1540-1612), Luca Contile (1505-1574), Bartolomeo Taegio (1520-1573), Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), and others. More work still needs to be done on how the “sign” treatises were related to the other kinds of activities that their authors engaged in.

²² A useful compendium is the treatise by Luca Contile, the *Ragionamento di Luca Contile sopra le proprietà delle imprese con le particolari degli Accademici de gli Affidati et con le interpretazioni et croniche* (Pavia: 1574), to which we will return. This is divided into ten chapters, respectively treating *insegne*, *armi delle famiglie*, *divise*, *livree*, *foggie*, *emblem*, *riversi delle medaglie*, *cifre*, *hieroglifici*, and *impres*.

²³ For a standard modern definition of the *impresa* see Praz, “*Impresa*,” 938 (Trans. mine): “Rappresentazione simbolica d’un proposito, d’un desiderio, d’una linea di condotta – ciò che si vuole imprendere, intraprendere – per mezzo di un motto e d’una figura che vicendevolmente s’interpretano” [The symbolic representation of a proposition, desire, line of conduct – that which one wants to take up, pursue – by means of a *motto* and a figure that mutually interpret one another].

²⁴ For the Este context, studies include Torboli, *Il duca Borso d’Este e la politica delle immagini nella Ferrara del Quattrocento*; Torboli, *Diamante! Curiosità araldiche nell’arte estense del Quattrocento*; and Galvani, “La rappresentazione del potere nell’età di Borso d’Este: ‘impres’ e simboli alla Corte di Ferrara” (PhD Thesis, Università degli Studi di Ferrara). For a wider scope, see Boulton, “Insignia of Power: The Use of Heraldic and Para-heraldic Devices by Italian Princes, c.1350-c.1500,” 103-128. See also Slater, “Tampering with Signs of Power: Juan de Palafox, Historiography, and the Limits of Heraldry,” 113-133, an article which shows how the evidence of “heraldic” practice can exceed the limits that have defined the form, without however calling those limits into question.

²⁵ On the canonization of Ariosto in the Cinquecento, see especially Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando furioso*. Chapter One discusses two figures critical to both the canonization of Boiardo and Ariosto, and to the development of the *impresa* and the “sign” treatise as genres: Ruscelli and Domenichi.

of the twentieth century to consider Ferrara's celebrated Romance Epics as expressions of the visual-symbolic currencies typical of Italy's flourishing Renaissance courts.²⁶

None of these perspectives – from heraldry, imaginary heraldry, or the *impresa* – offer a truly comprehensive lens for reading the poems in question, however. Our most recent study of Este heraldry is *Gli Stemmi Estensi ed Austro-estensi: Profilo storico* (1985) by Angelo Spaggiari and Giuseppe Trenti, formerly the head archivists of the Archivio di Stato in Modena. This was produced in the context of a revival of interest into the heraldic traditions of premodern Italy. It involved a push to consolidate the great variety and number of archival sources on the subject, and to give studies of Italian heraldry the same sound scholarly basis that was perceived to have already been achieved elsewhere in Europe.²⁷ A recurring theme was the need to lay to rest the seemingly persistent and pernicious associations in Italy between heraldic research and noble pretensions; to distinguish the vainglorious inventions of “baroque” genealogists from disinterested scholarship whose sources could be trusted.²⁸ One of the consequences of these

²⁶ The readings of Ariosto's poem that developed within the Cinquecento *imprese* treatises were first discussed by Salza in “Imprese e divise d'arme e d'amore nell'*Orlando furioso*,” 310-363; and “La letteratura delle ‘imprese’ e la fortuna di esse nel ‘500,” 205-252. Scholarship that has continued to consider Ariosto's poem in the light of the *imprese* treatises includes Nova, “*Dialogo dell'imprese*: La storia editoriale e le immagini,” 73-86; Bregoli Russo, “Boiardo, Ariosto e le *imprese*,” 188-200; Baldassari, “Tradizione cavalleresca e trattatistica sulle imprese: Interferenze, uso sociale, e problemi di committenza,” 61-76; and Bigi, “Imprese, blasoni, emblemi nell'*Orlando furioso*,” 9-21. Parallel efforts to read early modern literary texts in relation to the treatises on “signs” have been carried out with attention to emblems. See especially Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*.

²⁷ An early and ambitious publication that came out of these efforts was Bascapè and del Piazzo, *Insegne e simboli: araldica pubblica e privata, medievale e moderna* (1983, 1999), here iii (Trans. mine): “Quando nel 1983 *Insegne e simboli. Araldica pubblica e privata, medievale e moderna* venne stampato nelle Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato, l'intento degli Autori e dell'Amministrazione archivistica italiana fu quello di dotare archivisti e studiosi di uno strumento che riconducesse l'araldica nel suo alveo naturale di scienza del simbolo, mostrandone potenzialità di scienza ausiliaria della storia e liberandola dalla nozione di disciplina per cultori di vanità nobiliari” [When in 1983 *Insegne e simboli. Araldica pubblica e privata, medievale e moderna* was printed by the Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, the intention of the authors and of the administration of the Italian archives was to provide archivists and scholars with a resource to return heraldry to its natural state as a science of the symbol, revealing its potentialities as an auxiliary science of history and freeing it from its title as a discipline for seekers of noble vanities]. Subsequent major contributions to Italian heraldry studies include *Araldica. Fonti e metodi. Atti e del convegno internazionale (Campiglia Marittima, 6-8 marzo 1987)*; Savorelli, *Piero della Francesca e l'ultima crociata: Araldica, storia e arte tra gotico e Rinascimento*; Dionigi, Cambareri and Gentilini, eds., *Stemmi robbiani in Italia e nel mondo: per un catalogo araldico, storico, ed artistico*; and Ferrari, ed., *L'arme segreta: Araldica e storia dell'arte nel Medioevo (secoli XIII-XV)*.

²⁸ See Papi, “L'araldica fiorentina nell'età comunale: un problema da definire,” 26 (Trans. mine): “La distanza che separa, nel campo della ricerca araldica, l'Italia del resto d'Europa, dove condizioni istituzionali, politiche e culturali, hanno presieduto da una parte ad una migliore – o quantomeno più centralizzata – sistematizzazione del materiale e dall'altra, di conseguenza, hanno favorito una più forte attenzione storiografica su questa difficile fonte, è nota. Ed è anche bene ricordare che l'*unicum* rappresentato dall'Italia nell'Europa, da una Italia cioè tradizionalmente intesa come terra di città e di particolarismi civici, è proprio una delle cause storiche sia della complicazione sia della dispersione degli studi araldici, che si sono spesso smarriti negli itinerari di ricostruzione, quando non di invenzione, di genealogisti non meno fantasiosi che eruditi” [Well known is the distance that separates Italy, in the field of heraldry research, from the rest of Europe, where institutional, political, and cultural institutions presided over a better – or at least more centralized – systematization of the material and, in consequence, favored a stronger historiographical attention towards this difficult source. We do well to remember the *unicum* Italy represents within Europe; an Italy traditionally understood, that is, as a land of cities, and of civic particularisms, which is precisely one of the historical reasons both for the complexity and for the dispersion of heraldry studies. These have often lost their way, moreover, in the reconstructed, if not entirely invented, itineraries performed by genealogists no less imaginative than erudite].

emphases was an increasing interest in the heraldry of the republican communes.²⁹ Another was a strong bias in favor of archival, and therefore often legal, sources over other kinds of “artistic” documentation.³⁰ Spaggiari and Trenti followed these principles in their study of Este heraldry, which had a significant impact on their results.

Three documents from the Este Archive in Modena constitute the core of their historical profile of Este heraldry. All three date from the fifteenth century; and Spaggiari and Trenti argue that they, together, created the composite heraldic image that the rulers of the Este house regularly employed until 1780. The first dates from 1431 and is the record of an honorific concession made by Charles VII of France (1403-1461) in favor of the reigning Este Marquis, Nicolò (1383-1441), and his heirs in perpetuity. Its contents describe the privilege to combine or “quarter” the image of the triple *fleur-de-lys*, from the French royal house, with the image of the white eagle already associated with the house of Este. The original document is missing in the Este archives, but it was copied at the turn of the fifteenth century by one of the dynasty’s first official archivists, Pellegrino Prisciani (1435-1518).³¹ Prisciani claimed to have copied it, specifically, when he inserted its full text into his monumental history of Ferrara (*Historia Ferrariae*, 1505 ca.), in a chapter dedicated to the “sign, or insignia and arma which in past times had been used by the illustrious House of Este” [*Quo signo, sive quibus insignibus & armis priori etiam tempore illo gloriosissima Domus Estensis usa fuerit*].³²

²⁹ New work on the heraldry of the Italian communes includes Seiler, “Kommunale Heraldik und di Visibilität politischer Ordnung: Beobachtungen zu einem wenig beachteten Phänomen der Stadtästhetik von Florenz, 1250-1400,” 205-240; Savorelli, ed., *Gli stemmi dei comuni e delle province dell’Emilia Romagna*; Savorelli and Favini, *Segni di Toscana: Identità e territorio attraverso l’araldica dei comuni. Storia e invenzione grafica (secoli XIII-XVII)*; and Weber, *Zeichen der Ordnung und des Aufbruchs: Heraldische Symbolik in italienischen Stadtkommunen des Mittelalters*. See also Pastoureau, “Stratégies héraldiques et changements d’armoiries chez les magnats florentins du XIVE siècle,” 1241-1256; and Theseider, “Sugli stemmi delle città comunali italiane,” 311-349.

³⁰ See Ridolfini, “Presentazione,” in Bascapé and del Piazze, *Insegne e simboli*, xiv (Trans. Mine): “Mezzo fondamentale e indispensabile per lo studio dell’araldica è la documentazione archivistica. Non che la documentazione artistica esposta sui pubblici monumenti non abbia la sua importanza, tutt’altro: la larga messe di illustrazioni che quest’opera presenta ne dà solida attestazione; tuttavia la documentazione archivistica prevale in importanza perché da essa sola si possono trarre quelle garanzie di regolarità e di ufficialità che costituiscono le più valide basi su cui tale scienza si fonda: se, ad esempio, è importante per la scienza araldica la raffigurazione dello stemma di un antico ospedale riprodotta sul portale d’ingresso dell’edificio, ancora più importante e scientificamente più valida sarà la descrizione o, magari, il disegno stesso di detto stemma, riportati nel documento che contiene il privilegio dell’Autorità (imperiale, pontificia, civica, ecc.) che detto stemma o emblema conferi all’ospedale in questione” [The fundamental and indispensable means of studying heraldry is archival documentation. This is not to say that the artistic documentation on public monuments does not have an importance, as the large quantity of illustrations that this text presents here attests; Nevertheless, archival documentation prevails in importance because is from it alone that one can draw the kinds of guarantees of regularity and authority that constitute the most valid bases on which the science of heraldry is founded. If, for example, the coat of arms (*stemma*) of a hospital is reproduced on the entranceway of a building, the description or even depiction of that arms as reported in the document that contains the privilege of an authority (imperial, papal, civic, etc.) and that confers the arms or emblem will be even more important and more scientifically valid]. For another elaboration of this point see Bordone, “Storiografia, genealogia e araldica. Usi e abusi,” 505-514.

³¹ On Prisciani as an Este archivist and historian (among his many other roles at the Este court), see Rotondò, “Pellegrino Prisciani (1435 ca.-1518),” 69-110; Zanella, “Le ‘Historiae Ferrariensis’ di Pellegrino Prisciani,” 253-265; Donattini, “Confini contesi: Pellegrino Prisciani a Venezia (marzo 1485 – gennaio 1486),” 187-217; and Bezner, “Pellegrino Prisciani und die *Praxis* der *Historia*. Ferrareser Renaissance-Historiographie und ihr Kontext,” 353-388.

³² Prisciani, *Historia Ferrariae*, Book VII, ASMo, Mss. Biblioteca 98, 8v-11v, here 8v (Trans. mine). The concession was subsequently edited and printed for the first time by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in his *Antichità Estensi*, Vol.2, 195 (“Concessione fatta da Carlo VII. Re di Francia...”; Trans. mine): “Charles par la grace de Dieu

The second document is from 1452 and is one of the most prized legal records in the history of the Este archive. It is the diploma of concession from the Emperor Frederick III (1415-1493) to Borso d'Este raising the Imperial feuds of Modena and Reggio to the status of a Duchy, and the feud of Rovigo to the status of a County. These were territories which the Este included already within their dominions, but for which they received on this occasion the prestigious Ducal title for the first time.³³ Thus the diploma from the Imperial notaries:

As a gift of our favor and token of our liberality, with imperial authority we dispense, grant, and concede that you and your abovementioned heirs may carry and show these with your other arms [*vestris armis*] as the arms [*arma*] of the aforementioned new duchy of Modena and Reggio: the whole and complete black eagle crowned with a golden crown in a gold or yellow field, as quarters conjoined by a small shield in the middle of them, with a white eagle on a blue field; and as the arms of the county of Rovigo, a two-headed eagle divided longwise in half, black on a gold or yellow field for one half, and for the other half white on a blue field; just as they are depicted here in the present document clearly by the art of a painter.³⁴

Roy de France. Scavoir faisons a tous presents & advenir, que nous aians regart a haute Noblesse & Magnificenze du Lignage & Hostel, don't est yssu notre tres Cher & Amè Cousin le Marquis de Ferrare, & aux hautex & tres louables faitz de vaillance, grans entreprinses en armes, & autre honorable merites dignes de toute Noblesse, honneur, & louange, qui sont en sa personne ... Avons de nostre certaine science & deliberé propos eu sur ce advis, & meure deliberation avecq plusiers de nostre Sang & Lingage, & autres estans en notre grand Conseil octroyè & octroyons de grace especial, plaine puissance, & auctorité Royal ... que il, & ses hors yssus de sa chair, puissent, & leur loise avoir & porter doresnavant, & a tousiours en leurs Armes escarteleure de France. C'est a scavoir au premier & denier Quart d'icelles en champ trois Fleurs de Liz d'or en champ d'asur en dentele, ainsi & par la forme & maniere qu'il est icy pour traict figure, & armoye. Volans & octroyans, que de noz present grace & octroy Luy & les sciens, qui devront porter ces dictes Armes, ioissent & usent a tousiours perpetuellement, & les puissant porter, ainsi que cy dessus est dict par tout signe & armoye, sans ce que ores & ne pour le temps advenir leur soit en ce contredict ne obuié par quiqui ce soit en aulcune maniere" [Charles King of France by the grace of God. We make known to all present and to come that we have high regard for the nobility and magnificence of the lineage and house from which is issued our dear and beloved Cousin the Marquis of Ferrara; and for the high and commendable deeds of chivalry, the great enterprises in arms, and other honorable merits worthy of all that nobility, honor and praise, that are within his person ... On the basis of our wisdom and deliberation, and after more deliberation with many of our blood and lineage, and others of great counsel, we have decided, according to our special grace, fullness of power (*plaine puissance*) and Royal authority ... that he and his issue may have the right to bear henceforth and in perpetuity, on their arms (*en leurs Armes*), the quarters of France; that is, in the first and last quarter of these, three gold *Fleurs de Liz* on a field of blue *en dentele*, in the form and manner here portrayed and figured. We wish and concede, by our present grace, that he and his issue, who can bear the aforesaid arms, enjoy and use them, and are able to bear them, as they are here above described, as the full sign and arms (*signe & armoye*), without now or in times to come being contradicted or forgotten by anyone in any way].

³³ Obizzo d'Este was "elected" signore over Modena as early as 1288, while Reggio had been brought under Este control during the rule of Nicolò III, in the early 1400s. For an overview of the formation of the Este's dominions see Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 50-56.

³⁴ *Diploma of Frederick III, 1452*, ASMò, ASE, Casa e Stato, Ser. gen., membr., cass. 15, n. 31 (Trans. Mine): "De uberiori deinque dono gratie et liberalitate auctoritate cesarea ubi concedimus, indulgemus, largimur ut tu et heredes tui seponominati totam et integram aquilam nigram cum duobus capitibus et corona aurea coronatam in campo aureo sive croceo cum aliis vestris armis per quartierium coniunctam cum parvo scuto in medio eorum aquilam albam in campo flaveo habenti tamquam arma supranominati novi ducatus Mutine et Regii et unam aquilam bicipitem pro medietate ad longum nigram in campo aureo seu croceo et pro alia medietate albam in campo blauro sive azurrio tamquam arma comitatus Rodigii, prout hec in presentibus artificio pictoris clarius sunt depicta deferre et gestare possitis et valeatis."

The document created two image prototypes for the Este dynasty corresponding to their entitlements to the new Duchy of Modena and Reggio and the new County of Reggio. The description we have just read is part of the complete text of the diploma, containing its legal and financial terms. Visualizations of both images, in vibrant colors and gold leaf, are illuminated at the document's very center (Figure 1).

The third and last major source in Spaggiari and Trenti's historical profile is similar to second, in that it is a parallel concession by the Popes to the Este rulers; elevating the papal feud of Ferrara this time to Ducal status. Paul II was the first to make this concession to Borso in 1471 (during the trip to Rome at which Boiardo was present), and Sixtus IV confirmed it with Borso's successor, Ercole I, the following year. The first event produced no extant archival record, but the second did and it shows that the promotion once again generated a modification of the Este *arma* (Figure 2).³⁵ For centuries after 1472 – and even after Ferrara devolved to the Papacy in 1598, as the archivists point out – the *arma* of the Este rulers combined the figure of white eagle, the golden lilies from France, the two-headed black eagle from the Emperor, and the crossed keys from the Popes, which amounted to a composite image reflecting the family's most conspicuous international alliances and bonds contracted at the height, arguably, of their international power and prestige.³⁶

There is little overlap between this account of Este heraldry and the *Inamoramento*, notwithstanding their overlapping dates.³⁷ One of the reasons is that Spaggiari and Trenti's history sets out “to examine the first sure testimonies that have come down to us, and to leave behind every supposition that does not have a foundation of proof,” while Boiardo had no such constraints.³⁸ The *Inamoramento* is concerned with the history of the Este's white eagle, which is an image lacking a precise legal or documentary basis in the Este archive. The poem represents only the first of the three fifteenth-century versions of the Este *arma* that Spaggiari and Trenti catalogue, moreover, which is to say the conjunction of eagle with the French lilies. This image finds its way into the poem in the context of a prophecy to which Rugiero's character is privy, telling of the “future” achievements of Nicolò III d'Este at the head of Este house.³⁹ The 1452 and 1471/2 versions of the Este *arma* are absent from the poem, although Boiardo continued

³⁵ *Diploma of Sixtus IV 1472*, ASMo, ASE, Casa e Stato, Serie gen., membr., cass. 25, n.68.

³⁶ Spaggiari and Trenti, *Gli Stemmi Estensi ed Austro-estensi*, 49-60.

³⁷ Boiardo composed the *Inamoramento* between the 1460s, it is currently believed, and 1495. See Tissoni Benvenuti, “Introduzione,” xii-xxi.

³⁸ Spaggiari and Trenti, *Gli Stemmi Estensi ed Austro-estensi*, 23-24 (Trans. mine): “Ora, non essendo, come vedremo, noi in possesso di documenti d'alcun genere che possano soccorrerci nel nostro caso particolare anteriori alla seconda metà del secolo III, non ci resta che lasciare agli specialisti stessi l'onore di formulare soluzioni soddisfacenti, limitandoci a vedere intanto quanto in proposito hanno detto gli scrittori che hanno in qualche modo affrontato il tema delle origini dell'arma estense, per passare poi ad esaminare le prime testimonianze sicure che ci siano pervenute, tralasciando ogni supposizione che non abbia fondamento di prova; e in tal modo procedere nel nostro lavoro” [Now since we are not, as we will see, in possession of documents of any kind that can take us further back, in our particular case, than the second half of the thirteenth century, we are left to leave to specialists the task of formulating satisfying solutions and to limit ourselves to observing in the meantime what the writers who have treated the question have said about the origins of the Este *arma*; to pass onto examining the first sure testimonies that have come down to us, leaving behind every supposition that does not have a foundation of proof; and thus to proceed with our work]. The histories of Este heraldry consulted by Spaggiari and Trenti begin with the *Historia Ferrariae* of Prisciani and include the major prose histories produced subsequently by the Este court archivists, including the *Antichità Estensi* of Muratori.

³⁹ *Inamoramento* II.xxi.58: “Natura mostra fuor il suo thesoro: / Ecco il Marchese a cui vertù non manca! / Mondo beate e felici coloro / Che saran vivi a quella età si franca! / Al tempo di costui gli zigli d'oro / Saran coniunti a quella Aquila bianca / Che sta nel ciel, e saran sue confine / Il Fior d'Italia e doe bele marine.”

writing it until his death in 1495. When the *Inamoramento* is mentioned in *Gli Stemmi Estensi*, however, it is briefly cited along with other artistic exemplars, visual and verbal, of the *stemmi* whose histories have been left to the archive to disclose.⁴⁰ There is little indication of how this exceptionally imaginative and popular poem might have participated in the history of Este heraldry in more than a passive way.

“Imaginary heraldry” would seem to offer the more suitable framework for reading the poem’s language and narratives around “signs,” given these considerations; and yet here too there are drawbacks. These drawbacks come from the inextricable relationship, so I will argue elsewhere in this dissertation, between Boiardo’s stories about the Este “sign” of the eagle, on the one hand, and those about more obviously fictional images, on the other. There is also the matter of the poem’s marked interest in the laws of “signs,” or rather in the relationship between articulations of law and of images, even in some of its most blatantly imaginary scenes. It is difficult to discern a dividing line in Boiardo’s discourses around images, to put it differently, between reality and imagination.

The stanza from the *Inamoramento* that serves as the epigraph of this Introduction can illuminate this point, as it describes a “legie manifesta” or “manifest law” that prohibits individuals from donning images belonging to others on pain of death. Leading up to these lines, the poem’s titular hero Orlando has been performing a quest at the behest of his new object of desire, Angelica, the princess from Cathay for whom he has abandoned all his former allegiances and scruples. He has been interrupted in this quest outside the city of Batria (today in Afghanistan) by the sight of a beautiful woman named Origille, who is naked and hanging from a tree by her hair. He has noticed a collection of shields, helmets and crests lying scattered on the ground around her; and has begun listening to the knight standing guard at her side, recounting the story of her crime.

According to this story, the woman had convinced two of her suitors to substitute their real *insegne* for alternative ones in hopes that they would eliminate one another.⁴¹ Taking advantage of her brother’s recent murder, and of her father’s agreement with yet another man (Arriante) to avenge the boy’s death, she had instructed the one suitor to wear the signs of her brother’s killer and the other to wear those of Arriante. Instead of killing and being killed, however, all four knights ended up presenting themselves to Origille’s father at the same time: Her plot backfired and the “reason for the transmuted arms” was clearly uncovered: “Quivi la cosa fo tuta palese, / E la cagion del’arme tramutate” (II.xxix.30). When the whole party was brought before the King of Batria, each man was condemned to death: The one for murder; the second for agreeing to assassinate the first; and Origille’s two suitors for agreeing to bear the images or devices of others (“altrui divisa”).⁴² For the misappropriation of such images is a capital crime in the realm, as we are told finally, in the stanza I have highlighted:

Nel regno nostro è legie manifesta

⁴⁰ Spaggiari and Trenti, *Gli Stemmi Estensi ed Austro-estensi*, 21-22. In other words, the “artistic” exemplars of the Este images are here considered *variants* of the standard images created within the domain of the law and of the archive. On the overlooked status of the variant within the history of (textual) criticism, a famous polemical account is Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*. The connection anticipates this dissertation’s larger argument about the close relationship between the history of humanist textual criticism, on the one hand, and heraldry as a form of “picture criticism,” on the other.

⁴¹ For the full story of Origille’s crime and punishment see *Inamoramento* I.xxix.4-37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I.xxix.33: “Horringo, perché morto avìa Corbino, / Ch’era gargione e lui già di gran fama; / Et Ariante sì come assassin, / Qual per aver il prezo d’una dama, / Avìa promessa a quel vecchio mastino / La morte di colui, che tanto brama; / Cossì meco Loctrino ad una guisa, / Che avevamo portata altrui divisa.”

Che chiunque porta scudo over cimero
D'un altro campion o d'altra giesta,
È disfamato con gran vitupero
E se non ha perdon, perde la testa.
Ben che 'l statuto sia crudel e fero,
Ché la pena è maggior che la falanza,
Pur è servata per antica usanza. (I.xxix.31)

Origille herself was allotted a special punishment, at last, to which Orlando and Boiardo's readers have been privy; her body exposed to the elements to become an image of both her false and uncharitable nature, and of the execution of an equally harsh but clear and unbending law.

Or so we might presume. As Boiardo orchestrates the scene and its fall-out, in fact, a rather different set of messages emerge. The arms scattered nearby turn out to testify to a series of failed attempts to liberate Origille by knights who have either misread or disregarded the King of Batria's sentence.⁴³ When Orlando follows their lead with success, we learn that he is motivated less by a sense of chivalric duty than by a "burning" desire for Origille that overshadows even his lust for Angelica.⁴⁴ As he has been looking on and listening to the story of her crime, meanwhile, readers know that he himself is wearing a "sign" that disguises his true identity: Orlando is wearing images of an erupting volcano at this point in the poem, instead of the white and red checkered sign (the so-called *quartiero*) with which his character was traditionally identified, by his fictional companions-in-arms no less than by Boiardo's contemporaries, who were familiar with prior legends about Orlando's biography and thus with his image as well.⁴⁵ The "false" image that Orlando dons throughout this scene transparently reveals, on the other hand, the explosive state of desire in which we find him for much of Boiardo's innovative poem. In short, this is poetic world in which the pretensions of the law to exert control over both persons and images are seriously, and also comically, undermined.

The *Inamoramento* calls into question, or at least complicates, in this way the idea that its imaginary heraldry acted as a model or reflection of real practices in Boiardo's time and place. In *Law in the Courts of Love: Literature and other Minor Jurisprudences* (1996), a study in the tradition of critical or radical legal studies, Peter Goodrich makes a compelling case for reading literary enactments of law as potentially critical practices, which can expose law's boundaries, frailties, and limitations.⁴⁶ "Alternative or minor jurisprudences," as he calls such scenes, "are not merely poetic or aesthetic enterprises"; for they "disturb, parody, and deconstruct" the sovereignty of the law by revealing the law's reliance, always and already, on language, fiction, and therefore desire.⁴⁷ In the scene we have just read, what comes to light from this perspective is the disconnect between the scope of the "legie manifesta" within the jurisdictional limits of Batria and the actual porousness of that jurisdiction's boundaries. What also comes to light is the naiveté of the law's desire to exert control over images and identities; and the power of desire, on

⁴³ Ibid., I.xxix.36.

⁴⁴ Ibid., I.xxix.40-46.

⁴⁵ Readers have last seen Orlando at II.xv.66, with "una montagna che getava foco" on his crest and the same image ("pur quella insegna") on his shield.

⁴⁶ Other studies useful for contextualizing Goodrich's propositions here are Legendre, *Dieu au miroir: Étude sur l'institution des images*; Goodrich, Barshack and Schutz, eds., *Law, Text, Terror: Essays for Pierre Legendre*; and Gearey, *Law and Aesthetics*. See also Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law*, on how sophisticatedly Italian poetry and fiction had engaged with legal discourse and questions.

⁴⁷ Goodrich, *Law in the Courts of Love*, 2-4.

the other hand, to undermine the law's effects and intentions. "Where one believed there was the law," Goodrich writes, "there is in fact desire and desire alone. Justice is desire and not law."⁴⁸ The theme of the power of desire to overturn "order" and "rule" was apparently dear to Boiardo, as he developed it even outside of his romance epic wherein it becomes one of the central thematic leitmotifs.⁴⁹ It calls on us to find new ways to interrogate the relationship between his imaginative writing and a realm of images which actually were, or could be at least, manifest laws, as the archival research of Spaggiari and Trenti has shown; visualizations of jurisdictional claims over people and land; representations of the law's authority as exercised by a given figure of authority, and so on.

Was Boiardo's parodic approach to the law of images in this imagined scene responding to certain laws or legal discourses around images closer to home? Do the poem's many convoluted plots and manipulations of *insegne* conceivably respond to the rhetoric of the diplomas in the Este archive, which stressed the timelessness and transparency of the Este's *arma*? If so, how and why do they do so? Why would Boiardo enmesh the Este eagle in a poem where the possibility of legal control over "signs" is openly ridiculed; where "signs" are materially fragile, notoriously open to misinterpretation, and almost ontologically related to the inconsistency of human identities and the mobility of the passions? Was he highlighting the ability of the Este image, and thus the Este family, to *survive* history and contingency by presenting elaborate foils of wayward identities and deceitful images? Or was he articulating some other messages whose contours we have lost? Were other contemporary iterations of the Este arms implicitly or explicitly interrogating, as the *Inamoramento* seems to have been, their meaning, function, and status?

These questions anticipate some of the difficulties involved in using not only "imaginary heraldry" but also *imprese* studies, finally, as a lens onto Boiardo's poem and its continuation. As we will see in the body of this dissertation, the first articulations of the *impresa* and its properties were made within treatises often invested in establishing clear distinctions between images or "signs."⁵⁰ Among these were *armi* or *armi di famiglie*, as they had begun to be called, and *imprese*. Most treatises defined the one in association with family identity, nobility, modern (which is to say, post-classical) history, and legal discourse. They associated the other with desires and intentions, humanistic erudition, various ancient traditions (Egyptian, Greek, Roman, etc.), and a legalistic discourse of a different kind: a discourse we might call today aesthetics *avant-la-lettre*, or the rules of art.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ See Boiardo, *Pastorale*, Egloga IX.53-59: "Oh, come è pazo chi crede e prosume / pore a li amanti né ordine né regola! / Ben prima sarà il foco in questo fiume, / e gli occei tutti vestiran di scaglia, / e tutti e pesci fian coperti a piume, / che mai ragione umana o forza vaglia / Spiccar que' cor che insieme agionse Amore"; and *Orphei Tragoedia* IV.107: "Chi pon legge a li amanti?" These are topical borrowing well, from (at least) Ovid and Petrarch.

⁵⁰ The first to insist on such distinctions within the Italian treatise tradition on "signs" was Girolamo Ruscelli in his *Ragionamento di Monsignor Paolo Giovio sopra i motti et disegni d'arme e d'amore che comunemente chiamano imprese. Con un discorso di Girolamo Ruscelli intorno allo stesso soggetto* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1556). See, for example, Ruscelli, *Ragionamento*, 137 (Trans. mine): "oggi chiamiamo imprese che sono quasi del tutto diverse da quelle, & per non saper far questa distintione in quella guisa, che io soggiungerò non molto di sotto, s'ingannano molti nel saper far l'Imprese, & essi veramente in molte ingannato il Giovio, di quelle che egli racconta nel precedente Ragionamento suo col Domenichi" [today we call *imprese* things which are completely different from them; And for not knowing how to make the *distinction* that I will outline bellow, many fool themselves into believing that they know how to make *Imprese*. Truly they are fooled in many points by Giovio, who spoke about these things in the previous *Ragionamento* with Domenichi].

For example, in Luca Contile's *Ragionamento sopra le proprietà delle imprese* of 1574, there is a chapter dedicated to "when, how, and why *Armi delle famiglie* had their beginning, why they are displayed in public, and what was used before this invention."⁵¹ Contile defines his subject as "modern indications of nobility ... which pass on to successors in perpetuity."⁵² Raising questions about their uses and properties, such as why they were seldom removed from public display, and whether they were permissibly conceded to adopted and/or illegitimate children, he refers to legal sources such as the commentary on the *Digest* written in the early sixteenth century by Guillaume Budé, and the treatise *De insigniis et armis* written in the mid-fourteenth century by the peninsula's most famed jurist, Bartolus of Saxoferrato.⁵³ The "sign" of the *impresa*, on the other hand, Contile describes as a "visible testimony of civic and heroic intellects," though which "man discovers his generous thoughts, conceived by him, and interpreted by the world."⁵⁴ He claims that its earliest extant exemplars derived from antediluvian times.⁵⁵ As for the "rules" governing its properties and use, Contile feels authorized to elaborate on these himself, from his historical, antiquarian, linguistic, and literary – in short, his humanistic – compendium of knowledge and expertise, as well as from his personal experience.

These kinds of distinctions between *armi* and *imprese* scarcely stand up in the *Inamoramento*. Here, as we will have occasion to observe more closely, there are no evident semantic distinctions between the different words that describe "signs," like *divise*, *insegne*, *armi*, and *insigna* (The word *impresa* is not used at all). Furthermore, "signs" associated with familial groups in the poem, such as the white eagle, are associated with erotic desire and classical erudition at the same time. In the development of the love story between the Este progenitor Rugiero and his eventual betrothed Bradamanate, the eagle image acquires an erotic charge; while Boiardo attributes its origins to an ancient mythological event, the telling of which is particularly indebted to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Signs of "individual" desire in the *Inamoramento*, for their part, do intersect with the law – like Orlando's flaming volcano. Many of these images call into question the very boundaries of the individual self; many are

⁵¹ Contile, *Ragionamento di Luca Contile sopra le proprietà delle imprese*, 11 (Trans. mine): "Quando e come & perché hebbero principio l'Armi delle famiglie & perché si pongono in publico & quello si usava innanzi a tale inventione"

⁵² Ibid., 12 (Trans. mine): "Le armi adunque, inditii moderni di nobiltà, e non l'imagini, trascendono a successori in infinito."

⁵³ Ibid., 12 (Trans. mine): "Con ciò sia che l'imagini, come per decreti publici non si potevano levar da luoghi ne scancellare, così in alcuni luoghi non si radano le armi ne si cassano senza legitimo castigo, Il Budeo ciò conferma nella legge finale nel digesto dell'origine del giusto" [Just as (ancient) *images*, by public decree could not be removed or erased, so in certain places *armi* cannot be removed or destroyed without legitimate retribution, as Budé confirms in (his commentary on) the final law in the *Digest* on the origin of law (*De origine iuris*)]; and "[D]evesi per tutto ciò considerare che stima far si debba delle stesse armi mentre che fanno delle nobiltà perpetuo testimonio, per ciò, ben è da sapere se queste si possono alienare, o, no. Bartolo tien nel trattato delle insegne e dell'armi che si possono alienare e concedersi agli adottivi e legittimati, o vero arrogati & ancora a coloro che per benefici fatti, o per intrinseca benevolentia degni ne sono" [One must for all that consider what value to place in these *armi* while they make a perpetual testimony of nobility; and for this reason one would do well to know if they can be alienated or not. Bartolus holds in the treatise on *insegne* and *armi* that they can be alienated and conceded to adopted and legitimated (children), and even arrogated by those who are worthy of them through the benefices they have carried out or through intrinsic goodwill]. The two legal sources referenced here, the *Annotationes in quatuor e viginti pandectarum libros* by Budé and the *De insigniis et armis* by Bartolus, are discussed in Chapter Two.

⁵⁴ Contile, *Ragionamento di Luca Contile sopra le proprietà delle imprese*, 29 and 37 (Trans. mine): "Ecco però quanto importi il publica l'imprese, visibil testimonio degli intelletti civici et heroici"; "... habbiano a servire per l'imprese per onde scuopra il l'huomo i suoi generosi pensamenti, conceptuti da lui, & interpretati dal mondo."

⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

conspicuously “modern” inventions; and many express quite egotistical, rather than the most “generous,” thoughts of their users. “Signs” also are created for others and at others’ expense in Boiardo’s poem, in scenes that call into question their users’ ability to control their images, identities, and desires. Complicating matters further, the same images that refer to a lineage for some characters can refer to personal attributes and goals for others.

Boiardo and Ariosto’s works have been situated at a critical *transitional* juncture in the history of so-called symbolic imagery, precisely because of these ambiguities; a juncture at which genealogical *stemmi* or *armi* were purportedly transforming into individualized *imprese*; and the medieval heraldic tradition being rediscovered, parodied, and replaced by something new and more suitable to the humanistic and courtly societies of the Renaissance. This is Rinaldo Rinaldi’s thesis in “Stemmi di parole: Araldica e letteratura” (2010), our most comprehensive survey to date of “imaginary heraldry” in the Italian literary canon. In the section of this article titled “Fra *stemmi* ed *imprese*,” or between *stemmi* and *imprese*, Rinaldi writes:

It is precisely the courtly civilization of the late Quattrocento that rediscovers the descriptive and visual possibilities of heraldry, recuperating a *topos* characteristic of medieval chivalric literature: the catalogue of the troops before a battle or of the knights during a joust, each with his *insegna* on his flag or on his helmet. Obviously, the French romance models have a major role in the formation of this ‘neo-gothic’ taste of the quattrocento public ... But it is no longer, in fact, family *stemmi* (and as such designated for the shield), but individual *imprese* that arouse the interest of this literature: figures without a human form, accompanied or not by a *motto*, which suggest a physical or moral quality of the knight, or express his gentle homage to his lady. Almost absent from the poem of Pulci, *Il Morgante*, such “heraldic” descriptions have a large importance in the other chivalric masterpiece of the Quattrocento, the *Inamoramento de Orlando* of the Scandinese Matteo Maria Boiardo.⁵⁶

Boiardo privileges a free individualized heraldry, in other words, following chivalric fashion and his own fantasy. At the same time, he does not renounce describing traditional family *stemmi*, even as he explicitly presents his imaginary *imprese* on the same media as if they were the hereditary arms of a noble house, displayed not only on the crest but also on the shield.⁵⁷

This approach makes intuitive sense in the light of at least two broad areas of extant scholarship. The first is concerned with the fate of heraldry in the Renaissance; specifically, with its perceived crisis and decline, coinciding with or resulting from the rise of novel forms such as the *impresa*, emblem, and portrait. Arguments to this effect have been made from a variety of

⁵⁶ Rinaldi, “Stemmi di parole: Araldica e letteratura,” 14 (Trans. mine): “È proprio la civiltà cortigiana del tardo Quattrocento a riscoprire le possibilità descrittive e visive dell’araldica, recuperando un *topos* caratteristico della letteratura cavalleresca medioevale: il catalogo degli eserciti prima di una battaglia o dei cavalieri durante una giostra, ciascuno con la sua insegna sulla bandiera o sull’elmo. I modelli romanzeschi francesi, ovviamente, hanno un ruolo determinante nella formazione di questo gusto ‘neo-gotico’ del pubblico quattrocentesco ... Ma non sono più infatti, gli stemmi familiari (come tali destinati allo scudo), ma le imprese individuali a destare l’interesse della letteratura: figure non in forma umana, accompagnate o meno da un motto, che suggeriscono argutamente una qualità fisica o morale del cavaliere, o un galante omaggio di quest’ultimo alla sua dama. Quasi assenti nel poema dello stesso Pulci, *Il Morgante*, simili descrizioni araldiche hanno invece una grande importanza nell’altro capolavoro cavalleresco del Quattrocento, *L’inamoramento de Orlando* dello scandinese Matteo Maria Boiardo.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 (Trans. mine): “Boiardo privilegia insomma una più libera araldica individuale, seguendo la moda cavalleresca e la propria invenzione fantastica, ma al tempo stesso non rinuncia a descrivere i tradizionali stemmi familiari, poiché presenta esplicitamente le sue immaginarie ‘imprese’ come se fossero armi gentilizie di una casata, disposte non solo in cimiero ma anche nello scudo.”

disciplinary perspectives. Michel Pastoureau, one of our foremost experts on heraldry, has argued that the increasing rigidity of heraldic imagery, since its inception in the twelfth-century, provoked the “individualistic” reactions expressed in the novel forms of the Renaissance.⁵⁸ The cultural historian Maurice Keen has pointed out how material conditions of warfare increasingly rendered coats of arms irrelevant in the Renaissance; and how popular enthusiasm for jousts, tournaments, and the “old chivalrous histories of Arthur and Charlemagne,” which had sustained the coat of arms, waned as a result of the new excitement generated by classical antiquity.⁵⁹ According to Hans Belting in his recent proposal for *An Anthropology of Images* (2001, 2011), Renaissance humanism itself advanced “principles inimical to heraldic thinking,” because it took a stand “against the rigid hierarchical structure of the social body” of which heraldry was a visual expression.⁶⁰ The demise of heraldry and the rise of new visual rhetorics were symptoms, Belting argues, of nothing less than the new anthropological conceptions of personhood that the Renaissance humanists produced.

In addition to these arguments, the “transitional” explanation for the discourses around images in our poems resonates with other aspects of their study. The very name “romance epic,” for example, contains the suggestion that “two apparently antithetical strands of culture” have been combined. Thus Jane Everson,

At the heart of the genre of the romance epic in Italy, therefore, as it developed from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, lies a paradox, a paradox which is intellectually very challenging and stimulating, but which normally passes unobserved – namely that the period which saw the birth, development, and flowering of humanist ideas and of literature based on those ideas is the very same period in which the ‘medieval’ genre of the romance epic saw its major flowering in Italy, culminating in the work of Ariosto. How did these two phenomena coexist?⁶¹

Related to this apparent generic “paradox” are the studies of intertextuality in Boiardo and Ariosto’s works that have considered their medieval and “popular” sources separately from their classical and “learned” ones, as Albert Ascoli and Eleonora Stoppino have pointed out.⁶²

These “paradoxical” visions extend also to the contexts in which the poems were produced. In the commentary to the latest critical edition of the *Inamoramento* (1999), the two patrons who presided over the poem’s composition, Borso d’Este and Ercole I d’Este, are characterized as harbingers of different cultural matrices, chivalric and humanistic respectively, to the Este court generally and to the poem particularly.⁶³ From another angle still, the decisive cultural divide appears to lie between Boiardo and Ariosto’s poems and biographies, as they

⁵⁸ Pastoureau, “Aux origines de l’emblème: La crise de l’héraldique européenne aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles,” 121-136; “*Arma senescunt, insignia florescunt*. Note sur les origines de l’emblème,” 125-137; and “Naissance d’une image nouvelle. La médaille du Quattrocento,” 139-184.

⁵⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 129-142, 247-48. With related hypotheses, see also Daly, “Sixteenth-century Emblems and Imprese as Indicators of Cultural Change,” 383-420; and Weber, “Heraldry.”

⁶⁰ Belting, “The Coat of Arms and the Portrait: Two Media of the Body,” in *An Anthropology of Images*, 76-77.

⁶¹ Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism: The Matter of Italy and the World of Rome*, 3. An important stimulus for Everson’s discussion was Ruggieri, *Umanesimo classico e umanesimo cavalleresco italiano*.

⁶² See Ascoli, review of *L’Orlando furioso e il romanzo cavalleresco medievale*, by Daniela Delcorno-Branca, 278-279; and Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando Furioso*, 9.

⁶³ See Tissoni Benvenuti, “Introduzione,” xvi – xxvii; and “Ruggiero o la fabbrica dell’Inamoramento de Orlando,” 82-89.

were separated by the military crisis of 1494, and several cultural changes including the expansion of the typographic industry, the *questione della lingua*, and the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁶⁴ There has also been a longstanding understanding of the Este states and of Este-patronized culture, *en bloc* as it were, as a transitional zone in which avant-garde humanistic influences from Florence, Rome, and Venice vied with medieval - alternatively "local" or "international" - impulses.⁶⁵ In 1912, when Aby Warburg delivered the lecture that secured Este Ferrara's relevance within the budding discipline of art history, it was to reveal the iconological sources of the enigmatic Sala dei Mesi frescos and also to offer, in his words, a "stylistic interpretation of the Ferrarese pantheon as a transitional type between international Medieval Ages and the Italian Renaissance."⁶⁶ In short, while the fault lines have shifted depending on the point of view adopted, the rift between worlds that has appeared in and around Boiardo and Ariosto's poems has remained remarkably durable, both over time and across disciplines.

This dissertation is the result of a certain resistance towards the "transitional" reading of the imagery of the *Inamoramento* and *Orlando furioso*. One of its premises is that the visual languages of these poems represent an opportunity of consequence precisely because so many layers of historiography (from literary studies, the history of art, and cultural studies) place them "between" such categories as *stemmi* and *imprese*, law and aesthetics, genealogy and individuality, chivalry and classicism, feudalism and humanism, International Gothic and the Italian recovery of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, etc. But is it possible to study discourses around "signs" in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, within and close to Boiardo and Ariosto's works, without *a priori* definitions of the "signs" themselves and of the cultural contexts in which we are examining them?

The title I have chosen, *Renaissance Heraldry*, is deliberately paradoxical and provocative. On one level, it resists the thesis that heraldry declined and grew obsolete in the Renaissance because of some of the very conditions that have traditionally defined the "Renaissance" as coherent concept, such as the rediscovery of classical antiquity in the form of humanism, or the discovery of a more individualized concept of the self. On another level, it resists a much broader method of historical analysis, which seeks out homologies between the disparate structures of a given society to generate the understanding of a cultural system.⁶⁷ A sophisticated example of this method as it has been applied to our subject is Howard R. Bloch's *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (1983), which involves "heraldry" in a broad network of homologous relationships between Medieval socio-political, grammatical, historiographical, literary, and visual practices and modes.⁶⁸ What it

⁶⁴ Dionisotti, "Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo nel Cinquecento," 221-241.

⁶⁵ For a lucid critique of this perspective from the perspective of art history and the history of patronage, see Folin, "La committenza estense, l'Alberti e il palazzo di corte di Ferrara," esp. 257-259.

⁶⁶ Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," 565 (Trans. Britt). For the German text see Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und Internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara," in Venturi, ed., *L'Italia e l'arte straniera: atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte (Roma 1912)*, 179-193, here 180: "Danach soll versucht werden, durch einen Ausblick auf Botticelli die antike Götterwelt in Ferrara stilgeschichtlich als Uebergangstypus vom internationalen Mittelalter zur italienischen Renaissance zu begreifen."

⁶⁷ See Burke, "From Antiquarianism to Anthropology," 229-247.

⁶⁸ See Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 29: "We shall see how the patterns of noble kinship prevalent until the time of the French Revolution are themselves rooted in a particular linguistic model, and, further, how such a system of paternity is sustained by certain aristocratic practices of the sign (e.g. heraldry, patronymics), and mediated by a

means to study Renaissance heraldry as a positive proposition, however, requires some further explanation.

My project was initially conceived as a study of “survivals” or “afterlives” (*Nachleben*), as Warburg had famously described his studies of classical forms in the Renaissance.⁶⁹ How had a form tied to certain political, technical, and cultural conditions endured or “survived” as those conditions changed? This is a crucial question, in fact, because it brings to light the connections between this and other studies carried out in recent years dedicated to the ongoing relevance of so-called feudal practices in early modern Italy, and in the Este states specifically.

Several studies in this direction were made possible by a shift in Italian political historiography that took place already in the 1970s and 80s.⁷⁰ This shift was characterized by a questioning of the predominantly urban, mercantile, and bourgeois picture that for so long seemed to distinguish Italy’s premodern history from the rest of Europe. It brought to light the ongoing relevance, even throughout the early modern period and south of the Alps, of non-mercantile aristocracies, agriculture, and “feudal” relationships, based on the exchange of land and other benefices in return for homage and service. What were the connections, rather than the oppositions as had been often stressed previously, between cities and their surrounding territories, urban communes and landed nobility, Italy and the rest of Europe? As Peter Jones pointed out in his now-classic essay on this historiographical turn, “Economia e società nell’Italia medievale: la leggenda della borghesia” (1978), posing such questions could entail substantial revisions to the longstanding narrative that posited Italy’s medieval communes as anticipatory of modern industrialization and capitalism.⁷¹ It could also, Jones correctly predicted, lead to the increasing importance of “other Italies” within our assessments of the peninsular experience as a whole:

Milan and Genova, Florence and Venice, the principal progenitors of the traditions associated with ‘liberty’ and the merchant economy, did not constitute, as everyone recognizes but many forget, either the whole of medieval Italy or the only relevant part of it. To use a language that is becoming popular, there were also “other Italies,” and even an “other Florence” if not an “other Venice” as well.⁷²

The Este states, in this way, became increasingly relevant to the historiography of pre-modern Italy. In *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350-1450* (1988), Trevor Dean demonstrated the continuous importance of feudo-vassalitic bonds for Este state-building from their earliest consolidations of power on the peninsula through to their continued attempts to maintain and grow their position during the “Renaissance” and beyond. Marco Folin’s *Rinascimento estense: Politica, cultura, istituzioni di un antico Stato italiano*

range of representational practices – stained glass, manuscript illumination, genealogical narratives, ‘literary’ genealogies, epic poetry.”

⁶⁹ Warburg used this word-concept already in the “Italienische Kunst und Internationale Astrologie” lecture of 1912. One of the most influential discussions of it is Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante. Histoire de l’art et temps de fantômes selon Aby Warburg*.

⁷⁰ A useful summary and contextualization is Coleman, “The Italian communes. Recent work and current trends,” 373-397.

⁷¹ Jones, “Economia e società nell’Italia medievale: la leggenda della borghesia,” 188-189.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 188 (Trans. mine): “Milano e Genova, Firenze e Venezia, progenitrici principali della tradizione associante ‘libertà’ e ‘mercatura’ non costituivano, come tutti riconoscono, ma molti dimenticano, né tutta l’Italia medievale, né la sola parte rilevante di essa: in un linguaggio che sta diventando corrente, c’erano anche ‘altre Italie,’ perfino un’altra Firenze, se non addirittura un’altra Venezia.”

(2001, 2004) made a critical step forward by connecting this political history of the Este states (on relations between the Este and their land, clients, and overlords) to traditions of cultural history that had often focused exclusively on the life of the capital, Ferrara, from the Quattrocento onwards (on Este patronage of humanist scholarship, the arts, and letters).⁷³ As feudal political practices “survived” the long history of Este rule, this book argued, so did several cultural practices that had been tied to it. These did not necessarily disappear once the *studia humanitatis* became the preferred educational path within the Este administration throughout the second half of the fifteenth century and beyond. Folin was especially interested in the prolonged but understudied production of annals in the Este states, as he explained at the outset of *Rinascimento estense*:

The project began with a historiographical question. Contrary to what an outdated and teleological interpretative scheme would tell us, that humanistic culture in Renaissance Italy coincided with a rapid decline of urban annalistic traditions, even with just a review of the inventories of the manuscripts of Italian libraries one can realize that almost everywhere the annalistic approach, far from being a marginal residue of an antiquated vision of the world, remained one of the principle canons of reference at least until the end of the 17th century, even with various and important differences across time and place.⁷⁴

Of course, during of the Cinquecento, the treatises on the *ars historica* distinguished chronicles and annals, on one side, from history, on the other, charging these distinctions with a strong evaluative weight. And it is without a doubt true that modern chronicles, having remained in manuscript form in most cases, had a much more limited circulation than the “humanistic” histories, occasionally printed in multiple editions. Nevertheless, the longstanding diffusion of chronicles as a privileged form of historical narration cannot be classified as a cultural residue ... One must pose the problem therefore of investigating the reasons behind its long success, by deciphering the cultural matrices, redrawing the spatial and temporal coordinates, retracing the specific links that tied the different historiographical options to particular political and social dynamics. In this perspective, the case of the Este states – where the production of citizen chronicles remained extraordinarily rich until the end of the Ancien Régime – can provide material for reflections of broader interest.⁷⁵

⁷³ On the traditional separation between these two areas of Este historiography see Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 3-8

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, v-vi (Trans. mine): “La ricerca ha preso le mosse da una constatazione di carattere storiografico. Al contrario di quanto vorrebbe un inveterate schema interpretativo di matrice teleologica secondo cui l’affermazione della cultura umanistica nell’Italia del Rinascimento avrebbe coinciso con il rapido declino della cronachistica cittadina, anche solo a scorrere gli inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche italiane ci rende conto che quasi ovunque nella Penisola l’approccio annalistico, lunghi dall’essere il lacerto marginale di un’antiquata visione del mondo, rimase uno dei principali canoni di riferimento per lo meno sino alla fine del XVII secolo – sia pur con varie e significative differenze di luogo e di tempo.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vi (Trans. mine): “Certo, nel corso del Cinquecento i trattatisti dell’*ars historica* distinguevano ormai correntemente tra cronache e annali da una parte e storia dall’altra, caricando queste distinzioni di una forte pregnanza valutativa; ed è senza dubbio vero che le cronache moderne, rimaste nella maggior parte dei casi manoscritte, abbiamo avuto una circolazione assai più limitata delle storie umanistiche stampate a volte in diverse edizioni. Tuttavia, la duratura diffusione delle cronache come forma di narrazione storica privilegiata non può essere rubricata come residuo culturale ... Si pone così il problema di indagare le ragioni profonde di questo lungo successo di genere, decifrandone le matrici culturali, ridisegnandone le coordinate spazio-temporali, rintracciando i nessi specifici che legavano le diverse opzioni storiografiche a precise dinamiche politiche e sociali. In questa

This reconsideration of annals offers an important parallel or model for the present study of heraldry, which is also motivated by the apparent disconnect between a body of evidence testifying to the form's vitality, on the one hand, and contrary claims from both current scholarship (on heraldry's Renaissance decline) and the humanist treatise literature from the sixteenth century, on the other. Another related model is Roberto Bizzocchi's *Genealogie incredibili: Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna* (1995, 2009). This shows how yet another cultural practice once associated with feudalism – the production of “incredible” genealogies – not only survived early modernity, but also evolved in directions that contributed to the development of so-called modern historicism. Not surprisingly, this book relies on several examples of histories and historians from the Este context.⁷⁶

Both the political historiography investigating the late survivals of feudalism on the Italian peninsula and the cultural studies that followed and accompanied it, in summary, have proved essential to the present study; especially because Italian heraldry studies has not yet taken account of these historiographical shifts.⁷⁷ The metaphors of survival and its corollaries (afterlives, residues, etc.) are no longer guiding ones here, however. The task of analyzing the discourses around “signs” in and around our so-called romance epics – ideally without privileging our own discourses about these words, objects, and their users first – led to other conclusions and perspectives. This dissertation contends that “medieval heraldry,” as we know it, is a *construction* of certain humanist communities and techniques. “Renaissance heraldry,” in this sense, is intended as a name for this process of construction, which I hope to elucidate; as the description of its outcome, an apparent oxymoron or clash between two distinctive cultural systems; and as an intimation of the unexpected histories that have emerged here from interrogating the blind spots and varieties of the humanist tradition along with our own indebtedness to its legacies.

My methodology borrows from several different disciplines. For reading the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso*, two strong models are Peter Goodrich's above-mentioned study, *Law in the Courts of Love* (1996); and the example and method of Albert Russell Ascoli. Since *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (1987), Ascoli has demonstrated how the *Furioso* intervened in and even reconfigured contemporary problems and

prospettiva il caso degli Stati estensi – dove la produzione di cronache cittadine rimase straordinariamente ricca sino alla fine dell'Antico Regime – può fornire qualche spunto di riflessione di interesse probabilmente più generale.”

⁷⁶ Este historians Girolamo Falletti (1518-1564) and Giovanni Battista Pigna (1530-1575) figure prominently in Bizzocchi's study. The genealogical historiographical traditions of the Este court have been the subject of separate investigations in recent years as well. See Turchi, “Matrimoni e memoria genealogica fra tardo medioevo ed età moderna (genealogie estensi, sec. XV – XVII),” 801-831; Bezner, “Pellegrino Prisciani und die *Praxis der Historia*. Ferrareser Renaissance-Historiographie und ihr Kontext,” 353-388; and Tristano, “History ‘Without Scruple’: The Enlightenment Confronts the Middle Ages in Renaissance Ferrara,” 79-121.

⁷⁷ A telling premonition of the disconnect between heraldry studies and political historiography in Italy can be found in the 1978 volume of Einaudi's *Storia d'Italia (Annali I: Dal feudalismo al capitalismo)*, where Jones' “Economia e società nell'Italia medievale: la leggenda della borghesia” first appeared. In the same volume, Zug Tucci's overview of Italian heraldry, “Un linguaggio feudale: l'araldica,” 811-873, which is also now a classic in its field, affirms the feudal origins of the form and its precocious decline on the peninsula because of the very conditions that had long characterized Italian medieval historiography and that Jones was looking to counterbalance: dynamic factionalism, urbanization, mercantilism, and the rise of the bourgeoisie. The article ends by turning to the early history of the *impresa*, whose individualized and flexible form, so Tucci argues, became available and increasingly attractive to Italians from the end of the fifteenth century onwards.

debates, rather than merely reflecting them.⁷⁸ This perspective is crucial for reading the discourses of images in the Este romances not as models or reflections of a “real” heraldic practice, but as real discursive practices already, with real effects.

Two other methodological guides come from certain “critical” developments in the disciplines of archaeology and semiotics. In “Archaeology and Design History: A Thesis and Nine Theses” (2013), Michael Shanks reviews how the concept of design (concerned with agency, invention, manufacture) and the discipline of archeology (concerned with cultural ecologies) can inform one another to generate paradigms for engaging with artifacts. Among his “theses” or propositions for these engagements, Shanks cautions against adhering too closely to “histories of origins,” since objects are constantly remade and repurposed. In this sense, he says, they can always inhabit “folded” as well as linear horizons of temporality.

Better, I suggest, is to begin *in medias res*, with a specific artifact in specific practices and processes. The context of an artifact is better identified by studying how the artifact worked ... I call this a heretical empirics, because it does not assume certain categories that organize society and experience, but looks to define such categories in the process of empirical investigation, and so to generate potentially unorthodox and heterodox characterizations of an artifact.⁷⁹

Shanks cautions against anchoring objects in a single historical “context,” in other words, and against defining them by “discrete bundles of attributes or qualities.”⁸⁰ Doing so may reveal associations between objects and social groupings, but may also obscure how groups are constituted by the objects they interact with, and/or by the qualities of those interactions. This is a considerable support and stimulus to my study of “heraldry” that, similarly and very unusually for the subject, refrains from beginning with a definition of the form, a list of its attributes, and a history of its origins.⁸¹ Instead, I ask with Shanks, what was at stake in the definitions, bundles of attributes, and origin stories that certain Renaissance users generated for these “signs” (i.e. Paolo Giovio, Girolamo Ruscelli, and Luca Contile in their treatises)? Why did other groups resist this approach?

Related to these ideas from the study of material culture, this project is supported by some perspectives from language science; namely, those which have destabilized the notion of

⁷⁸ See Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 8-9 for an explanation of how this perspective reacted to certain Hegelian readings, long influential in Italy, of “Ariosto as the uncritical reflector ... of what they take to be the ‘Spirit’ of his age.”

⁷⁹ Shanks, “Archaeology and Design History: A Thesis and Nine Theses,” 112.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸¹ For a standard modern definition see Pastoureau, “L’image héraldique,” 115-122, here 115 (Trans. mine): “Apparues au milieu du XIIe siècle pour des raisons militaires – reconnaître les combattants sur les champs de bataille et de tournoi -, les armoiries peuvent se définir comme ‘des emblèmes en couleurs, propres à un individu ou à un groupe d’individus, et soumis dans leur composition à certaines règles qui sont celles du blason.’ C’est essentiellement l’existence de ces règles, peu nombreuses mais fortement prescriptives, qui différencie le système héraldique européen de tous les autres systèmes emblématiques, antérieurs ou postérieurs” [Appearing in the middle of the twelfth century for military reasons – to identify the combatants on battlefields and in tournaments – coats of arms can be defined as ‘emblems in color, proper to an individual or group of individuals, submitted in their composition to certain rules which are those of *blason*.’ It is essentially the existence of these rules, not numerous but strongly prescriptive, that differentiate the European heraldic system from all other emblematic systems, anterior or posterior]. The remainder of this article describes the central properties and then the “significant and insignificant” elements of the coat of arms: in the former group, the field, figures, and colors; and in the latter group, the form of the perimeter, the dimensions, volumes, style, and nuances of the colors. We will see how several Renaissance articulations of “heraldry,” especially from Ferrara, fail to conform to this definition.

language as a “system” of normative forms to focus on specific utterances and their political and rhetorical force. As V.N. Vološinov writes in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), (still in my view one of the most lucid explanations of what would become “social semiotics”):

The task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e. it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity. In other words, the understander, belonging to the same language community, also is attuned to the linguistic form not as a fixed, self-identical signal, but as a changeable and adaptable sign.⁸²

In relation to the language rather than the materiality of “signs” now, this perspective has helped me to dislodge the key words of this study – *arma, stemma, impresa, signa, insignia*, etc. – from their “proper” meanings and to explore the ways in which their meanings emerged out of creative work and social struggle.

It should be said, finally, that the relevance of these two critical paradigms, from the study of material culture and the study of language, anticipates one of the project’s central arguments: “Signs,” as meeting places between material forms and verbal enunciations, already engaged these two areas of humanist inquiry in the Renaissance. Philology and antiquarianism, or textual criticism and artifact-criticism, seem to be more closely connected from the point of view of this topic; and their Renaissance developments less linear, and more contested, than has traditionally been brought to light.⁸³

This dissertation is organized into three chapters. The first presents the *Inamoramento de Orlando* and *Orlando furioso* as challenges to our “grammars of signs,” which is to say our understanding of the distinctions between “signs” (coats of arms among them), their cultural coordinates of reference, and the ways in which (and reasons for which) such distinctions are to be drawn in the first place. The bulk of the chapter is concerned with reading the storylines that are constructed with and around images across the two poems; an exercise which amounts to recovering or rather beginning to recover, so I argue, a lost visual language parallel to the lost linguistic idiom which Boiardo scholars have been seeking to recover from before the *rifacimenti* and reforms of his sixteenth-century editors. The last part of the chapter turns to the “sign” treatises from the sixteenth century to investigate how they (mis)read the poems in question with their “grammars of signs” that anticipate to a large extent our own.

The remaining two chapters are dedicated to investigating the histories and contours of these two profoundly different expressions of visual “signs” in relation to language and cultural history, from the Renaissance; that is, the one expressed in the romance epics, and the other expressed in the *trattatistica sulle imprese*. Chapter Two, “Humanist Philology and the Grammar of Signs,” offers an account of the origins of the *trattatistica* within a certain mainstream or cosmopolitan humanist tradition embracing the emerging sciences of philology and antiquarianism. Beginning with one of the earliest writings of Lorenzo Valla’s (from 1433), the chapter traces a history of humanistic investigations into “signs” of identity, authority, social

⁸² Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Trans. Matejka and Titunk), 68.

⁸³ On the distinction between the history of philology and of antiquarianism see Grafton, “Humanist Philologies: Texts, Antiquities, and Their Scholarly Transformations in the Early Modern West,” 171-172; and Kraus, “Picture criticism: Textual studies and the image,” 236-256. For a discussion of the convergences between them and the interest in studying these convergences further, see Herklotz, “Arnaldo Momigliano’s ‘Ancient History and the Antiquarian’: A Critical Review,” 127-153.

distinction, and property - and into the words that designated such objects – between antiquity and contemporary times. It is in this context that several modern notions about “medieval heraldry” come to light as constructions of humanism; since both the word “heraldry,” its normative definition, and the conception and study of the Middle Ages can be seen coming into being together under the scrutiny of humanist technologies for organizing, historically, language and the material world.

Chapter Three, “Humanist Philology and the Genealogies of Images at the School of Guarino da Verona,” performs a parallel operation to the second chapter but in a circumscribed context; at the humanist “school” tied geographically, politically, and institutionally to the Este house. Beginning its investigation at the same time as the previous chapter, precisely in 1433, the chapter demonstrates that the same kinds of subjects received different treatments in this community, even as its members maintained close contacts with the intellectual developments unfolding elsewhere and their protagonists. Their discussions of “signs”, indeed, suggest that a distinctive theory and practice of philology developed here, which in turn helps to explain several aspects of the cultural production around the Este dynasty that other scholars have noticed in recent years: the porous boundaries between history and fiction; the interest in marvels and the fantastic (and in Herodotus); the lack of a distinctive conception of the Middle Ages; and the preponderance of genealogical historiography; in addition to the amorphous images built into the vernacular poems with which the present study begins.⁸⁴ In this respect, the chapter participates in recent efforts to re-think the history and diversity of philology (and of antiquarianism) from comparative perspectives.⁸⁵

Overall, the project is invested in recovering this strain of humanism and its outcomes – here tied to the Este’s “feudal” political practices and dynastic agendas – as an essential contribution to the humanist tradition in its broadest sense. The non-positivistic, and even anti-positivistic, impulses that characterize it have rippled through the history of the human sciences, both hard and soft, and may be more than ever critical to their future.

⁸⁴ I am referring to various observations in Ross, “Poetics at the Court of Leonello d’Este: Virgil, the Marvelous, and Feltrino Boiardo in the Competing Discourses of Angelo Decembrio’s *De politia litteraria*,” 55-69; Bezner, “Pellegrino Prisciani und die *Praxis der Historia*. Ferrareser Renaissance-Historiographie und ihr Kontext,” 353-388; Tristano, “History ‘Without Scruple’: The Enlightenment Confronts the Middle Ages in Renaissance Ferrara,” 79-121; and Looney, “The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento,” 167-183.

⁸⁵ See Nemerov, “Seeing Ghosts: *The Turn of the Screw* and Art History,” 13-32; Pollock, Elman, and Chang, eds., *World Philology*; Pollock, “Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World,” 931-936; and Miller, “Goethe and the End of Antiquarianism,” 897-916.

I.

Wayward Images and Legible Signs of the *Inamoramento de Orlando* and *Orlando Furioso*

Già non portò la insigna de il quartiere
Ma de un vermiglio scuro era vestito;
Cavalca Briigliadoro, il cavalliero,
E soletto alla porta se n'è gito.
Non sa de lui famiglio né scudiero;
Tacitamente è dela terra usito.
Ben suspirando ne andava il mischino,
E verso Ardena prese il suo camino.

- Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Inamoramento de Orlando*¹

In the second canto of the *Inamoramento de Orlando*, the poem's eponymous hero leaves Paris tearful, alone, and in the darkness of the night to search for the "viso adorno" of his new beloved, Angelica (I.ii.23-28). This is the beginning of the narrative action, as it is the first of Orlando's displacements under the influence of a love that the rest of the poem will trace and that will descend into madness in its most celebrated continuation, the *Orlando furioso*. The event is marked with a "sign": Orlando no longer wears the "insigna de il quartiere," the narrator tells us, "ma de un vermilio scuro era vestito."

The purpose of this chapter is to begin reading the *Inamoramento* and its most famous continuation, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, through the images described on their characters' suits of armor. First, we consider how the *Inamoramento* opens so that these images are immediately implicated in major thematic questions about the precariousness of identity, and about the capacities and limitations of verbal and visual signs. Next, we turn to some of the conventions around these so-called *insigna* in prior texts narrating the biographies of Orlando and his companions, which Boiardo drew upon and extended. I discuss how Boiardo's innovations with this visual language may have related to some of the other innovations for which he is better known today. Further sections of the chapter follow the storylines of "signs" associated with specific characters: Orlando; three minor characters of Boiardo's invention; and Rugiero, the dynastic hero and purported progenitor of the Este house. In taking stock of the insights about the two poems that can be gained with this perspective, the chapter asks why it is not already part of their reception history. Our last section examines the sixteenth-century treatises on *impresa* and their influential engagements with these exceedingly popular works of poetic fiction.

Our thesis is that the amorphous visual language of these poems was obscured and replaced, rather than elucidated, by the sixteenth-century treatises. These elaborated discourses according to which "signs" could be clearly and appropriately named, distinguished from one another, contextualized historically and culturally, and above all organized in a "grammatical" manner. The process of recovering the original qualities of these poems' visual and narrative strategies will require engaging with the some of the cultural horizons and political agendas that

¹ *Inamoramento*, I.ii.28 (Trans. mine): "No longer donning the *insigna* of the *quartiere*, he was dressed in dark vermilion. The knight mounts Briigliadoro and alone heads to the gate. Not a friend or servant knows about him. He left the city quietly and sighing, the poor thing; and towards Ardena made his way."

their creators, editors, and commentators did not always share. It will also entail questioning the construction, and therefore the absolute objectivity and rationality, of our own grammars of “signs,” which we have inherited to a large degree from the cosmopolitan humanism of the High Renaissance.

i. Boiardo's New Beginnings

When the *Inamoramento* begins, signs are immediately a problem. It is the feast of the Pentecost, celebrated amongst Christians for the miracle of the so-called tongues of fire. In the New Testament, this marks the visitation of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in the form of “tongues” that temporarily abolish the distinctions between human languages, instituted since the destruction of Babel.² In this Pentecostal feast, however, a variety of sign-systems operate alongside and clash with one another uncomfortably.³ Muslims and Christians celebrate the feast together, in an open gesture of trust, while expressing hostility towards each other’s languages and customs.⁴ Amongst the Christians, happy faces and pleasantries hide internal rivalries and mutual suspicions.⁵ The narrator colloquially calls the feast day “Pasqua Rosata” in reference to the rose petals used to celebrate the miracle of the fiery tongues (I.i.8). He then introduces Angelica – the beautiful princess from Catai who intrudes upon these celebrations – herself a flower, and her character proceeds to seduce Muslims and Christians alike by offering a crown of rose petals and eventually her own person to the knight who will defeat her brother, Argalia, in a joust (I.i.26-28). Angelica’s “vista alegra” and delicate speech promise to make “manifesta ... quella cagione / Che ce ha conduti,” while the poet warns that all is false (I.i.25). These only apparent “peregrini” have been sent to Paris by their father, Galafrone, to seduce and trap Christendom’s defenders. Orlando and his companions, meanwhile, fall into a state of irrepressible erotic passion that makes itself clearly visible on their faces despite their best efforts to hide their emotions from one other.

Ognon par meraviglia l’ha mirata,
Ma sopra a tutti Orlando a lei s’acosta
Col cor tremante e con vista cangiata,
Ben che la volontà tenia nascosta
E talhor li ochi ala terra bassava,
Che di si stesso assai se vergognava. (I.i.29)

Stava ciascuno immotto e sbigotito,
Mirando quella con sommo diletto;
Ma Feraguto, il giovenetto ardito,
Sembrava vampa viva nelo aspeto,
E ben tre volte prese per partito
Di tuorla a quei ciganti al suo dispeto,
E tre volte afrenò quel mal pensieri

² See *Acts* 2. On Pentecost as a topical opening of Arthurian and Carolingian tales in French and Italian traditions see Tissoni Benvenuti, *Commento*, I.i.8n.

³ For a complementary reading of Boiardo’s opening scene see Mazzotta, “Italian Renaissance epic,” 101.

⁴ See *Inamoramento* I.i.13 and I.i.20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I.i.15-19.

Per non far tal vergogna alo Imperieri.
 Or sul'un piede, or sul'altro se muta,
 Gràttassi il capo e non ritrova loco.
 Ranaldo, che ancor lui l'ebe veduta,
 Divéne in faccia rosso comme un foco. (I.i.33-34)

These furtive blushes are among the first indications in the *Inamoramento* of the “close interaction between the internal and the external in the realm of images”; the capacity of its characters to generate images internally and to project images outwards in response to the images of others.⁶ They also highlight the co-dependency of desires and images, which remains a constant in this poem; “as if the two concepts were caught in a mutually generative circuit, desire generating images and images generating desire.”⁷ Meanwhile, the whole opening episode presents “signs” that refer to transcendent values and thwart allegoresis; “signs” that work to abolish but also to reinforce boundaries between his characters; and “signs” that both deceive and reveal truths. All these dynamics are at play when the titular hero leaves Paris dressed, no longer in his familiar *quartiero*, but in “virmiglio scuro” to disguise his (former) identity, and to unwittingly give a clear signal of the metamorphic power that love is exerting upon him now.

The poem’s second episode introduces explicitly how armor will function throughout as an assemblage of surfaces that literally hide the body while projecting images and “signs” outwards to others.⁸ In the scene, the Pentecostal feast gives way to a series of jousting matches between armed knights.⁹ Araglia, a character of Boiardo’s invention, bears the arms in which, so we are told, his father has sent him to Paris to deceive the Christians: Full-body armor and a magic lance - “scudo, coraccia et elmo col cimieri / E spade fatta per incantamento” – and colors of pure white for himself and his horse (I.i.38).

Hor con queste arme il suo patre il mandò
 Stimando che per quelle il sia invincibile. (I.i.39)

Odendo il corno, l’Argalia levosse,
 Ché giacea al fonte la persona franca,
 E de tutte arme subito adobosse
 Da capo a piedi, che nulla li manca;
 E’ contra Astolfo con ardir se mosse,
 Coperto egli e il destrier in vesta bianca,
 Col scudo in bracio e quella lancia in mano
 Che ha molti cavallier già messi al piano. (I.i.63)

The English knight Astolfo, who is first to fight him, meanwhile displays on his person and horse the luxurious gems, gold, and leopard figures, which had already been associated with his character in Italy for over a century.¹⁰

⁶ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, 36.

⁷ Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 57.

⁸ For a complimentary study of armor as a narrative device (in the *Orlando furioso*) see Ascoli, “Like a Virgin: Male Fantasies of the Body in *Orlando furioso*,” 142-157. On Renaissance armor as image-media see also Springer, *Armour and Masculinity in the Italian Renaissance*.

⁹ For the relationship between textual and sexual genealogies in Ariosto, Boiardo, and the “chivalric” traditions they drew upon see Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 7.

¹⁰ Astolfo’s “leopard” seems to be consistent across some of the major works of the ‘Spagna’ tradition in Italy that preceded the *Inamoramento* (discussed below), including the *Spagna ferrarese* (“d’oro nel rosso avea tre liopardi,”

Ben valeano quelle arme un gran thesoro:
 Di grosse perle il scudo è circondato,
 La maglia che se vede è tutta d'oro;
 Ma l'elmo è di valore ismesurato
 Per una zoglia posta in quel lavoro,
 Che (se non mente il libro de Turpino)
 Era quanto una noce; e fu un rubino.
 Il suo distrer è copertato a pardi,
 Che sopraposti son tutti d'or fino. (I.i.61)

Between these first two contestants alone – and there are several more – it can be seen how the images displayed on the armed body may be deceptive or transparent on the part of the characters; and new or traditional on the part of the author. This range of possibilities prepares readers for the many transformations of Orlando's *insigna* that take place throughout the poem. However, Orlando's first transformation from the *quartiero* to "vermilio scuro" is the first suggestion that armor may occasionally act as a kind of second skin or face as well; to communicate or conceal not only a character's identity, history, or intentions, but also his passions.

Boiardo could count on his audience being well-acquainted in advance with Orlando's biography, principal companions and adversaries, and with knights-in-arms generally as textual and intertextual personalities.¹¹ Orlando was the central figure of an entire universe of popular culture on the Italian peninsula in the Quattrocento expressed orally, in verse, and in prose.¹² The *Inamoramento* was indeed a familiar exercise in this tradition, insofar as it offered a "prequel" or pre-text to the legend of his heroic death at Roncesvaux in the eight century, rendered in the vernacular and in verse in the *Chanson de Roland*, and in Latin prose in the *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi*, or pseudo-Turpin chronicle. The events Boiardo recounted fall between two extended episodes in Orlando's biography that were highly developed in Boiardo's lifetime and well-known at the Este court after centuries of extensions and elaborations on these pre-texts.¹³ The so-called 'Spagna' tradition recounted the Franks' attempts to liberate the pilgrimage route to Compostella from Infidels, with the (unrealized) plan to crown Orlando as king there once the mission was complete. These campaigns had been an opportunity to imagine more of Orlando's feats, including narrative divagations into Persia and the Holy Land prior to his death.¹⁴ The 'Aspromonte' tradition told of still earlier conflicts between Franks and Moors in southern Italy, in the Aspromonte range in Calabria, and in Sicily. These stories imagined

II.20) and the *Entrée d'Espagne*. On Astolfo's long history as a character see Ferreo, "Astolfo (Storia di un personaggio)," 513-530.

¹¹ See Tissoni Benvenuti, "Intertestualità cavalleresca," 57-78; and "Testi cavallereschi di riferimento dell'*Inamoramento de Orlando*," 239-256.

¹² See Dorigatti, "Reinventing Roland: Orlando in Italian literature," 10-26; Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism*, 27-51; and Villorois, *La letteratura cavalleresca. Dai cicli medievali all'Ariosto*.

¹³ On the Este library and its "chivalric" collections see Bertoni, *La biblioteca estense e la cultura ferrarese ai tempi di Ercole I (1471-1530)*; Tissoni Benvenuti, "Il mondo cavalleresco e la corte estense," 13-26; Allaire, "Owners and Readers of Arthurian Books in Italy," 190-204; and Antonelli, "La sezione francese della biblioteca degli Este nel XV secolo: sedimentazione, evoluzione e dispersione. Il caso dei romani arturiani," 53-82. Boiardo is understood to have used the Este library freely as his own.

¹⁴ See Catalano, "Introduzione," *La Spagna: Poema cavalleresco del secolo xvi*, 3-41; Dionisotti, "*Entrée d'Espagne, Spagna, Rotta di Roncisvalle*," 207-41; Folena, "La cultura volgare e l'umanesimo cavalleresco nel veneto," 141-57; and Sberlati, "Dall'*Entrée d'Espagne* all'*Orlando innamorato*: una genealogia non solo linguistica," 175-194.

Orlando becoming knighted for the first time, acquiring his sword Durlindana, and his “sign,” the *quartiero*.¹⁵

The connections between characters and their arms – weapons, pieces of armor, and the images supported by these media – varied and evolved within these literary and popular traditions. In the *Chanson de Roland*, for example, the Franks as a collective are distinguished by the image of the *oriflamme* on their *gunfalon*, their war-cry *Monjoie*, and the sound and object of the Oliphant. The *Chanson* is understood today for this reason as a “product of the pre-heraldic period”; because it contains “technical terminology and certain figurative and chromatic elements that will become characteristic of the heraldic *arma*, without however these being connected to one another and fused into that particular system.”¹⁶ At the same time, the association between Orlando and his sword in that poem may have anticipated or modeled the kinds of relationships that would develop later between the individual paladins and their visual “signs.” Howard R. Bloch makes this argument in *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (1983), as he discusses how a “relation of propriety” is established between Roland and his sword Durendal already in the *Chanson*.

“O Durendal, how beautiful you are and how very holy!
Your golden pommel is full of relics,
Saint Peter’s tooth, some of Saint Basil’s blood,
Some of my lord Saint Denis’s hair,
Some of Saint Mary’s clothing.
It is not right for the pagans to own you,
You must be served by Christians.
May no coward ever possess you!
With you I conquered many vast lands
Over which white-bearded Charlemagne rules,
And the Emperor is powerful and mighty as a consequence.”¹⁷

Highlighting this passage in which Roland fears for the fate of the sword upon his imminent death to the Saracens, Bloch writes that the sword is a “sign which here expresses his essence [and] functions as a totemic projection of his soul”:

It is, in fact, this proper relation to the hero which prevents it from belonging to anyone else. Such a transfer, as Roland’s fear of loss betrays, would constitute precisely what we have defined linguistically as a lack of appropriateness – an inadequation between a word and the property of the thing it alone signifies.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Rajna, *Ricerche intorno a i Reali di Francia*, 7-113, 253-264, 283-330; Barbarino, *L’Aspromonte. Romanzo cavalleresco inedito*; Barbarino, *I Reali di Francia*; and Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism*, 32-35.

¹⁶ Zug Tucci, “Leggende carolinghe e araldica immaginaria,” 307 (Trans. mine): “La *Chanson*, soprattutto la fonte maestra, è un prodotto del periodo prearaldico e in essa si trovano, come è stato giustamente osservato, certa terminologia tecnica e certi elementi figurativi e cromatici che diverranno caratteristici dell’arma araldica, però senza essere collegati tra loro e fusi in quel particolare sistema.” See also Marchand, “L’Art héraldique d’après la littérature du Moyen Age. Les origines : La *Chanson de Roland*,” 37-43.

¹⁷ *Chanson de Roland*, 173.2344-2354 (Trans. Brault): “E! Durendal, cum es bele e seintisme! / En l’oriet punt asez i ad reliques: / En dent seint Perre e del sanc seint Basile / E des chevels mun seignor seint Denise, / Del vestement i ad seinte Marie. / Il nin est dreiz que paiens te baillisent, / De chrestiens devez ester servie. / Ne vos ait hume ki facet cuardie! / Mult larges teres de vus avrai cunquises, / Que Charles tient, ki la barbe ad fluire, / E li empereres e nest ber e riches.”

¹⁸ Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 105.

The fear of “inadequation” that Orlando expresses in the passage is what Bloch’s book identifies as the underlying connection between the *chanson de geste* in its formative stages and multiple layers of medieval society: including etymological grammar; feudal kinship structures; and “heraldry,” which Bloch describes as a “differential system of signs guaranteeing the propriety of the family in relation to similar groups [and] to its land.”¹⁹ According to this formulation, the logic of “heraldry” was already present in the *Chanson* even if “heraldic” images were not. Since individual characters and their lineages were not connected to visual “signs” there, meanwhile, precisely these connections became areas for growth as the tradition expanded and the biographies and genealogies of Charlemagne’s paladins were fleshed out in increasing detail.²⁰

Orlando was associated with the *quarter* image in some of the most influential and early versions of his biography on the Italian peninsula. The *Entrée d’Espagne*, composed in the first half of the fourteenth century by an anonymous Paduan, was the earliest source for the ‘Spagna’ tradition in Italy. Here the image is not only associated with Orlando’s character but also the strength of this association is an object and outcome of the poet’s narration of events. It first appears when Ferragù, the most daring and formidable of the Saracen warriors in the poem, asks the whereabouts of “Rollant” and has him identified as the one “en l’eschu scharteré, d’or e d’arçant departirez e sevré” [in the checkered shield, separated and quartered into gold and silver].²¹ This visualization inspires Ferrau’s intense desire to fight Orlando and affords a second and closer look at the latter’s armed body and *quarter*.²² The ensuing battle results in Ferrau’s conversion to Christianity and his death, before which he shares with Orlando a plan to liberate the Frankish prisoners and capture the city of Lazera, the Christian’s first major objective. The plan is to switch “signs” with Ferrau once the latter has died and to enter the Muslim city in disguise carrying a corpse bearing the *quarter* - as if Ferrau were carrying Orlando’s dead body instead of the other way around. Orlando executes this plan successfully, accessing the citadel in disguise, freeing the Frankish prisoners, and finally raising his *quarter* to alert Charlemagne and the others to attack from outside the city walls. In short, a temporary change in Orlando’s image leads to the solidification of his reputation as Christendom’s foremost paladin and to the strength of the association itself between his character and the *quarter* after all. For the remainder of the *Entrée*, each of the Franks’ major victories and the importance of Orlando’s contribution to them are signaled by the display of the *quarter* at the decisive moments of victory.

In some of the ‘Aspromonte’ stories, Orlando’s youth was an occasion to speculate on the origins of the *quarter* in connection to his person. The Florentine *cantastorie* Andrea da Barbarino (1370 ca.- 1431) is interesting in this respect because he offers two different explanations for the image across two of his major prose works about Orlando’s life, the *Aspromonte* and *I Reali di Francia*, both of which were likely known by Boiardo directly.²³ In the former, the image first belongs to the Saracen King Almonte, who is captured in the taking of Aspromonte. Orlando is

¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

²⁰ For this suggestion see Zug Tucci, “Leggende carolinge e araldica immaginaria,” 308.

²¹ *Entrée d’Espagne*, 1538-1540 and 1545-1550 (Ed. Thomas): “Di moi ancor, seignor,” parla l’Esclé, / Pués qe je n’ai au proz Rollant josté, / Ou est il donque et in qual part alé? ... Mostrerai vos ce que tant demandé./ Esgardez la o il sunt amassé / Si grant bernaje entor cil sol armé; / S’un pué fust plus envers nos adrecé./ Veoir poués en l’eschu scharteré, / d’or e d’arçant departirz e sevré, / Qe cil seroit Rollant, mon avohé.”

²² Ibid., 1669-1672 (Ed. Thomas): “Droit vers le niés Marsille se mist l’ardiz Rollant. / Qui donc veüst com il veit paumoiant / Sa grosse lance, e le quarter replant / D’un clier colors celestre e d’or lusant!”

²³ On Boiardo and Andrea da Barbarino see Tisconi Benvenuti, “Note preliminari al commento dell’*Inamoramento de Orlando*,” 291-293; and “Ruggiero e la fabbrica dell’*Inamoramento de Orlando*,” 69-73.

rewarded with the image after his decisive contribution to that victory.²⁴ In the *Reali*, the longer historical framework allows for an extended narration of Orlando's parents' and grandparents' lives, and of Orlando's early childhood. One chapter (LX) is entirely dedicated to the question of "how Orlando had the *divisa* of the *quartiere* of purity, which he took up for his *arme*."²⁵ This explains that the *quartiere* was given to "Orlandino" by his playfellows in Sutri, where he lived in poverty with his mother.

When Orlandino was in the midst of so many boys and they wanted to make [him] a leader for the feast, one of the boys, the son of a cloth merchant, said to the others: "By my faith, it's to our shame that we should make Orlando our lord and that he goes about with such tattered and poor clothes; and we're attending a feast!" All responded that he was right, and they agreed amongst themselves that four of them would go and collect money for the love of God and would dress Orlando. So the four boys put together some money and decided to get for it one *braccio* and a half of cloth each, and so they went. Two of them brought back white cloth and the other two brought vermilion cloth. These two colors bought two gifts to reign within Orlando, that is pure virginity and charity. And they had made a vestment for Orlando in white and red, divided into four parts [*a quartieri bianco e rosso*]: The white part was on the quarter of the right arm, and on the left was the vermilion; on the left torso there was white, and on the right torso vermilion. And having received this dress, they called him the lord of the children for the feast ... And as long as he lived in this world, he wore this *divisa* in quarters, saying that God and purity had given it to him, and therefore he wanted to wear it.²⁶

These few but significant precedents show that Orlando's "quartered" image was linked to his identity and biography across what Eleonora Stoppino has described as the "intertextual pattern specific to the chivalric epic, which constructs characters across different texts."²⁷ Zug Tucci stresses the consistency that was achieved for the "signs" of the principal heroes of these legends across the web of their articulations:

²⁴ Barbarino, *L'Aspromonte*, III.LVIII.13-19, p.175: "E appresso uscì Carlo del padiglione, e cominciò a fare cavalieri, e non dimanda s'egli era gentile uomo o no; solo el nome suo era scritto, e donava arme e cavalla a chi non n'aveva. Apresso disse al re Salamone e al duca Namò che adobbassino Orlandino della vesta nuova ch'era per lui aparecchiata di bianco e rosso a quartieri, e che vestissino tutti e' suoi compagni di bianco, e che menassino davanti a lui el cavallo che fu d'Almonte, e portassino la sua spade, la quale Orlandino acquistò. E così fu ubidito."

²⁵ Barbarino, *I Reali di Francia*, IV.LX (Trans. mine): "Come Orlandino ebbe la divisa del quartiere dalla purità, la quale prese per arme."

²⁶ Ibid., IV.LX (Trans. mine): "Quando Orlandino era nel mezzo di tanti fanciulli, e volevano fare signore per la festa, uno fanciullo, figliuolo d'uno mercatante di panni, disse verso gli altri fanciulli: 'Per la mia fe', che la nostra è gran villania, che noi facciamo Orlandino nostro signore, e ch'egli è co' panni così rotti e poveri; e siamo per la festa!' E gli altri tutti risposono ch'egli diceva il vero: e accordaronsi che quattro di loro andassino e raccogliessino danari per l'amore di Dio e vestissino Orlando. E' fanciulli mettevano chi quattro danari e impuosono di recarne uno braccio e mezzo di panno per uno, e così recarono; e due di loro arrecarono panno bianco, e gli altri due arrecarono panno vermiglio. Questi due colori importarono due grazie che regnorono in Orlando, cioè pura verginità e carità. E feciono fare uno vestimento a Orlando a quartieri bianco e rosso: la parte bianca fu al quartiere del braccio ritto, e al sinistro fu vermiglio; al fianco sinistro fu bianco, e al destro fu vermiglio. E ricevuta questa vestimenta, lo chiamarono signore de' fanciulli per la festa ... E sempre che vivette in questo mondo, portò quella divisa a quartieri, dicendo che Iddio e la purità gliel'aveva donata, e però la voleva portare."

²⁷ Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 6. More of the pre-texts known to Boiardo would ideally be taken into consideration in this chapter. The *Spagna ferrarese* manuscript, edited in 2009 by Valentina Gritti and Cristina Montagnani, would be the next candidate as it is known as the principal vehicle by which the 'Spagna' tradition was received by the Este community.

The less a character is defined, in the oral tradition and/or in the literature, and the less his familial and social relationships are defined, the greater inventive possibilities that character offers for his purported *arma*; And vice versa, the more the character is already delineated and circumscribed, the more the spectrum of possibilities for his *insegne* is restricted.²⁸

Tucci continues:

In order not to appear false, improper, or too incredible, and therefore to be unacceptable to the readers or listeners of the poem, the imaginary *arma* had to take into consideration two fundamental factors: On the one side, the *insegne* effectively in use on the part of persons or institutions of its own time, for example by the king of France or the Emperor, successors of Charlemagne; Secondly, it could not deviate from the broader mental coordinates of contemporaries, strongly conditioned by tradition. It was necessary therefore to adequate the choice of the *insegna* to the scale of values universally recognized in association with the various pairs of colors and with determinate figures, such as for example the lily, the eagle, the dragon, and the cross - the 'armes de Jesu Crist'.²⁹

One could alternatively highlight the variability that existed across different accounts of the same image. In Barbarino's works, we have seen the *quartiero* seeming to act as a kind of flashpoint for competing narratives about its origins. While a certain consistency is established around the image itself, the stories about it change along with the different perspectives and variations in the character's biography.

Boiardo's treatment of Orlando's *insigna* appears both traditional and innovative against this background. On the one hand, his poem references not only Orlando's *quartiero* itself but also chooses an origin story for his association with it, the victory over Almonte at Aspramonte, which had already been narrated by Barbarino.

E Dardinello, il giovenetto franco
Ha le sue nave a questo congiunte;
Il quartier ha costui vermiglio e bianco,
Come solia portar il padre Almonte;
E pur cotale insegna, più né manco,
Portava indosso ancora Orlando il Conte.
Ma' alcun di lor portarla costò cara. (II.ii.14)

E gionse il fio d'Almonte, Dardinello,
Che portava il quartier sì come Orlando,

²⁸ Zug Tucci, "Leggende caroline e araldica immaginaria," 307 (Trans. mine): "*Grosso modo* vale anche qui la regola che meno è caratterizzato un personaggio, o nella tradizione o nella letteratura, e configurato nei suoi legami familiari e sociali, maggiori possibilità inventive si offrono per una sua supposta arma; e viceversa, più è modellato e circoscritto il personaggio, maggiormente si restringe la gamma delle insegne per lui concepibili."

²⁹ Ibid., 306 (Trans. mine): "Comunque per non apparire falsa, inadeguata e poco credibile, quindi non accettata ai lettori-uditori del poema, l'arma immaginaria doveva tener conto di due fattori fondamentali. Da un lato, delle insegne effettivamente in uso da parte di personaggi o istituzioni del proprio tempo, considerati discendenti o eredi dei protagonisti celebrati dai poemi, come ad esempio il re di Francia o l'imperatore, quali successori di Carlomagno. In secondo luogo non si poteva prescindere dagli schemi mentali dai contemporanei, fortemente condizionati dalla tradizione. Bisognava perciò adeguare la scelta dell'insegna alla scala dei valori universalmente riconosciuti ai vari accoppiamenti cromatici e a determinante figure, come ad esempio il giglio, l'aquila, il drago, e le 'armes de Jesu Crist' - la croce."

E fuor d'arzon lo trasse a gran flagello. (II.ii.23)

These references are made in the context of Orlando's only appearance with the *quartiere* in Boiardo's poem. They therefore serve to connect Orlando's biography here to prior legends. They also create opportunities for new stories to grow out of the old. For example, having Almonte's son Dardinello continue to wear his father's image, "[il] paterno quartier candido e rosso," Boiardo opens a new conflict around its ownership that Ariosto will conclude in the *Furiosio*.³⁰ On the other hand, Orlando removes his familiar sign at the outset of the *Inamoramento* and spends most of the poem donning a succession of novel and highly unstable images that mark both his departure from "himself" and the startling narrative innovation of Boiardo's poem with respect to its predecessors: Orlando's radical subjection to Love.

It is true that, before the *Inamoramento de Orlando*, several *inamoramenti* - of Orlando's cousin Rinaldo, of his parents Milone and Berta, and of other members of Charlemagne's entourage - had been imagined earlier in the fifteenth century. Elements more typical of, but not necessarily exclusive to, Arthurian and lyric traditions had meanwhile found more space in the ever-expanding material of the *chanson de geste*.³¹ However, Boiardo was the first to imagine this most solemn, austere, and proverbially virginal hero of the Carolingians in Love's throes. As his narrator suggests in the poem's first verses (while attributing the "novella" to a hitherto suppressed historical manuscript of Turpin's), this poem was meant to be surprising and "maraviglioso."³²

Non vi para, signor, maraviglioso
Odir contar de Orlando innamorato,
Ché qualunque nel mondo è più orgoglioso
e da Amor vinto al tuto suiugato:
Né forte bracio, né ardire animoso,
Né scudo o maglia, né brando afilato,
Né altra possanza può mai far difesa,
Che al fin non sia da Amor batuta e presa.
Questa novella è nota a poca gente,
Perché Turpino istesso la nascose,
Credendo forsi a quel Conte valente
Esser le sue scritture dispetose,
Poi che contra ad Amor fu perdente
Colui che vinse tutte l'altre cose:
Dico de Orlando, il cavalier adato.
Non più parole hormai: veniamo al fatto. (I.i.2-3)

³⁰ See *Orlando furioso*, 18.cxlvii-cxlix: "Vide Rinaldo il segno del quartiere./ di che superbo era il figliuol d'Almonte; / e lo stimò gagliardo e buon guerriero, / che concorrer d'insegna ardia col conte ... Vengo a te, per provar come ben guardi il quartier rosso e bianco; che s'ora contra me non lo difendi, / defender contra Orlando il potrai manco. - / Rispose Dardinello: - Or chiaro apprendi / che s'io lo porto, il so defender anco; / e guadagnar più onor, che briga, posso / del paterno quartier candido e rosso." Here Rinaldo challenges and kills Dardinello, on behalf of Orlando, for the *segno del quartiere*.

³¹ See Dorigatti, "Reinventing Roland: Orlando in Italian Literature," 106-126; and Stoppino, "Arthur as Renaissance Epic," 123-124.

³² Turpin's chronicle had been used before to introduce novel biographical materials and interludes into chivalric tradition. On Boiardo's use of the device see Zanato, *Boiardo*, 179-183; and Mazzotta, "Italian Renaissance Epic," 99-100.

As has been thoroughly pointed out, Boiardo's invention set into motion a series of *capovolgimenti* and departures from readers' expectations on the level of characterization and plot.³³ Love afforded a larger psychological profile to his characters with respect to their predecessors in the Quattrocento chivalric repertoire.³⁴ It also helped a new language to emerge for the Carolingian heroes, with greater intertextual borrowings from classical, vernacular, and humanistic traditions.³⁵ How did Love's imposition effect also the visual language of Boiardo's poem?

ii. *An Image Lost: The Story of Orlando*

The story of Orlando's *insigna* weaves throughout the *Inamoramento* and continues through its most celebrated continuation (and conclusion), Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.³⁶ Between the two poems, one discovers the story of an image lost and finally recovered (in the *Furioso*), which reflects the loss and restoration of "Orlando" to "himself," as he existed prior to either poems' interventions. The story's details, meanwhile, develop Orlando's character and many of the major themes of both poems. They also reflect on the paradoxes and limits of characterization within an inter-textual tradition; the innovations that Boiardo and Ariosto brought to that tradition; and the latter's reading of and relation to the former. Throughout, the *insigna* is developed both as an image and narrative device.

Following Orlando's departure from Paris, the next mention of his shield-image in the *Inamoramento* comes in the twenty-sixth canto of the first book, just as it changes again. Orlando is in the company of Angelica, having decided to fight under her command at all costs, and he accepts a new crest and shield from her hands. Desire itself is portrayed on these objects in the form of an image of winged Cupid with his darts.

Lei abbracciava quel franco gueriero,
Dicendoli: "Baron, dove ne vai?
Tu m'hai promeso, e sei mio cavaliero:

³³ See for example Tissoni Benvenuti, "Introduzione," xxiii-xxiv (Trans. mine): "Sembra guidare questa prima invenzione una giocosa poetica del capovolgimento dei topoi narrativi del genere: la spedizione di Gradasso non è mossa da motivi religiosi o politici, ma semplicemente dal capriccio di possedere Durindana e Baiardo; il casto Orlando non solo si innamora perdutamente, ma l'amore lo rende ancor più valoroso e invincibile; Ranaldo è creato dall'imperatore capitano generale dell'esercito cristiano e, invece di essere – come di solito nei poemi italiani contemporanei – occupato nella conquista di tutte le donzelle che incontra, fugge la bellissima Angelica innamorata di lui; Astolfo, che fin dall'*Entrée* era un allegro ed elegante buffone sprovvisto di qualità militari, è il vincitore del forte Gradasso nel duello finale" [This first invention seems to guide a playful poetics of overturning the *topoi* of the genre: Gradasso's expedition is no longer inspired by religious or political motives, but simply by the caprice of possessing Durindana and Baiardo; the chaste Orlando not only falls in love hopelessly but also love make him even more brave and invincible; Ranaldo is created *capitano generale* of the Christian army by the Emperor and, instead of being occupied – as he usually is in the contemporary Italian poems – with the conquests of all of the women he encounters, he flees the beautiful Angelica who is in love with him; Astolfo, who since the *Entrée* was a happy and elegant buffoon without military capacities, is now the vanquisher of the inimitable Gradasso in the final dual].

³⁴ See Sangirardi, *Boiardismo ariostesco*, 38.

³⁵ See Matarrese, *Parole e forme dei cavalieri boiardeschi*, 45-62.

³⁶ The *Inamoramento* inspired numerous continuations besides the *Furioso*, which I have not taken into consideration here. See Harris, *Bibliografia dell'Orlando innamorato*, 59-96; Montagnani, "L'incantesimo del *sequel*: fra Boiardo e Ariosto," 41-56; and Matarrese, "... continuando la invenzione del conte Matheo Maria Boiardo," 57-76. On Ariosto as a reader of Boiardo and the history of the relationship between their poems as a "questione critica," see Sangirardi, *Boiardismo ariostesco*, 7-17; and Cavallo, *The Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso*, 69-73.

Questo giorno per me combaterai,
 E per l'amor di me questo cimero
 E questo rico scudo portarai.
 Abi sempre il pensier a cui tel dona,
 Et opra ben per lei la tua persona.
 Cossi dicendo, gli donava un scudo,
 Che il campo è d'oro e l'armelino è bianco;
 E un bel cimier, ch'è un fanciulletto nudo
 Con l'arco e l'alle e le saete al fianco.
 Quel Conte, che pur mo' fo tanto crudo,
 Mirando la dongiela venia manco,
 E tanta zogia senti e tal desire
 Che d'allegrezza si sente morire. (I.xxvi.10)

The scene reveals how Orlando has renounced his agency, and indeed his identity, in this enamored condition. The narrator develops this idea further and in the following scene describes Orlando wearing these new arms as the god of love bearing an image of the paladin on his crest.

Il dio d'amor, che ha il Conte per cimero,
 Volò con l'ale rotte ala pianura.
 L'elmo d'Almonte ben gli fiè mestiero,
 Ché qua la affatason non lo asicura,
 Poi che Renaldo a tanta furia il toca,
 Che gli avria posto le cervele in bocca. (I.xxvii.5)

“Orlando” has become a sign and cipher to Amor, whom he now embodies. Angelica’s “gift” highlights her character’s ingenuity, meanwhile, as she is not only determining the paladin’s *insigna* at this point but also orchestrating his activities and, along with them, the poem’s plot.

More (mis)adventures ensue. When Orlando’s new arms are literally ripped apart in a skirmish with Rinaldo, the paladin’s heart is described as breaking in tandem with them.

La sopravesta il Conte avia straciata,
 E rotto il scudo d'or dal'armelino,
 E perduto il cimer del dio d'amore,
 Unde di doglia gli crepava il core.
 Et avëa tal doglia nel pensiero
 Che non scià dir se egli è morto né vivo
 Se quella dama chiedesse il cimero,
 O domandasse comme ne fo privo. (I.xxvii.37-38)

This is another indication of the strong connection between the “surface” image and the “inner” passions in Boiardo’s poem. We will encounter again the poet’s attention to the fragility, vulnerability, and materiality of images, which in this instance prompts a number of further questions. Does this seemingly new vulnerability of (some) images in the *Inamoramento* come from the novel force that love asserts on its characters? Will Orlando in love lose the physical invulnerability for which his character was famous? To what extent could “Orlando” as a character survive the *rovesciamento* of his biography in this fashion? The “replacement” images Angelica supplies him with are equivocal about these questions.

Poi che di piastra fu tutto coperto
 Et ebe il suo bon brando al fianco cento,
 Angelica la bella gli ebbe offerto

Un cimier alto e un scudo ad or destinto:
Era il cimier un arboselo inserto
E il scudo a tal insegna anchor depinto
L'elmo s'allaza quel Baron soprano,
Monta a destriero e prende l'asta in mano. (I.xxvii.56)

Portraying images of a grafted branch, these objects visualize the regenerative and degenerative potentialities of love and invention both.

The next developments in the story of Orlando's *insigna* take place in the second book of Boiardo's poem and explore the capacity of the image to disguise as well as reveal different messages to different audiences, elaborating on the dynamic introduced when Orlando replaced his *quartiero* with "virmilio scuro" in Paris at the outset. One extended episode revolves around Orlando's becoming a temporary "compagno" to Norandino, the King of Damascus. They attend a tournament in Cyprus together, where the poet describes the whole company wearing *insegne* portraying images of a live volcano, which we encountered in the Introduction to this dissertation.

Intrò il Re di Damasco tutto armato,
Con trombe avanti e ben acompagnato.
Un monte acceso portava nel scudo
E similmente nel cimier in testa,
E ciascun che con esso era venuto
Avea pur tal insegna e sopravesta. (II.xx.10-11)

Several of Orlando's former companions fail to recognize him while he is bearing this image. Grifone and Aquilante fight against him at the tournament without knowing it: "Ben che lui non cognose il paladino / Perché l'insegna avea di Norandino." (II.xx.28). Rinaldo encounters him with Angelica without realizing who he is.

Un cavalier gli stave armato al fianco,
Nela sembianza pien d'alto ardimento,
Ch'ha per cimier un Mongibel in testa,
Ritrato al scudo e nela sopravesta.
Dico che quell Baron ha per cimero
Una montagna che getava foco;
El scudo e la coperta dil destriero
Avean pur quella insegna nel suo loco. (II.xv.66)

Non conosceva el conte, che era armato
Con quella insegna dal monte di foco:
Ché si palese non se avria mostrato,
Serbando il suo parlare in altro luoco.
Perché essendo ad Angelica accostato,
Cortesemente e sorridendo un poco
Disse: - "Madama, io non posso soffrire
Ch'io non vi parli, s'io non vo' morire. (II.xx.49)

As we have said, these encounters are both ironic and comic because the "monte di foco" both disguises "Orlando" and transparently reveals his explosive inner state.

The last extended episode in the story of Orlando's image in the *Inamoramento* is also his character's last appearance there. He has returned to Paris with the *quartiero* and is therefore recognized by Christians and Muslims; predictably, with elation on the one side and consternation

on the other.³⁷ Boiardo's audience alone is privy to Orlando's prayer, meanwhile, that Charlemagne's troops under the "banner of the golden lilies" may be defeated in order that his last-minute aid might be seen by Angelica and secure her love.

Venne in quel bosco e scese Briigliadoro,
E là pregava Iddio devotamente
Che le sante bandiere a zigli d'oro
Sia mo' abatute, e Carlo e la sua gente. (II.xxx.61)

As the Saracens make their own prayer that Orlando might convert to Islam, the poem highlights that precisely the impossible *has* occurred and that Orlando *has* converted, albeit to Love instead of Islam.

Quel dal quartiere è Orlando paladino:
Or sciemarà il superchio a nostra gente!
Be lo cognosco insin da picolino.
Cossì Macon lo faccia ricredente,
Come di spada e lanza ad ogni prova
Il più fier hom al mondo non se trova. (II.xxix.42)

The paladin's last appearance in Boiardo's poem thus looks back to its beginning when Orlando leaves in Paris without his familiar *insigna*. Where the story began with his separation from the *quartiere* for a new sign of love, he is last seen returning to the familiar image to disguise love's enduring hold.

In the *Orlando furioso*, Orlando's image undergoes three major changes at critical points of his story's beginning, at the apex of his madness, and at its resolution.³⁸ The beginning of Orlando's story is delayed until the eighth canto of the *Furioso* and takes place at the siege of Paris, where Boiardo had last left him.³⁹ Orlando is still looking for Angelica and decides to leave the city following a dream in which Angelica appears to him in danger and calling for his help. His departure is accompanied by his donning a new *insegna*, with which he first plans to search the pagan camp for his beloved.

E per potere entrare ogni sentiero,
che la sua dignità macchia non pigli
non l'onorata insegna del quartiere,
distinta di color bianchi e vermigli,
ma portar vòlse un ornamento nero;
e forse acciò ch'al suo dolor simigli:
e quello avea già tolto a uno amostante,
ch'uccise di sua man pochi anni inante. (OF, 8.85)

This echoes his first departure from Paris at the outset of the *Inamoramento*, but with differences between the two scenes that are as striking as their similarities. As far as Orlando's character is concerned, he appears considerably more calculating here in explaining the new image as a tactic

³⁷ Charlemagne's recognition of Orlando falls at 2.xxix.42: "Quando conobbe Orlando al bel quartiere ... / E 'l re Carlon, che 'l vide di lontano / Lodava Idio levando al ciel le mano." The pagans recognize him through Pinadoro's vision of the image and Sobrino's identification of it at 2.xxix.41-42.

³⁸ I have based my reading of the *Furioso* in this chapter on the critical edition by Segre (1960), re-edited by Caretti (1966, 1992). This is based in turn on Ariosto's final authorial edition of 1532. I have not yet considered the extent to which the earlier authorial editions of the poem, from 1516 and 1521, and the changes across the three editions, shed light on the image-stories that I am tracing.

³⁹ On the siege of Paris and Orlando's story as one of the principle narrative sutures between the two poems see Sangirardi, *Boiardismo ariostesco*, 40-43.

to preserve his freedom of movement along with his reputation, or *dignità*. He also appears more self-conscious, as he reflects on how the “ornamento nero” reflects his inner “dolor”. The black color, in addition, anticipates the more sinister depths to which Orlando will be carried in this poem with respect to its predecessor.

Orlando’s “ornamento nero” is justified in narrative terms by its Saracen provenance, meanwhile, and this comes to be essential to the story that the *Furioso* develops around his character. When Orlando searches for his beloved among Charlemagne’s enemies in this disguise, for example, the poet reminds us that his “abito arabesco” affords him this possibility along with his ability to understand the enemy’s language.

E poi che venne il di chiaro e lucente,
tutto cercò l’esercito moresco:
e ben lo potea far sicuramente,
avendo indosso l’abito arabesco;
e aiutollo in questo parimente,
che sapeva altro idioma che francesco,
e l’africano tanto avea espedito,
che pareo nato a Tripoli e nutrito. (OF, 9.5)

It is this very knowledge of Arabic that eventually triggers Orlando’s madness in the *Furioso*’s famous twenty-third canto: by allowing him to read and understand the inscriptions that Angelica and her lover Medoro have left in the woods declaring their love.⁴⁰

In *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony* (1987), Albert Ascoli has shown that the problem and language of “signs” is crucial to the episode of madness in this poem.⁴¹ “[A]ll of the short episodes in the canto which act as preludes to the great scene involve successful or unsuccessful recognitions, all based on the ability to detect or protect identity by means of name, outer appearance, and other ‘segni’ and ‘indizii’.”⁴² Moreover, a succession of signs are responsible for triggering Orlando’s madness: First the Arabic inscriptions; then the shepherd’s recounting of Angelica and Medoro’s love to Orlando; and finally the bracelet that the shepherd procures to support his story as a “testimonio e segno” and that Orlando had once given to Angelica as a token of his love.⁴³ The experience of madness itself leaves the hero “both literally and figuratively stripped of all the signs of his humanity and his own special heroic identity ... unrecognizable to almost everyone.”⁴⁴

Non son, non sono io quell che paio in viso
quel’ch era Orlando è morto ed è sotterra;
la sua donna ingrattissima l’ha ucciso:
sì, mancando di fé, gli ha fatto guerra.
Io son lo spirito suo da lui diviso,
ch’in questo inferno tormentandosi erra,
acciò con l’ombra sia, che sola avanza,

⁴⁰ *Orlando furioso*, 23.110: “Era scritto in arabico, che ‘l conte / Intendea così ben come latino: / Fra molte lingue e molte ch’avea pronte, / Prontissima avea quella il paladino; / E gli schivò più volte e danni et onte, / Che si trovò tra il popol saracino: / Ma non si vanti, se già n’ebbe frutto; / Ch’un danno or n’ha, che può scontrargli il tutto.”

⁴¹ Ascoli, *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony*, 304-331.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 315.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 310: “The progression is from less certain and complete signs to evidence which is increasingly closely linked to its origin, culminating with an eyewitness and, then, Orlando himself as originator of the bracelet’s significance.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 310.

esempio a chi in Amor pone speranza. (OF, 23.128)

Qui riman l'elmo, e la riman lo scudo,
lontan gli arnesi, e più lontan l'usbergo:
l'arme sue tutte, in somma vi concludo,
avean pel bosco differente albergo.
E poi si squarciò i panni, e mostrò igudo
l'ispido ventre e tutto 'l petto e 'l tergo;
e cominciò la gran follia, si orrenda,
che de la più non sarà mai ch'intenda. (OF, 23.133)

At least one result of all this “sign” language is that madness in the *Furioso* appears as “a state of *undifferentiation* leading to the failure to be recognized for who one is and caused by the recognition that others are just like oneself”: “[Madness] refuses the differential structures of language which presume a difference between self and others that requires the bridge of linguistic communication and which operate by virtue of differentiations of every kind (black/white, human/animal, etc.).”⁴⁵ Already Ascoli’s reading of these problematics around “signs” in the *Furioso*, moreover, extends to the *insegne* worn the characters.⁴⁶ Following the full stories of *insignia* between Boiardo and his continuator, as we are doing here, confirms that both visual as well as verbal “signs” are at stake in the poems. It also shows how the later poem pushes to an extreme the narrative mechanisms that the former had set into motion already, by breaking the “proper” connection between Orlando and his *insigna* in the context of the Pentecostal miracle, which abolished the differential structures constituting human language(s).

Ariosto’s attention to this is confirmed though his development of Orlando’s recovery, which takes place though the intervention of Saint John the Evangelist, a participant in that miracle in the Bible. In the *Furioso*, John explains Orlando’s madness as a form of divine punishment for having “twisted” the *insegne* entrusted to him by God:

Sappi che 'l Vostro Orlando, perché torse
Dal camin dritto le commesse insegne,
È punito da Dio, che più s'accende
Contra chi egli ama più, quando s'offende. (OF, 34.62)

He also instructs Astolfo on how to restore Orlando’s reason, and on how to recognize Orlando by a certain sign (“alcun segno”), presumably on his naked body, without which the enraged paladin would have been forever indistinguishable from the beasts.⁴⁷ Once Orlando is captured, finally, forced to ingest his “reason” and enabled to “racquistar quanto già amor gli tolse,” the very last “sign” of his recovery is none other than the *quartiero* (OF, 39.61).

Specifically, the “restored” Orlando appears with his old image while preparing for the first battle after his cure, to be fought together with his companions Oliviero and Brandimarte, against some of the most formidable Saracens. The poet prefaces the scene with the claim that the “each knight / studies to have a sumptuous and new garment,” which (only) for the others is really true.

Pel di de la battaglia ogni guerriero

⁴⁵ Ibid., 315; 321.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 212-224.

⁴⁷ *Orlando furioso* 39.45: “Astolfo tutto a un tempo, ch’era quivi, / che questo Orlando fosse, ebbe palese / per alcun segno che dai vecchi divi / su nel terrestre paradiso intese. / Altrimenti restavan tutti privi / Di cognizion di quell signor cortese; / Che per lungo sprezzarsi, come stolto, / Avea di fera, più che d’uomo, il volto.”

studia aver ricco e nuovo abito indosso.
 Orlando riccamar fa nel quartiere
 l'alto Babel dal fulmine percosso.
 Un can d'argento aver vuole Oliviero,
 che giaccia, e che la lassa abbia sul dosso,
 con un motto che dica: *Fin che venga*:
 e vuol d'oro la vesta e di sé degna.
 Fece disegno Brandimarte, il giorno
 de la battaglia, per amor del padre,
 e per suo onore, di non andare adorno
 se non di sopraveste oscure e adre.
 Fiordiligi le fe' con fregio intorno
 quanto più seppe far, belle e leggiadre.
 Di ricche gemme il fregio era contesto;
 d'un schietto drappo e tutto nero il resto. (OF, 41.30-31)

Oliviero makes for himself a hitherto unseen image and *motto*, which he simply wants for the occasion; and Brandimarte, assisted by the handiwork of his beloved Fiordiligi, wears dark colors and precious materials in a gesture of mourning for his father. What occurs in Orlando's case is a return to the *quartiere* that had always been his, before the biographical parenthesis that Boiardo had opened. The "novel" twist is that Orlando adds to his *quartiere* an image of Babel struck by lightning. It is the very opposite biblical event from the Pentecostal miracle with which the *Inamoramento* began.⁴⁸

One implication of this ending to Orlando's story is that post-Babelic differentiation and the "signs" that are a consequence of it appear to have positive connotations, associated as the image of Babel's destruction now is with Orlando's newly recovered sanity.⁴⁹ The capacities and craftsmanship involved in the making of "signs" appear distinctly (positively) human, even as the "signs" that the characters make for themselves accompany violence, expresses their potentially wayward desires, and mourn death. Orlando's relation to his *insigna* also seems less essential as he "embroiders" the tower upon it; and the white and vermilion *quartiere* less a sign of the character's virginity and charity than a sign of the tradition in which "Orlando" was made, and could therefore be changed. These ideas contrast with some of the most influential sixteenth-century readings of the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso*, which canonized both poems as didactic allegories and as trans-regional "Italian" masterpieces whose local ties to the Estensi and their regional idioms could be "corrected" into oblivion.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Genesis* 11.5.

⁴⁹ There are certainly other possible interpretations of Orlando's final image. Lanfranco Caretti glosses it as a "simbolo dell'orgoglio pagano vinto dal Cielo, come augurio all'impresa che Orlando si accinge ad affrontare" (symbol of pagan pride vanquished by Heaven, as an augury for the enterprise that Orlando prepares himself to undertake) in his edition of the *Furioso* at 41.30n. My reading differs by following the story of Orlando's image and by considering it in the context of the poem's linguistic and semiotic themes and questions.

⁵⁰ On "moral allegorization" as one of the tools used for canonizing the *Furioso*, see Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando furioso*, 6. We will return to the question of how allegory and ethics have shaped the interpretation of both poems and their "signs" further down in this chapter.

iii. *New Characters, New Insegne: Brunello, Rodamonte, Marphisa*

Orlando is not the only character in the *Inamoramento* or *Furioso* who is associated with one or more images. Nearly every armed character in these populous poems are given *insigna* to display on their bodies. These images too have stories, and/or are often inseparable from their characters' stories, within and between the two poems. This holds true even for characters who, at the other end of the spectrum entirely from Orlando, make their debut in chivalric tradition in the *Inamoramento*, having no prior genealogies in the accounts of the Carolingian peers. In this section we ask how these characters contribute to the discourses around *insigna* that we have been tracing.

We have seen that Zug Tucci's analysis of "imaginary heraldry" in the Carolingian tradition new characters' "signs" allowing for greater inventiveness and creativity on the part of authors and *cantari*.

The less a character is defined, in the oral tradition and/or in the literature, and the less his familial and social relationships are defined, the greater inventive possibilities that character offers for his purported *arma*; And vice versa, the more the character is already delineated and circumscribed, the more the spectrum of possibilities for his *insegne* is restricted.⁵¹

Boiardo surprises once again on this point, however, in essentially the opposite way that he surprises with Orlando's image. While upending tradition by altering Orlando's *quartiero*, his new characters' "signs" often prove to engage profoundly with prior literary traditions, or more often with multiple traditions, showing how invention emerges out of a dialectic between tradition and change. In addition, the new "signs" of his poem and its continuation often reflect and refract those of the more established characters at the level of their iconographies and themes. For both types of characters (established and new), moreover, the narrator attends closely to the fabrication of "signs" as a psychological, and/or material activity. For a combination of the above reasons, the "signs" of well-established and of newly invented characters in the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso* tend to resemble each other more than one might expect.

The "ladro soprano" of the *Inamoramento*, Brunello, is one example of this phenomenon (II.iii.39). Rajna had pointed out that his typology descends from a long tradition of dwarf-robbers in Germanic and French epic and romance, while his character by name was unheard-of and new to the Carolingian material.⁵² Entering Boiardo's poem as the "servente" of a pagan king, he gets charged with helping Agramante to acquire (i.e. by stealing) Angelica's magical ring. Since he is a decidedly ignoble figure, without arms or a hereditary genealogy to speak of, he is initially described with and as a collection of personal and physical attributes, from maliciousness and speed, to short stature and dark skin.

Egli è ben picioletto di persona,
Ma di malicia a meraviglia pieno,
E sempre in calmo e per zergo ragiona:
Lungo è da cinque palmi, o poco meno,
E la sua voce par corno che sona;
Nel dire e nel robbar è senza freno.

⁵¹ Zug Tucci, "Leggende carolinge e araldica immaginaria," 307 (Trans. mine): "*Grosso modo* vale anche qui la regola che meno è caratterizzato un personaggio, o nella tradizione o nella letteratura, e configurato nei suoi legami familiari e sociali, maggiori possibilità inventive si offrono per una sua supposta arma; e viceversa, più è modellato e circoscritto il personaggio, maggiormente si restringe la gamma delle insegne per lui concepibili."

⁵² See Rajna, *Le Origini dell'epopea francese*, 431-32; and Tissoni Benvenuti, "Introduzione," xii.

Va sol di nòte, e il dì non è veduto,
Curti ha i capilli, ed è negro e rizuto. (II.iii.40)

Brunello enjoys an unexpected rise in status, however, when Agramante crowns him “Re de Tingitana” as a reward for having successfully acquired the ring (XVI.14). The promotion allows him to bear arms and an *insegna* that we learn of in Boiardo’s extended catalogue of the African troops in Book Two.

Dapoi Brunelo, il Re de Tingitana,
Avea l’insegna di novo retrata,
Più vaga assai del’altre e più soprana,
Perché lui stesso a suo modo l’ha fata:
Come hoggi al mondo fa la gente vana,
Stimando generosa far sua schiata
E le cassate sue nobil e degne,
Con far di zigli e di leon insegne.

Cossì Brunel, la cui fama era poca
(Come intendesti, ch’era Re di novo)
Nel campo rosso avea depinta un’oca
Ch’avea la coda e l’ale sopra al’ovo;
De ciò parlando, lui con gli altri gioca:
“Ben son” dicendo “antiquo, e ciò ti provo,
Ché lo Evangelio, ch’è drito iudicio,
Afferma che l’oca era nel’inicio!” (II.29.6-7)

The “Re di novo” “paints” for himself a goose upon an egg, we learn here; and he jokes that the image testifies to his ancient lineage, as even the Evangelist affirms that “in the beginning was the goose [l’oca].”

The joke refers to the first lines of the Gospel of John, in which God’s eternal being and creative force is described as a form of *logos* that clarifies in turn the nature of the Son: “In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum era apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum. Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.”⁵³ Its presence in Boiardo’s poem thus extends the ongoing comparison of divine and human forms of language and “signs” with which the poem began. In Brunello’s handling, the joking *insegna* also compares with Angelica’s use of the rose-petal crown on Pentecost as an egregious misuse and “twisting” of Biblical language and signs. On the other hand, and much like Angelica, Brunello shows himself to be an ingenious deviser of “signs” in this scene, true to the capacities for “arte” and “inzigno” that he claims from the start.⁵⁴ We have discussed already how Angelica’s images for Orlando both conceal his identity and comically reveal his attachment to her. Brunello’s joking *insegna*, not dissimilarly, conceals his ignoble origins even as it betrays a clear-sighted awareness of how his social promotion has flouted the ideology of the nobility of which he is now supposedly a part.

But the same “sign” reflects the “arte” and “inzigno” of the poet too. Brunello’s performance of his image recalls the Tuscan novelistic tradition, for example, in which parodic shield-images combined with punning commentaries (*motti*) had become a kind of *topos* since the Trecento, usually aimed at the aristocratic pretensions of the most dull-witted amongst the

⁵³ *John* 1-2.

⁵⁴ See *Inamoramento* II.iii.41: “Signor, io non possarò mai / Sin che con arte, ingani, o con inzigno / Io no acquisti il prometuto regno.”

middling classes.⁵⁵ The passage shows us Boiardo moving Brunello from one literary typology to another, in other words, just as the character changes status in the world of the poem.

The episode in which Brunello makes his *insegna* known – the poet’s catalogue of the African troops – is meanwhile modeled on at least two illustrious classical sources about which the poet is as doubly transparent and deceptive as Brunello is about his newly acquired nobility. Several scholars have noticed how Boiardo’s narrator here claims an unprecedented scale for his African troops in relation to the two major invading armies of classical history (the Africans who invaded Italy under Hannibal, and the Persians and their allies who invaded Greece under Xerxes). Precisely by doing so, of course, Boiardo acknowledges Livy and Herodotus as his sources for the passage.⁵⁶

Né quando prima il barbaro Hannibàle,
Roto avendo ad Ibéro il gran diveto,
Con tuta Spagna et Affrica ale spale,
Speciò col foco l’Alpe e con l’aceto;
Ne el gran Re persiano, in quela vale
Ove Leonida fè l’asptro decreto
Con le gente di Sithia e d’Ethiopia,
Ebbe de armati in campo maggior copia. (II.29.2)

In Herodotus’ *Histories*, which Boiardo translated over roughly the same period that he was writing the *Inamoramento*, the catalogue describes the particularities and varieties of the vestments, headgear, arms, armor, and languages, belonging to the diverse nations gathered together under Xeres’ leadership against the Greeks.⁵⁷ Boiardo’s version keeps the suit of armor as the standard accoutrement of the pagans, following chivalric tradition, while inventing a series of novel *insegne* for his foreign soldiers, which seem to vie with Herodotus’ model to produce wonder and *varietas*. The figures on these images include a woman dragging a dragon by the ears (“una dongiela scapigliata / E quela un drago per l’orechie tiene”); parts of a griffon (nel campo vermilio / Le branche, el colo, e ‘l capo d’un griffone); a nude boy (nel rosso un fanciulletto nudo); and a dragon with a human head (un drago verde il qual ha il capo humano).⁵⁸ Brunello’s jokingly blasphemous *insegna* among this list highlights how incongruous and ingenious Boiardo’s poetic

⁵⁵ See for example Sacchetti, *Trecentonovelle*, LXIII (“A Giotto gran dipintore è dato uno palvese a dipingere da un uomo di picciolo affare. Egli facendosene scherze, lo dipinge per forma che colui rimane confuso”); and CL (“Uno cavaliere, andando in podesteria porta uno suo cimero; uno Tedesco il vuole combatter con lui ed elli nega la battaglia”); Bracciolini, *Facetiae*, CCI (“Contesa di due uomini per la stessa figura negli stemmi”); and Degli Arienti, *Porretane Novelle*, XXVII (“Uno camariero del principe Nicolò, marchese da Este, adimanda a epso principe il faza cavaliere; e questa dignità essendoli negata, li adminanda l’arma sua: unde cum morale exemplo gli è donato uno capo de aglio, e poi diventa religioso certosino”). Tissoni Benvenuti points out the “scherzosa deformazione popolare di gusto toscano” here in her “Commento” at *Inamoramento* II.29.7n.

⁵⁶ See Murrin, “Agramante’s War,” 107-128; esp. 111-114 on this scene.

⁵⁷ See Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.61-87. On Boiardo’s *volgarizzamento* of Herodotus see Looney, “Herodotus in Narrative Art in Renaissance Ferrara,” 232-253; “The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento,” 167-193; “Fragil arte: tradurre e governare nei volgarizzamenti boiardeschi ad Ercole I d’Este,” 123-136; and “Erodoto dalle *Storie* al romanzo,” 429-441.

⁵⁸ The whole catalogue appears at *Inamoramento* II.xxix.3-22. The narrator’s image-descriptions are often as playful and as punning as Brunello’s “motto” is for his own. For example, the description of the *insegna* displaying “the talons, neck, and head of a griffin” is a joke that depends on griffins being hybrid creatures combining the body, tail, and hind legs of a lion with the head, neck, and front talons of an eagle. Chapter Three treats an earlier discussion about griffins and hybrid beings at the Este court, also related to Herodotus’ reception in that milieu and to the articulation of “signs” (iii. *Modeling a Philology of Images*).

practice is, in and not only in this very scene. The thief's ironic transfiguration into a king underscores how the *Inamoramento* itself enacts its "nobilizzazione letteraria di un genere popolare."⁵⁹

In the *Furioso*, Brunello's *insegna* is never seen or mentioned again, even though his character's story continues. When Bradamante encounters him early in Ariosto's poem, she refrains from killing him on the basis that he is ignoble and "senza arme".⁶⁰ The reader is given no explanation as to why Brunello is not wearing the arms here, or bearing the "oca" that he had invented for himself after becoming a king. The omission could imply Bradamante's nobility – her inability to see Brunello for anything other than the thief that he is, for example – or Ariosto's recognition of the limited applicability of Boiardo's novelistic joke to the intertextual pattern of the chivalric tradition. In either case, Brunello's early and unmarked appearance prepares the reader for the declining fortunes of the character in Ariosto's poem, his falling out of favor with Agramante and the revocation of his title, whereby he is restored to the ignoble condition in which he entered the *Inamoramento* in the first place.

Another creation of Boiardo's whose *insegna* is perhaps more memorable is Rodamonte/Rodomonte. The invention of this proud pagan warrior differs from that of Brunello, since Boiardo attaches Rodamonte to a complex genealogy that is both sexual and textual. First introduced in the *Inamoramento* at the end of a long genealogical sequence that begins with Alexander the Great, we are told that Rodamonte's father is Ulieno di Sarza, a giant already known (and related to Agramante) from Andrea da Barberino's *Aspromonte*.⁶¹ Later on in Boiardo's poem, his genealogy is extended even farther back to Nimrod, an ancestor of Noah's according to Genesis, and the leader of the tower of Babel's construction according to several popular and literary traditions that Boiardo knew.⁶² This claim grants Rodamonte the most ancient genealogy of any character in Boiardo's poem. However, with perfect irony, the giant is unable to conceive of himself in genealogical terms, just as he is unable to heed the prophecy that predicts his death at the hands of the Franks.⁶³ The reason for this, and the most consistent feature of his character, is his inability to have faith in or reverence for anything that transcends the bounds of his immediate sensory experience, especially his sight.⁶⁴

Rodamonte's limitation in this respect becomes the basis for the "sign". As in the case of Bruenllo, only one image is revealed in connection to Rodamonte's character over the course of

⁵⁹ Matarrese, *Boiardo a Scandiano*, 16. For another example of how Brunello's character combines combination medieval and classical genres see Matarrese, *Parole e forme dei cavalieri boiardeschi*, 30.

⁶⁰ *Orlando furioso*, 4.xiii-xix: "Quivi la donna esser conosce l'ora / di tor l'anello e far che Brunel mora. / Ma le par atto vile a insanguinarsi / D'un uom senza arme e di sì ignobil sorte."

⁶¹ *Inamoramento* II.i.5-17; and Tissoni Benvenuti, "Commento," II.i.17n.

⁶² *Inamoramento*, II.xiv.32-34: "Nembroth, il fier gigante, che in Tesaglia / Sfidò già Dio con sieco ala bataglia./ Poi quell soperbo, per la sua arroganza / Fece in Babel la Tore edificare, / Ché de gionger al ciel avia speranza / E quel' a tera tuto roinare ... Re Rodamonte nacque de sua giesta." Nimrod appears in *Genesis* 10:4. Tissoni Benvenuti discusses Boiardo's possible intertexts for Nimrod in Dante's *Inferno* and the *Dittamondo* in her "Commento" at II.xiv.32n.

⁶³ *Inamoramento* I.i.60-61.

⁶⁴ Rodamonte articulates this several times. See *Inamoramento* II.iii.20-22: "Mal aggia l'omo che dà tanta fede / Al ditto di altri e al quell che non si vede! ... Se egli è alcun dio nel ciel (ch'io nol scio certo) / Là stasis ad alto, e di qua giù non cura; / Homo non è che l'abia visto o esperto, / Ma la vil genere crede per paura. / Io de la mia fede vi ragiono aperto, / Che sol il mio bon brando e l'armatura / E la mazza ch'io porto al destrier mio / E l'animo ch'io ho son il mio dio!" On Rodomonte's obsession with vision see also Cavallo, *The World Beyond Europe*, 113-116. On various classical influences on Rodamonte's character see Zampese, "L'Orlando innamorato e Stazio," 401-6 and 416-17; and Chaudhuri, "The *Thebiad* in Italian Renaissance Epic: The Case of Capaneus," 527-540.

the *Inamoraemtno*. It emerges amidst his early battles in France as a “vermilio” field on which a naturalistic representation of a woman is portrayed – no other than Rodamonte’s beloved, Doralice, standing with tamed lion.

Del Re di Sarza in tera è ‘l confallone,
Ch’era vermilio, e dentro una Regina
Qual avea posto il freno ad un leone:
Questa era Doralice di Granata,
Da Rodamonte più che il cor amata
Peró ritrata ela sua bandera
La portava quell Re contanto atroce
Sì natural, e proprio come ella era,
Che altro non li mancava che la voce;
E lei mirando, alla bataglia fiera
Più ritornava ardito e più feroce,
Ché per tal guardo sua virtù fioriva
Come l’avesse avante agli ochi viva.
Quando la vide alla terra caduta
Mai fo nela su vita più dolente:
La fiera faccia di color si muta,
Hor bianca ne vien tuta, hor foco ardente. (II.vii.28-30)

A few stanzas prior, the narrator has compared Rodamonte himself to a lion with an epic simile.⁶⁵ The comparison proves to be canny once the warrior’s “confallone,” almost simultaneously to its initial description, falls to the ground and sends the warrior into a bestial rage.⁶⁶

Quando la vide a terra, Rodamonte
Dela gran doglia non trovava loco,
Et arrufarsi e crini ala sua fronte
Mostrando gli ochi rossi come ‘l foco.
Qual un cingial ch’a foria escie del monte,
Che cani e caciator extima poco,
Fiacca le broche e bate ambe le zane
(Tristo colui ch’acanto gli rimane!). (II.xiv.21)

The episode show how closely Boiardo intertwines his plots and characters with their “signs”. It also highlights Rodamonte’s fatal flaw, his reverence for visible phenomena alone, which makes him vulnerable not only to the idolatrous potentialities of desire but also to mistaking his image of Doralice for the woman herself. The passage links Rodamonte to Orlando’s character, finally, as both of these formidable warriors bear “signs” of their desire that prove to be as physically vulnerable as their own persons are whilst subjected to *eros*. This connection highlights the “universal” potency of desire in Boiardo’s poem to effect pagans and Christians alike. Rodamonte’s rage over his felled “sign” in the first poem, in which already he is called “forioso,” also foreshadows Orlando’s total and extended madness in the *Furioso*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Inamoramento* I.vii.25: “Quale il forte leon alla foresta, / Che sente alle sue spalle il caciatore, / Squassando e crini e torcendo la testa / Mostra le zanne e rugie con terrore, / Tal Rodomonte, odendo la tempesta/ Che facean e Lombardi, e ‘l gran furore / Dela sua gente rotta e posta in caccia, / Voltava adetro al soperba faccia.” On Boiardo’s similes see Zampese, *Or si fa rossa or pallida la luna. La cultura classica nell’Orlando Innamorato*, 184-5.

⁶⁶ The entire scene of Rodamonte’s rage at the loss of his “sign” unfolds at *Inamoramento* II.xix.19-68

⁶⁷ See *Orlando furioso* 46.civ.

Rodomonte's story in Ariosto's poem, meanwhile, is developed in a complex plotline that involves the loss of his first beloved (the fickle Doralice) to a rival suitor (Mandricardo); his love for a second woman (the faithful widow Isabella), whom he unintentionally murders; and a series of seemingly transformative acts of attrition and education. Only once do "new arms" appear on his body in this poem, at his hostile interruption of Ruggiero and Bradamante's wedding celebrations in the poem's concluding scene.

“tutto coperto egli e 'l destrier di ner,
di gran persona, e di sembiante altiero.” (OF, 46.ci)

“con nuove arme e cavallo e spada e lancia
alla corte or ne vien quivi di Francia.” (OF, 46.ciii)

But of the scene's central ironies is how little the giant's "nuove arme" reflect any change in his character from his prior manifestation in Boiardo's poem. Still Rodomonte shows no "sign" of reverence of any kind ("senza segno alcun di riverenza"); still he relies exclusively on his (limited) powers of vision to determine his actions ("ben che tua fellonia si veggia aperta," he challenges Ruggiero); and still – or again, after the scene of his rage in the *Inamoramento* – Ariosto portrays him as a wild and hunted animal.⁶⁸ This undercuts the apparently educational experiences that Rodomonte undergoes in the *Furioso*.⁶⁹ The example also shows how Ariosto uses the "sign" as a marker of breaks and continuities within his characters' psychologies and story-lines, and between his own poem and its predecessor.

The most interesting "sign" from the perspective of Ariosto's relation to Boiardo belongs arguably to the character of Marphisa/Marfisa, another Boiardan invention that Ariosto adopts and adapts.⁷⁰ Boiardo's narrator introduces her as a Queen from the Levant, without providing her with ties to a specific location or family.⁷¹ He stresses instead her extreme force and arrogance. The image he attaches to her is that of a crown broken into three parts, which is displayed on her shield and accompanied by a fire-breathing dragon on her helmet:

Una grossa asta portava Marphysa
De osso e de nerbo, tropo smisturata;
Nel scudo azuro aveva per divisa
Una corona in tre parte speciata;
La cotta d'arme pur a quella guise,
E la coperta tutta lavorata;
E per cimer nel'elmo al somo loco
Un drago verde che gitava foco. (I.xviii.4)

This image alludes to the vow that she makes to Muhammed, revealed when she is first introduced into the poem, to remain armed every day for at least five years until she has challenged three great

⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*, 46.civ; 46.cvi; and 46.cxxxviii: "Come mastin sotto il feroce alano / che fissi i denti ne la gola gli abbia, / molto s'affanna e si dibatte invano / con occhi ardenti e com spumose labia, / e non può uscire al predator di mano, / che vince di vigor, non già di rabbia: / così falla al pagano ogni pensiero / d'uscir sotto al vincitor Ruggiero."

⁶⁹ Cavallo has a different reading of "Ariosto's reversal of Rodomonte's character" in *The World Beyond Europe*, 119-121. Here she argues that "[w]hereas in the *Inamoramento* Rodomonte initially did not give credence to anything he could not verify with his own eyes, in the course of the *Furioso* he reverts into the very picture of credulity" (*Ibid.*, 119). My position is that Rodomonte's credulity is already a corollary of his insistence on sense-perception in the *Inamoramento*.

⁷⁰ On the woman warrior and textual antecedents for Marphisa/Marfisa in chivalric tradition see Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 18-57

⁷¹ Marphisa makes her entrance in the *Inamoramento* at I.xvi.28-30.

kings to battle, Gradasso, Agricagne and Carlomagno.⁷² She is induced to break this vow already in the *Inamoramento*, however, while following upon the heels of Brunello after he steals her sword. Chasing the thief, Marphisa's horse dies of fatigue and she despoils herself of her heavy arms, continuing her pursuit on foot in what is her last appearance in the *Inamoramento*.⁷³

In her first appearance in the *Furioso*, Marfisa's character is rehabilitated and reconnected with her armature in a scene that explicitly references the earlier story. In the context of Norndino's tournament at Damascus, she sees her arms offered as a prize and has them returned to her by recounting how she had lost them, while the *insegna* of the broken crown acts as a witness to the truth of her claim.

Mie sono l'arme, e 'n mezzo de la via
che vien d'Armenia, un giorno le lascai
perché seguire a piè mi convenia
un rubator che m'avea offesa assai:
e la mia insegna testimon ne fia,
che qui si vede, se notizia n'hai. –
È la mostrò ne la corazza impressa,
Ch'era in tre parti una corona fessa. (OF, 18.cxxvii)

Again, the image (of the broken crowns this time) signals the continuities between the two poems.

It is only later in the *Furioso* that critical changes to both the character and her image are made. In the twenty-fifth canto, Ruggiero, Aldigier, and Ricciardetto encounter a proud-looking knight displaying as "his" *insegna* "the rare and beautiful bird that lives more than a century":

I tre guerrieri arditi si fermaro
dove un sentier fendea quella pianura;
e giunger quivi un cavallier mirato,
ch'avea d'oro fregiata l'armatura,
e per insegna in campo verde il raro
e bello augel che più d'un secol dura. (OF, 25, 97)

Already to describe Astolfo's travels in Arabia, the poet had introduced the mythical phoenix.⁷⁴ He now confirms that the phoenix is depicted on this mysterious knight's shield, describing it as the bird that "renews itself and always finds itself unique in the world":

Vi dissi ancor, che di superbo aspetto
venire un cavalliero avean veduto,
che portava l'augel che si rinnova,
e sempre unico al mondo si ritrova. (OF, 26.3)

⁷² *Inamoramento* I.xvi.29: "Marphisa la dongiella è nominate / (Questa che io dico) e fo cotanto fiera / Che ben cinque anni sempre stete armata, / Da il sol nascente al tramontar di sera, / Perché al suo dio Macon si era avotata / Con sacramento, la persona altera, / Mai non spogliarsi sbergo e piastre e maglia / Sin che tre Re non prende per bataglia."

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II.xvi.6: "Ma per longa fatica e debeleza / L'armatura ch'ha indosso assai gli pesa, / Onde se la spogliò con molta freza." The episode underscores the denigrating effect that Brunello has in the poem on the other characters and on the narration generally, even as he himself is raised up as a king.

⁷⁴ *Orlando furioso* 15.xxxix: "Vien [Astolfo] per l'Arabia ch'è detta Felice / ricca di mirra e d'odorato incenso, / che per suo albergo l'unica fenice / eletto s'ha di tutto il mondo immenso; / fin che l'onda trovò vendicatrice / già d'Israel, che per divin consenso / Faraone sommerse e tutti i suoi: / e poi venne alla terra degli Eroi." This reference will also relate specifically to Marfisa's *insegna* of the phoenix, as we learn later that she had been kidnapped at a young age by a band of Arabs. See *Ibid.*, 36.lxiii.

The reader is as surprised as the other characters are in this episode to learn eventually that the knight is Marfisa. The image of the “unique bird” conforms well to her usual arrogance and pride;⁷⁵ but it surprises that we should find her with this image precisely in the scene where she encounters an equal to herself in strength and valor, Ruggiero, and where the poet compares her character to a literary antecedent, the Amazonian Queen Penthesilea.⁷⁶ The irony is redoubled the next time that Marfisa’s (new) *insegna* appears in canto thirty-six. The poet explains that she bears the image of the phoenix either out of pride, to denote her unique strength, or to express her intention to never submit to marriage.

Marfisa se ne vien fuor de la porta,
e sopra l’elmo una fenice porta;
o sia per sua superbia, dinotando
se stessa unica al mondo in esser forte,
o per sua casta intenzion lodando
di viver sempremai senza consorte. (OF, 36.xviii)

In the very same canto, however, the spirit of Atlas reveals that Marfisa and Ruggiero, *capostipite* of the Estensi, are twins: “in un medesimo utero d’un seme / ... concetti, e uscite al mondo insieme.”⁷⁷ This gives Ruggiero’s character the opportunity to review the long and illustrious genealogy that binds the two together. Ariosto’s language also recalls the passage in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, surely one of his sources, which introduces the phoenix as the only bird that “renews itself and reproduces its own being” without being “born from the inside of an egg.”⁷⁸ At the end of Ariosto’s canto, Marfisa converts to Christianity and vows to the Christian God to never remove her armor until she has avenged the father whom she had never known, a direct echo of her vow at the outset of the *Inamoramento* to “Macon.”⁷⁹ As Marfisa appears under the “sign” of a mythical bird whose primary distinction is its radical self-sufficiency, in other words, the character gains a familial genealogy and reveals her ongoing textual links to the *Inamoramento*.⁸⁰

By the end of Ariosto’s poem, Marfisa’s phoenix has several different connotations. An image of Marfisa’s (limited) sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency at first, already prefigured in the “arroganza” that distinguished her character in Boiardo’s poem, it later becomes an image of her lack of foreknowledge of the genealogy that Ariosto eventually provides her with. Once the

⁷⁵ See *Ibid.*, 26.lxxix: “Io sua non son, né d’altri son che mia: / dunque me tolga a me chi mi desia.”

⁷⁶ See *Ibid.*, 26.xxvi; and 26.lxxix: “Tal nel campo troian Penthesilea / contra il tessalo Achille esser dovea.”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.lxi.

⁷⁸ See Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, 385-393 (Trans. Miller): “Iunonis volucrem, quae cauda sidera portat, / armigerumque Iovis Cythereiadasque columbas / et genus omne avium mediis et partibus ovi, / ni sciret fieri, fieri quis posse putaret? ... Haec tamen ex aliis generis primordia ducunt, / una est, quae reparat seque ipsa reseminat, ales: / Assyrii phoenica vocant” [Juno’s bird, which wears starry spots on its tail, and the weapon-bearing bird of Jove, and Cytherea’s doves, and the whole family of birds – who would believe, unless he knew the fact, that these could be born from the inside of an egg? ... Now all these things get their life’s beginning from some other creature; but there is one bird which itself renews and reproduces its own being. The Assyrians call it the phoenix]. It seems to be important to Ariosto’s use of Ovid that the Roman poet mentions the Eagle, *armigerum Iovis*, in contrast to the phoenix; This is the eagle at the origin of the Este’s *aquila bianca* according to Boiardo and Ariosto’s accounts.

⁷⁹ *Orlando furioso* 36.lxxviii: “Io fo ben voto Dio (ch’adorar voglio / Cristo Dio vero, ch’adorò mio padre) / Che di questa armature non mi spoglio, / Fin che Ruggier non vendico e mia madre.”

⁸⁰ Elsewhere in the *Furioso*, the uniqueness of the phoenix is used as an image of human credulity and foolishness, associated with husbands who believe their wives alone to be faithful, while they see that the wives of others are not. See 27.cxxxvi: “Perché si come e’ sola la fenice, / ne mai più d’una in tutto il mondo vive, / così mai più d’uno esser si dice, / che de la moglie i tradimenti schive. / Ognun si crede d’esser quell felice, / d’esser quell sol ch’a questa palma arrive. / Come è possibil che v’arrivi ognuno, / se non ne puo nel mondo esser più d’uno?”

genealogy is revealed, it becomes a mirror or “twin” image – as Marfisa herself is identified the twin of Rugiero - of the *aquila bianca*, the image worn by Rugiero and by the Este lords his supposed descendants. The anti-genealogical image *par excellence* of the *Furioso* thus sustains and participates in its textual and sexual genealogies, after all. This also makes it a kind of joke about the possibility, or rather the impossibility, of radical poetic invention and “autonomy”. The great historical irony of Marphisa’s “sign,” meanwhile, is that it anticipated a claim that emerged from some of the most influential readers and critics of both Ariosto’s and his predecessor’s poems already in the Renaissance: That these works constituted decisively autonomous and “authorial” departures from the prior “medieval” intertextual traditions from which they had derived.⁸¹

iv. *An Image Found: The Invention of Rugiero*

“Il novo Rugier” is introduced at the close of the first book of the *Inamoramento* as the most perfect knight whose deeds readers can look forward to hearing about in the future unfolding of the story.⁸² He is “new” in least two respects: An unarmed and untested youth when Book II of Boiardo’s poem begins to follow his story in earnest, Rugiero is also a new addition to the Carolingian tradition, like Brunello, Rodamonte and Marphisa. Unlike these other “new” characters, however, he is endowed with an illustrious genealogy that he recognizes with both humility and pride.⁸³ Unlike the most established character of the Carolingian tradition in Italy, meanwhile, his genealogy *does* have a future. Although Rugiero’s own life will be cut short before its natural end, betrayal will not result in end of his genealogical line as it does for Orlando, (who of course dies without heirs at Roncesvaux). Rugiero’s genealogy will survive – “ma restarà la sua genealogia” – all the way to the dynastic house reigning in the poets’ own time (II.xxi.55).

Ruggiero’s character is shrouded in mystery and pathos from the start, as the narrator announces his predestined death by betrayal even before his person appears.⁸⁴ Afterwards, he is the subject of multiple prophecies at the level of the diegesis. Agramante learns that Ruggiero’s

⁸¹ On the canonization of the *Furioso* as an *unicum* severed from “the intertextual threads linking it to its forbearers,” see Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 18-22. In the Cinquecento, some of the same figures who participated in Ariosto’s canonization argued that Boiardo’s poem had constituted such a radical break from chivalric tradition already. See Ruscelli, “Annotazioni et avvertimenti di Girolamo Ruscelli sopra i luoghi difficili et importanti del Furioso” (Trans.mine): “Ariosto fu sicurissimo, che avendo il detto Libro del Boiardo oscurato affatto ne’ belli ingegni, il nome di altro Scrittore di Romanzi fino a’ suoi tempi, non si sarebbe potuto equivocare, intorno al conoscere quai guerre, quai fatti, e da che Autor descritti l’Ariosto seguitasse con questo suo” [Ariosto was most certain that, with the above-mentioned book of Boiardo’s having completely overshadowed in the most intelligent minds the name of every other writer of romances until his own time, one could not be unsure about which wars, which events, and what author Ariosto was following with this his own work]. It is also ironic, from the perspective of Ariosto’s poem, that the phoenix became a noticeably popular “sign” in the Cinquecento. See Salza, “Imprese e divise d’armi e d’amore nell’*Orlando furioso*,” 348; and Bregoli-Russo, *L’impresa come ritratto del Rinascimento*, 61-65.

⁸² *Inamoramento* I.xxix.56: “Cosa maggior, né di Gloria cotanta / Fo giamai scritta, né di più diletto, / Ché dil novo Rugier quivi si canta, / Qual fo d’ogni virtù il più perfecto / Di qualunque altro ch’al mondo si vanta; / Si che, signor, ad ascoltar vi sapetto / Per farvi di piacer la mente satia./ Se Dio mi serva al fin la usata gratia”

⁸³ For Rugiero’s attitude towards his genealogy see for example *Inamoramento* III.v.32: “Ciò non toglio a vanagloria, / Ma de altra stirpe di prodecie tante / Che sia nel mondo, non se na ha memoria; / E come se ragiona per el vero, / Sono io di questi, e naque di Rugiero.”

⁸⁴ *Inamoramento*, II.i.4: “Voi odireti la inclyta prodeza / E le virtù d’un cor peregrino, / L’infenita possanza e la bellezza / Ch’ebbe Rugier il terzo paladino / E ben che la sua famma e grande alteza / Fo divulgata per ogni confino / Pur gli fece Fortuna estremo torto, / Che fo ad inganno il gioveneto morto.”

presence will be necessary to the positive outcome of his campaign against the Franks.⁸⁵ Atlante, Rugiero's tutor, reveals in a second and more detailed prophecy his future conversion to Christianity, his death at the hands of the Maganzesi (the clan of traitors responsible for Orlando's death), and the illustrious genealogical future that his successors will have. This second prophecy amounts to a "vision" of some of the central figures in the "medieval" history of the Este dynasty.⁸⁶ It also ends with the first appearance of the white eagle, the *aquila bianca*, in the *Inamoramento*.

Vedo Azzo primo e 'l terzo Aldovrandino,
Né vi sciò iudicar qual sia maggiore,
Ché l'un ha morto il perfido Anzolino
E l'altro ha roto Henrico Imperatore.
Ecco un altro Ranaldo paladino:
Non dico quell di mo', dico il signore
Di Vicenza e Trivisi e di Verona
Ch'a Federico abate la corona.
Natura mostra fuor il suo thesoro:
Ecco il Marchese a cui vertù non manca!
Mondo beate e felici coloro
Che saran vivi a quella età si franca!
Al tempo di costui gli zigli d'oro
Saran coniunti a quella Aquila bianca
Che sta nel ciel, e saran sue confine
Il Fior d'Italia e doe bele marine. (II.xxi.57-58)

The Marquis referred to in this last stanza of Atlante's prophecy is surely Nicolò III, the father of Leonello and Borso. Nicolò was responsible for expanding the territories of the Este considerably, albeit not in fact to span the Western and Eastern coasts of the peninsula as the prophecy suggests. As we have seen, his alliance with Charles VII of France also brought about the conjunction of the "signs" of the lilies and the eagle in 1431.⁸⁷ The composite image Boiardo's readers "see" in the forms of this prophecy is therefore one that they would already know. It enters the poem here in relation to a successful Marquis, whose memory was still very much alive; and a political and genealogical alliance between the Este and the French, which had been a source of pride at the Este court for decades. At the same time, the conjunction of the lilies and the eagle is a fitting image of the very "inventione" that Boiardo is undertaking himself, by combining the Carolingian

⁸⁵ Ibid., II.i.72-76.

⁸⁶ Boiardo wrote about each of these figures (Azzo I, Aldovrandino, and Rainaldo d'Este) and their "signs" in the *Istoria imperiale*, his *volgarizzamento* of the Latin history ostensibly written locally in the late-thirteenth century by his countryman, Riccobaldo. An expanded version of this dissertation would examine how Boiardo contributed not only with the *Inamoramento*, but also with his *Istoria* and other works, to developing discourses around the Este's repertoire of images. For the text of the *Istoria* see Riccobaldo, *Istoria Imperiale di Riccobaldo Ferrarese*, 291-420; and Rizzi, ed. *The Historia Imperiale (1471-1473) by M.M. Boiardo*. For its significance and legacy see, among several other studies, Ponte, "Matteo Maria Boiardo dalla traduzione storiografica al romanzesco nella Vita di Federico Barbarossa," 443-59; Cottignoli, "Dietro le quinte dei 'Rerum': Muratori fra Boiardo e Riccobaldo," 63-72; and Tristano, "History 'Without Scruple': The Enlightenment Confronts the Middle Ages in Renaissance Ferrara," 79-121

⁸⁷ Spaggiari and Trenti, *Gli stemmi Estensi ed Austro-Estensi*, 45-48.

tradition of legends around Orlando and Charlemagne with the “epic” history of the Este house; the matters France and of Rome.⁸⁸ In this respect, Boiardo was making a familiar image new.

Rugiero’s character is “ignudo,” which is to say unarmed, when his story begins. Seeking to participate in a tournament organized by Agramante, he is reminded that he has “neither lance, nor sword, nor shield.”⁸⁹ This is remedied in short order as the boy is knighted by Agramante and given a temporary set of arms from Brunello.⁹⁰ Rugiero’s relation of vassalage to Agramante explains his next appearance in the *divisa* of the African king, a *quartiero* of blue and gold.⁹¹ We see Rugiero with the *aquila bianca* for the first time as the African troops collectively prepare to depart for France, where the young knight leads a legion of men from Tripoli.

Da Rugier paladin era guidata;
Lui ne lo azuro avea l’aquila bianca
Qual sempre da’ suoi antiqui fu portata. (II.xxix.18)

This sudden and seemingly casual appearance of Rugiero with his ancestral “sign” belies the fact that their story has only just begun. Between the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*, the image itself will acquire a genealogy, Ruggiero will be required to defend his rights to it, and he will need to come into possession of its “original” copy, on the shield of Hector of Troy.

It is through Hector’s shield, a medium initially separated from Rugiero, that Boiardo gives the *aquila bianca* a storyline of its own. The shield first appears in the third book of the *Inamoramento*, in the middle of a frescoed courtyard of a marvelous castle. We discover it through the eyes of the young Mandricardo, King of Tartary, who ends up taking it for himself along with the rest of Hector’s armor.

Posto è il bel scudo in megio ala gran piazza:
A ricontarvi el come non dimoro
Avea la corte intorno ad ogni faza
Logie dipinte con sotil lavoro.
Gran gente era ritracta ad una caza
E un gentil damigello era tra loro;
Più bel di lui tra tutti non si vede,
Ed avia scripto al capo: ‘Ganimede’
Tutta la istoria sua vi era ritracta
Di ponto in ponto, che nulla vi manca
Come caciando alla selva disfatta,
Lo portò sino al cel l’aquila bianca,
Qual poi sempre fo insegna di sua schiatta,
Sino al giorno che Hectòr, l’anima franca,
Occiso fu nel campo a tradimento.
L’aquila prima avia bianche le piume,
Che candida dal cielo era mandata;

⁸⁸ Rugiero’s story is described as an “invention” in the title to the *Inamoramento*’s second book: “*Libro secondo de Orlando Inamorato nel quale, seguendo la cominciata Historia, se trata dela impresa Africana contra Carlo Mano e la invention de Rugiero terzo paladino, progenitore dela inclyta Casa da Este.*”

⁸⁹ II.xxi.41: “Ahimè figliol, dove ne vai? / Hor non cognosci che sei disarmato? / Se ben going tra lor, e che farai? / Lor pur l’impicarano a tuo malgrato. / Tu non hai lanza, né brando, né scudo: / Credi tu aver Victoria essendo ignudo?”

⁹⁰ II.xxi.51-52.

⁹¹ II.xxviii.42-43: “E una sua veste gli fece arrecare, / Con pietre e perle di molto valore: / La veste è parte azurra e parte de oro/ Come il re porta, senza altro lavoro / Tre son vestiti ad una somiglianza, / che tal divisa altrui non può portare; / Brandimare, Agramante con Rugiero/ D’azzurro e d’or indosso hanno il quartiero.”

Ma poi che Troia fiè de pianti un fiume,
 Ne la crudele e misera giornata
 Quando fu morto Hectòr, el suo gran lume,
 La lieta insegna alhor fu tramutata:
 Per semigliarse a sua scura fortuna,
 L'aquila bianca travestirno a bruna. (III.ii.5-7)

This device allows Boiardo to attribute origins to the image with an extended ekphrasis. It is the frescos in the courtyard, according to the poem's fiction, which disclose the ancient history of the image around two incredible metamorphoses. Giove's lustful metamorphosis into an eagle upon abducting Ganymede is shown to account for Trojans' having taken up the image of the white eagle as their *insegna*.⁹² The image of the eagle is then shown to undergo a second "transmutation" from white to black upon the death of Hector of Troy, as a sign of mourning for the fallen hero. The shield physically displayed in Boiardo's castle, meanwhile, displays the image of a white eagle because it is *the very same object* that Hector himself used.

Ben che 'l scudo d'Hectòr, ch'io v'ho contato
 Qual era posto in megio ala gran corte,
 Non era in parte alcuna tramutato;
 Ma tal quale el portava il baron forte,
 Ad un pilastro d'oro era chiavato,
 Ed avia scritto sopra in letre scorte:
 'Se un altro Hectòr non sei, non mi toccare!
 Chi mi portò non ebe al mondo pare.
 Di quel color che mostra il cel serena
 Avea el scudo, ch'io dico, appariscentia. (III.ii.ix)

Hector's shield is thus a Trojan relic in the *Inamoramento*, just as Durindana was a Christian relic, or rather a collection of Christian relics, in the *Chanson de Roland*. Where the *Chanson* poses the problem of the sword's legacy after Orlando's death, however, Boiardo's poem poses the problem of how Rugiero will receive and merit this precious material inheritance, in order for his genealogical future to be secured.

Mandricardo's character, in fact, requires Ruggiero to fight for his ancestral image in a plotline highlighting the different kinds of connections that bind characters to their "signs" across both the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*. Mandricardo sets out in the *Inamoramento* unarmed and his relationship to the "signs" he acquires is consistently haphazard. He comes across Hector's shield by chance, just as later he acquires Durindana after seeing it hanging on a tree.⁹³ When he comes into conflict with Rugiero around the possession of the eagle image, therefore, what is at stake is not only its ownership, but also its meaning. Mandricardo claims to have won the eagle by

⁹² See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X.155-161 (Trans. Miller): "Rex superum Phrygii quondam Ganymedis amore / arsit, et inventum est aliquid, quod Iuppiter esse, / quam quod erat, mallet. Nulla tamen alite verti / dignatur, nisi quae posset sua fulmina ferre./ Nec mora, percusso mendacibus aëre pennis / abripit Iliaden; qui nunc quoque pocula miscet / invitaque Iovi nectar Iumonone ministrat" [The king of the gods once burned with love for Phrygian Ganymede, and something was found which Jove would rather be than what he was. Still he did not deign to take the form of any bird save only that which could bear his tunderbolts. Without delay he cleft the air on his lying wings and stole away the Trojan boy, who even now, though against the will of Juno, mingles the nectar and attends the cups of Jove.]

⁹³ See Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando furioso*, 422: "Mandricardo s'è appropriato, senza conquistarla, la spada d'Orlando" [Mandricardo has appropriated Orlando's sword without winning it].

force, while Rugiero claims it as his genealogical inheritance.⁹⁴ The fight is continued in Ariosto's poem at length, where Rugiero eventually wins the image by both physically and morally overpowering his opponent.⁹⁵

Ariosto remembers Mandricardo indeed as the embodiment of a kind of random connection between "signs" and their bearers; primarily through the intervention of Doralice, Mandricardo's beloved (and previously the beloved of Rodomonte). The woman's character ends up begging Mandricardo to give up the fight with Ruggiero, to value his life over what she considers a trifle - a merely "painted eagle."⁹⁶ When Mandricardo dies at Ruggiero's hands as a result of the duel, however, the lady suddenly considers that she could just as easily have given her heart to Ruggiero:

Ella, per quell che già ne siamo esperti,
Sì facile era a variar pensiero,
Che per non si veder priva d'amore,
Avria potuto in Ruggier pore il core.
Per lei buono era vivo Mandricardo:
Ma che ne volea far dopo la morte?
Proveder le convien d'un che gagliardo
Sia note e di ne' suoi bisogni, e forte. (OF, 30.lxxii-lxxiii)

The woman's loose understanding of the attachment between the "sign" and the person reflects her loose affections; and her reduction of the image to its material qualities reflects her reduction of Mandricardo to the strength of his physical body. All of this comically undermines her character's claims about the distinction between the merely painted "sign" and the value of the living person. In the meantime, her character undermines Mandricardo's tenuous claims to the image of the *aquila bianca* all along; and it contrasts those claims with both Rodomonte's idolatrous attachments to his images, and with Ruggiero's inherited and hard-won possession of same white eagle.

Rugiero's story decisively animates his image (the Este image), so that it becomes an intrinsic part of his life story. We have seen already how the white eagle participates in the revelation of Rugiero's genealogy and in the development of his martial valor. It is also involved in the story of his love. His first encounter with Bradamante, his future wife, takes place in the *Inamoramento* while both are fully armed.⁹⁷ When Ariosto builds on Boiardo's love story, he gives Ruggiero's eagle specifically an erotic charge, as it is seen in Bradamante's eyes as her gaze lingers on, and eventually penetrates through, his armor to imagine his body underneath.

Lo riconosce all'aquila d'argento
ch'ha nello scudo azzurro il giovinetto.

⁹⁴ *Inamoramento* III.vi.40-41: "Chi vi ha concessa, cavallier, licenzia / Portar depenta al scudo quella insegna? / Il suo principio e' di tanta eccellenzia / Che ogni persona de essa non e' degna. / Cio vi comportarò con pazienza, / Se tal virtù nel corpo vostro regna, / Che alla battaglia riportati lodo / Contro di me, che l'ho acquistata e godo. / Disse Ruggiero: - Ancora non mi ero accorto / Che quella insegna e' fatta come questa; / E veramente la portati a torto, / Se non siamo discesi de una gesta; / Onde vi prego molto e vi conforto / Che tal cosa facciati manifesta / Ove acquistasti tale insegna e come, / E quale e' vostra stirpe e vostro nome."

⁹⁵ *Orlando furioso* 26.xcviii; and 30.xvii-lxxv.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.xxxiv-xxxvi: "che non vi caglia se 'l candido augello / ha ne lo scudo quel Ruggiero ancora. / Utile o canno a voi non so ch'importi, / che lasci quella insegna o che la porti. / Poco guadagno, e perdita uscir molta / de la battaglia può, che per far sete: / quando abbiate a Ruggier l'aquila tolta, / poca merce d'un gran travaglio avrete; / ma se Fortuna le spalle vi volta / (che non pero nel crin presta tenete), / causate un danno, ch'a pensarvi solo, / mi sento il petto già sparare di duolo. / Quando la vita a voi per voi non sia cara, / e più amate un'aquila dipinta, / vi sia almen cara per la vita mia: / non sarà l'un senza l'altra estinta."

⁹⁷ See *Inamoramento* III.iv.52-55; and III.v.10-43.

Ella con gli occhi e col pensiero intento
 Si ferma a contemplar le spalle e 'l petto,
 Le leggiadre fattezze e 'l movimento
 Pieno di grazia; e poi con gran dispetto,
 Imaginando ch'altra ne gioisse,
 Da furore assalita così disse
 Dunque bacciar sì belle e dolce labia
 Deve altra, se bacciar non le poss'io? (OF, 26.xxxi-xxii)

Ariosto also adds to the dynastic love story new obstacles and complications, including Bradamante's unwarranted jealousy of Marfisa. This emotion precipitates her character into a crisis reflected in series of new and unstable "signs"; also reminiscent of Orlando's love-sickness in the *Inamoramento*. The most memorable of jealousy's symptoms here is the brown *divisa* of the cypress tree.⁹⁸

e tosto una divisa
 Si fe' su l'arme, che volea inferire
 Disperazione e voglia di morire.
 Era la sopraveste del colore
 In che riman la foglia che s'imbianca
 Quando del ramo è tolta, o che l'umore
 Che faceva vivo l'arbore le manca.
 Ricamata a tronconi era, di fuore,
 Di cipresso che mai non si rinfranca,
 Po c'ha sentita la dura bipenne:
 L'abito al suo dolor molto conviene. (OF, 32.xlvii-xlviii)

In this scene, Bradamante declares her intention to wear the *divisa* as a sign of her "dolor," which she mistakenly believes will be permanent. However, the organic image anticipates the likelihood – which after all comes to pass – that this crazed state will in due course come to an end.

Ariosto resolves the love story between Bradamante and Ruggiero, finally, together with the story of their "signs". The celebrated final scene of the *Furioso* takes place at the wedding ceremony of the dynastic heroes, where the woman warrior's initially white *insegna* can now be linked to her status as a bride.⁹⁹ As for Ruggiero's *aquila bianca*, it is quietly present on Hector's shield, which he wears in the battle that interrupts the ceremony, and which ultimately saves his life from the most powerful blow of his opponent, the faithless intruder Rodomonte.

La lancia del pagan, che venne a còrre
 lo scudo a mezzo, fe' debole effetto:
 tanto l'acciar, che pel famoso Ettore

⁹⁸ As Bradamante weeps on her bed in full armature (*Orlando furioso*, 32.xxxvi), Ariosto references the love-sickness that precipitated Orlando's initial departure from Paris at the outset of Boiardo's poem, in which he exchanges the *quartiero* for the *virnilio scuro*. See *Inamoramento* I.ii.22: "E' sopra al letto suo càde invilito, / Tanto è il dolor che dentro lo martella: / Quel valoroso, fior d'ogni campione, / Piangea nel letto come un vil garzone." The parallel between the two scenes is also emphasized by the fact that Bradamante departs "senza scudiero e senza compnia," like Orlando had. She will take the most direct route towards Paris in search of Ruggiero, whereas Boiardo's Orlando had been leaving that city to search for Angelica.

⁹⁹ Bradamante makes her appearance in Ariosto's poem as a "man" dressed in purely white arms. *Orlando furioso* 1.ix: "Ecco pel bosco un cavalier venire / il cui sembante è d'uom gagliardo e fiero:/ candido come nieve è il suo vestire, / un bianco pennoncello ha per cimero." See Ascoli, "Like a Virgin: Fantasies of the Male Body in *Orlando furioso*," esp. 144-147.

temprato avea Vulcano, era perfetto.
 Ruggier la lancia parimente a porre
 gli andò allo scudo, e gli ele passo netto;
 tutto che fosse appresso un palmo grosso,
 dentro e di fuor d'acciaro, e in mezzo d'osso. (OF, 46.cxvi)

Earlier in the canto, the wedding guests encounter a woven tapestry portraying the genealogical outcome of Ruggiero and Bradamante's marriage in Ariosto's own time and even in the person of his principle patron, Ippolito d'Este.¹⁰⁰ The narrator explains that the meaning of the tapestry is only available to Bradamante amongst the wedding guests, as she alone has received prophetic knowledge that the life-like persons and events represented there will in fact come to exist in "future" centuries.¹⁰¹ The full pathos of the poem's final verses, similarly, cannot be felt but by those who know "l'istoria tutta," the whole story, of the Trojan shield and the image it has supported since the *Inamoramento*. Only those who have followed this story will recognize how Boiardo and Ariosto made a god's unruly lust into the origins of a dynasty's "sign"; Hector's death into the precondition of a new genealogical life; and how precisely by weaving these stories into a new story of Orlando's love and madness they gave both Este history and their "sign" – the white eagle - a potent affective reach between the fibers of local and international history, and popular and high culture.

v. *A Tale of Two "Signs" and Two Editions*

If the "signs" of the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso* can speak to some of the questions that have perennially arisen around these poems, one of these is likely to be the unresolved question of the relationship between Orlando and Ruggiero's intersecting storylines. How does the story of Orlando, the once-virginal Carolingian martyr and his descent into love and madness, relate to the story of Ruggiero, the legendary progenitor of the Este house?

The reading that we have produced above suggests that there is a close relationship between the two characters, developed across the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*. While loosening the bond between Orlando and his *quartiero*, for example, both poems work to strengthen the association between Ruggiero and his "sign," the *aquila bianca*. If Orlando's is the story of a "sign" lost (in the *Inamoramento*) and finally recovered in a modified form (in the *Furioso*), Ruggiero's is the story of a "sign" born faithfully and ultimately found in its original "copy," on Hector's shield. Alongside Orlando's emotional intensity, meanwhile, the dynastic story and its "sign" seem to be able to acquire such a decidedly emotional charge. While Orlando's character and "sign" are made to submit to the unstable metamorphoses of Love, at the very origin of Ruggiero's genealogy and "sign" is posited an erotic metamorphosis from an ancient myth – Zeus' transformation into the form of an eagle.

Curiously, this perspective on the two characters and their storylines resonates with a pattern of "formal contradiction" that has been identified in recent years in the modern novel. In *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1999), Franco Moretti

¹⁰⁰ See *Ibid.*, 46.lxxvii-xcviii. My reading of this final prophecy is indebted to Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 377-393.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 46.xcviii: "Le donne e i cavalier mirano fisi, / senza trarne costrutto, le figure: / perché non hanno appresso che gli avvisi / che tutte quelle sien cose future. / Prendon piacere a riguardare i visi / belli e ben fatti, e legger le scritte. / Sol Bradamante da Melissa instrutta / gode tra sé; che sa l'istoria tutta."

identifies two kinds of plots and ideological “poles” in the novel of formation in Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰² On the one hand, he argues, the “principle of transformation” in the adultery plot showed youth indefinitely prolonged at the expense of identity and happiness, and often provided the novel with its beginning. On the other hand, the “principle of classification” in the marriage plot brought youth to an end and consolidated the protagonist’s identity at the expense of his or her freedom, often providing the novel with its end. Although pointedly aimed to describe characteristic features of *modernity*, Moretti’s analysis seems to help illuminate how Orlando’s erotic and shapeless metamorphoses open Boiardo’s poem, and how Ruggiero’s sinuous but finally completed pathway to marriage and dynasty concludes Ariosto’s.

The question of the relationship between Ruggiero and Orlando’s stories has received very different answers from Boiardo scholars, however; different not only from what I have just proposed but also as the standard edition of the *Innamoramento* has changed in recent decades along with our understanding of the cultural context that informed Boiardo’s invention. This means that the relationship between its Carolingian and dynastic heroes is also opportunity to gauge how the study of “signs” that we have conducted so far in this chapter intersects with some major currents and shifts in the scholarship dedicated to Boiardo’s poem and its context.

When Jo Ann Cavallo published *Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato: An Ethics of Desire* in 1993, the standard edition of Boiardo’s poem was based on the so-called *codice Trivulziano*, an anonymous manuscript copy of the final “authorial” printing of the entire poem (Scandiano, 1495). The *Trivulziano* had enacted, however, a radical linguistic revision and homogenization of its now-lost source.¹⁰³ Cavallo’s classic study considered ethics and education as hermeneutic frameworks for the poem.¹⁰⁴ It also proposed that the allegorizing and moralizing interpretations that had been generated by Boiardo’s editors and “reformers” in the Cinquecento represented reliable guides:

When Francesco Berni translated [the *Innamoramento*] into the Florentine dialect, he added introductory stanzas to many cantos which provided moral, social, philosophical, or religious reflections that he deemed pertinent to the narrative at hand. Moreover, in one of his asides to the reader, he equated the *Innamorato*’s method of allegorical narration with that attributed by a long exegetical tradition to Homer’s *Odyssey*. Some later critics have accused Berni of trying to add a moral dimension in his introductory stanzas that was foreign to Boiardo’s text. Yet Berni was not the only early Cinquecento writer to see a moralizing Boiardo. In the 1545 Domenichi edition, which contained a continuation by Niccolò degli Agostini, each canto was preceded by a brief description of both the argument and the underlying allegory.¹⁰⁵

With Francesco Berni (1497/98-1535) and Ludovico Domenichi (1508/10-1568), Cavallo was remembering in her Introduction here the most ambitious sixteenth-century editorial interventions into Boiardo’s poem, differing from one another in their results but similar enough – and similar to the *Trivulziano* manuscript – in their intent to present Boiardo’s popular poem to new audiences throughout the peninsula by reforming its language. Berni’s attempt to rewrite the

¹⁰² See Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 3-14.

¹⁰³ On the 1495 Scandiano edition (executed by Boiardo’s heirs) and the Trivulziano manuscript see Harris, *Bibliografia dell’Orlando innamorato*, 50-55 and 55-58.

¹⁰⁴ See also Cavallo, “L’Orlando innamorato come *speculum principis*,” 297-321. This later study expanded her earlier book and reading of Boiardo’s poem from the realm of individual ethics primarily to political ethics as well.

¹⁰⁵ See Cavallo, *Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato*, 3-4.

poem within a “tradizione borghese toscana” was in fact largely unsuccessful, while Ludovico Domenichi’s less invasive and a self-consciously “Italianized” version was an enormous success.¹⁰⁶ First published in 1545 alongside Pulci’s *Morgante* for the Venetian printer Girolamo Scotto, Domenichi’s “*Orlando Innamorato*” was illustrated with woodcuts and amplified with a brief description of the underlying “allegory” of each canto.¹⁰⁷ It became a standard edition, reprinted multiple times for different publishing houses until the discovery of the *codice Trivulziano* in the nineteenth century. It also offered an editorial model that would soon be applied with much success to Ariosto’s poem, by Domenichi’s colleague and contemporary, Girolamo Ruscelli (1518-1566).¹⁰⁸

It was additionally important to Jo Ann Cavallo’s vision of an ethical *Innamorato* that the allegorizing tendencies of its sixteenth-century editors seemed consonant with the humanistic values that Boiardo would have received, she believed, in the milieu where he was educated; a milieu shaped by the influence of the humanist pedagogue Guarino da Verona and his heirs.

The poem’s ethical dimension should not seem that strange if we recall the cultural climate of late fifteenth century Ferrara. The city was at the time a center of humanist studies, due largely to the efforts of Guarino da Verona. Guarino, who has been called the ‘greatest teacher in a century of teachers,’ stressed the central values of humanism during the thirty years he remained as director of the Studiolo which he founded in 1429. His pedagogical theory asserted that the aim of education was ethical and civic-political, so that one learned in order to act virtuously and prudently, i.e. to make the right choices for the benefit of society. The preferred vehicle for this civic education was literature. Poetry, now taught in conjunction with rhetoric and moral philosophy, was expected not only to entertain but also to teach ethics.¹⁰⁹

Within this complimentary picture of the efforts of the Cinquecento “reformers,” on the one hand, and the “ethical” and “civic-political” humanist school at Ferrara, on the other, Cavallo presented Orlando and Ruggiero as necessary oppositions within Boiardo’s poetic “ethics of desire.” The formerly chaste Carolingian martyr in her view represented the tradition of “*Venus in malo*”

¹⁰⁶ On Berni’s intervention see Weaver, “Riformare l’*Orlando Innamorato*,” 117-144; and Harris *Bibliografia dell’Orlando innamorato*, Vol.1, 141-157 and Vol.2, 9-138. On Domenichi’s edition see Harris *Bibliografia dell’Orlando innamorato* Vol.1, 167-200 and Vol.2, 139-148; Masi, “La sfortuna dell’*Orlando Innamorato*: cultura e filologia nella ‘riforma’ di Lodovico Domenichi,” 943-1020; Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600*, 104-105; and Jossa, “All’ombra di Ariosto. Lodovico Domenichi editore dell’*Orlando innamorato* e del *Morgante*,” 120-129. See also Trovato, *Con ogni diligenza corretto: La stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani (1470-1570)*.

¹⁰⁷ *Orlando innamorato del Signor Matteo Maria Boiardo, Conte di Scandiano, insieme co i tre libri di Nicolò de gli Agostini, nuovamente riformato per M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Scotto, 1545); and *Morgante Maggiore di Luigi Pulci, nuovamente stampato, e corretto per M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Scotto, 1545).

¹⁰⁸ *Orlando furioso, di M. Lodovico Ariosto, tutto ricorretto, et di nuove figure adornato. Alquale di nuovo sono aggiunte le annotazioni, gli avvertimenti, & le dichiarazioni di Girolamo Ruscelli, la vita dell’autore, scritta dal Signor Giovambattista Pigna, gli scontri de’ luoghi mutati dall’autore doppo la sua prima impressione, la dichiarazione di tutte le favole, il vocabolario di tutte le parole oscure, et altre cose utili & necessarie* (Venice: Valgrisi, 1556). Ruscelli’s *Furioso* is mentioned here because Ruscelli becomes important to the reception of Boiardo and Ariosto’s “signs,” as discussed below. On Domenichi’s *Innamorato* as a model for it see Dionisotti, “Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo,” 240-241. On Ruscelli’s interventions see Telve, “Ruscelli e Dolce curatori editoriali dell’*Orlando furioso*: La stabilizzazione linguistica di un modello poetico,” 227-255.

¹⁰⁹ Cavallo, *Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato*, 4. Chapter Three discusses the broader interpretations of humanist culture, in terms of ethics, which Cavallo’s perspectives on Boiardo and Guarino are connected to.

leading to “a loss of consciousness, memory, and even identity, and when frustrated, it leads to violence”; and the Este *capostipite* represented the possibilities of “Venus in bono,” or a “positive kind of earthly love, allied with reason, that takes into account the good of the other.”¹¹⁰

This chapter has relied on the latest critical edition of the *Inamoramento* (1999) by Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti and Cristina Montagnani. Based on the oldest extant printed editions of the poem - two Venetian printings from 1487 (for Books I and II) and 1506 (for Book III) - this edition has revealed a more “archaic” and heterogeneous poem than was previously known.¹¹¹ Still not the “work as it left the hands of the author” – inaccessible as a result of the total loss of Boiardo’s own manuscripts and *editiones principes* – it aims nevertheless to be “a reasonable approximation of the form in which contemporaries read the *Inamoramento*”; before the editorial and especially linguistic interventions of the following decades.¹¹² It also comes out of a long and ongoing tradition of attempting to “recover” Boiardo from those editorial interventions, and to restore the contours of the distinctive local context from which his poem was produced.

The origins of this tradition, at once editorial and scholarly, are often traced to Antonio Panizzi (1797-1879), the Modenese exile and librarian of the British National Library, whose 9-volume combined edition of Boiardo and Ariosto’s poems attempted to produce Boiardo’s “original” for the first time in three centuries.¹¹³ However, an arguably more important signpost for the latest edition of Boiardo’s poem was the lesson of Carlo Dionisotti, as delivered especially in his contribution to the conference that took place between Scandiano and Reggio Emilia in 1969, *Il Boiardo e la critica contemporanea*. Dionisotti’s essay on that occasion, “Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo nel Cinquecento,” came on the heels of the *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (1967); his celebrated vindication of a methodological principle for Italian pre-modern literary history based on the regional differences and traditions that had often been forgotten or minimized by idealist and nationalist currents under the aegis of Benedetto Croce and Francesco De Sanctis.¹¹⁴ Drawing on many of the same convictions that had animated that earlier collection of essays, Dionisotti argued in 1969 that the reception of Boiardo’s *Inamoramento* constituted one of the most clamorous cases of neglect and misunderstanding in the history of Italian literature, exacerbated by Italian idealism and its “doctrine of magnificent fate and progress,” but with its roots, ultimately, in the sixteenth century.¹¹⁵

Dionisotti’s “Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo nel Cinquecento” ranges over a panorama of factors that influenced Boiardo’s reception in the Cinquecento and that are still being investigated today. It discusses the view emerging, at the beginning of the Cinquecento, that the descent of Charles VIII into the peninsula in 1494 had constituted a decisive historical rupture. This idea became used, Dionisotti showed, to confine even the most avant-garde literary productions of the Quattrocento to a seemingly bygone age, including Boiardo’s poem. The

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8. For a complimentary reading of the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*, also based on the *Trivulziano* edition of the former and on a sense of the harmony between the “reformers” and the Ferrarese humanist tradition, see Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of Orlando Furioso*.

¹¹¹ See Tissoni Benvenuti, *Introduzione*, xi; and Montagnani, “Verso l’edizione del *Orlando innamorato*: I testimoni più antichi dei primi due libri,” 45-54.

¹¹² Montagnani, “La tradizione delle opere di Boiardo,” 601-631, 602.

¹¹³ See Harris, *Bibliografia dell’Orlando innamorato*, Vol. 2, 163-196 (“Il ritorno al testo originale: l’edizione di Antonio Panizzi”). Panizzi’s edition of the *Inamoramento* was the first to be based on the *Trivulziano* manuscript.

¹¹⁴ On Dionisotti’s intellectual history and impact on Boiardo studies see Anceschi, “Dionisotti e Scandiano,” 213-223; and “Dieci anni dopo...,” 19-60.

¹¹⁵ See Dionisotti, “Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo,” 221-222.

latter, ironically, even seemed to lend support to this notion with its famous final stanza, interrupting the narrative action with news of the invasion of the “Gauls.”¹¹⁶ Connected to the military crisis, moreover, there were various polemics launched against the historiographical claims of chivalric romances in the Cinquecento, in the name of historical veracity.¹¹⁷ The linguistic revolution, furthermore, relegated the diverse languages of the various courts and small centers of the peninsula, including Ferrara, to increasingly provincial status; while a literary language on a national scale was promoted and refined from the Tuscan classics.¹¹⁸ Finally, there was the enormous popularity of the *Orlando furioso*, already from its first edition in 1516, which continued Boiardo’s poem while also taking the measure of these new cultural conditions and adapting to them masterfully.¹¹⁹ If Ariosto’s poem stimulated the desire to read its “prima parte” amongst a wider audience than ever before, it also encouraged the idea – in any case readily pursued by the growing printing industry that could profit from it – that the earlier poem would need to be adjusted to suit new circumstances; and also to approximate the mold of this self-consciously modern and thoroughly ‘Italian’ masterpiece.

The tradition that Dionisotti opened to Boiardo studies has made the editorial interventions of Berni and Domenichi appear more as obstacles to accessing Boiardo’s poem in its original form than as guides. There now appears to be a fundamental tension between the Tuscan and Italianized versions of Boiardo’s poem that they produced and “il Boiardo Estense,” who has, as a result, increasingly become the object of research in Italy.¹²⁰ The *Inamoramento* is now being read as “a vindication of the Este culture of the chivalric epic and romance” and as “a sign of the proactiveness of the Este court in the context of quattrocento pluricentricism.”¹²¹ At the center of this perspective on the poem is the idiosyncrasy of Boiardo’s language. In the words of Tina Matarrese,

[t]he “dress” of his language, characteristic of the Po’ valley [*La caratteristica veste padana della sua lingua*], is the expression of that linguistic and cultural polycentrism still alive today within a system in which local traditions have been an essential source of national culture.¹²²

This image of Boiardo’s local language as the original and true “dress” of his poem precisely reverses his sixteenth-century editors’ attempts to present the poem in a superior “Italian” idiom. As Domenichi explained to his dedicatee in 1556, his edition of the “*Orlando innamorato*” was intended to be

¹¹⁶ *Inamoramento*, III.ix.26: “(Mentre che io canto, o Dio redemptore, / Vedo la Italia tutta a fiamma e a foco / Per questi Galli, che con gran valore / Vengon per disertar non sciò che loco: / Però vi lascio in questo vano amore / Di Fiorde spina ardente a poco a poco. / Un’altra fiata, se mi fia concesso, Raconterovi el tutto per espresso).”

¹¹⁷ Dionisotti, “Fortuna e sfortuna del Boiardo,” 232.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 236-238.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

¹²⁰ “Il Boiardo Estense” was the subject of the 1994 conference marking the five-hundredth anniversary of the poet’s death and introduced by Dionisotti, *Il Boiardo e il mondo Estense nel Quattrocento*. The *Centro Studi Matteo Maria Boiardo* that opened in Scandiano in 2001 has been undertaking new critical editions of Boiardo’s *oeuvre* and hosting new initiatives around their study. See Canova and Ruozi, eds., *Boiardo a Scandiano. Dieci anni di studi*.

¹²¹ Matarrese, *Parole e forme dei cavalieri boiardeschi*, 19 (Trans. mine): “E il poema boiardesco è anche la rivendicazione della cultura estense dell’epica cavalleresca e romanzesca, la sua marcata coltura padana il segno della particolare propositività della corte estense nell’ambito del policentrismo quattrocentesco.”

¹²² Matarrese, “Premessa,” 16 (Trans. mine): “La caratteristica veste padana della sua lingua è l’espressione di quel policentrismo linguistico e culturale tuttora attivo all’interno di un sistema in cui le tradizioni locali sono state un humus essenziale per la cultura nazionale.”

reformed as best as possible in those places where the author, prevented by death and by the roughness [*rozzezza*] of his time, and in which our Italian language lacks the polish of contemporary times, could not provide for it that ornament that was nevertheless given to his nature.¹²³

Domenichi's parallel dedication to Pulci's *Morgante* tells us that he understood his editorial operation precisely and deliberately as a "re-dressing" of the quattrocento poem into a new and "cleaner" linguistic garment.¹²⁴

The "recovery" of Boiardo's language in recent years, finally, has led to new hypotheses about the history of the text and about various hermeneutical questions. Boiardo's work on the poem has been extended from 1476 to the 1460s, which is to say from before the succession of Ercole I in 1471; and this argument has been primarily based of the linguistic variations that have now emerged across the first and second books.¹²⁵ New answers have also been proposed with regards to the question of the relationship between Orlando and Ruggiero's stories. More linguistic changes between the second and third books, precisely at the point where Ruggiero's story comes to dominate over the others, have led Tissoni Benvenuti to stress the distinctions between the two characters and their plotlines:

It merits particular attention the fact that Ruggiero appears in a poem dedicated to the love of Orlando and not expressly dedicated to him, as would be obvious considering his dynastic importance. What's more, of the very existence of Ruggiero there is not a word until the last octaves of the first book.¹²⁶

She has suggested that the third book "is almost a work in itself," as it experiments with new stylistic features along with "a kind of renewal of the plot, with the entry of a new pagan

¹²³ See Domenichi's dedication ("All' Illustrissimo Signor Giberto Pio di Sassuolo") in Harris, *Bibliografia dell' Orlando Innamorato*, 169 (Trans. mine): "riformato in meglio in quei luoghi dove l' autore prevenuto dalla morte, et impedito dalla rozzezza del suo tempo, nel quale questa lingua Italiana desiderava la pulitezza dei nostri giorni, non gli puote dar quell' ornamento, ch' era dell' animo suo."

¹²⁴ See Weaver, "Riformare l' Orlando innamorato," 137 (Trans. mine): "[I]l meglio ch' io ha saputo, presa la penna in mano, ho tolto la cura di ridurlo a quell' ornamento, che la mia ignorantia li può dare. L' harei tornato alla candidezza che si conviene al suo merito, se 'l mio valore avesse saputo farlo. Così rivestitolo un poco meglio, da che egli andava dattorno lacero, et male in arnese, lo mando a V.S. acciocché Ella si ralleghi con seco dalla pietà che m' ha mosso ad avere compassione della miseria di lui" [As best as I knew how, with pen in hand, I have taken care to reduce it to that ornament that my ignorance is able to give it. I would have returned it to the brightness that it merits if my worth would have known how. Nevertheless, re-dressed now a little bit better, since it formerly went about lacerated and poorly equipped, I send it to your excellency so that you may enjoy it as a result of the piety that moved me to have compassion for its misery].

¹²⁵ Tissoni Benvenuti, *Introduzione*, xi (Trans. mine): "Se questa edizione restituisce un testo più arcaico e quindi di più difficile lettura, permette d' altra parte di intravedere alcune caratteristiche dell' originale. Eliminato lo strato tardo e uniformante del manoscritto Trivulziano, si fa evidente la disomogeneità della scrittura, riconducibile ad una diacronia nella composizione certo più ampia di quella tradizionalmente assegnata ai primi due libri" [If this edition restores a more archaic and therefore more difficult-to-read text, it allows a glimpse on the other hand of some characteristics of the original. Without the late and unifying additional layer of the Trivulziano manuscript, one can see clearly the inhomogeneity of the writing, attributable to a much wider period of composition than that which has been traditionally assigned to the first two books].

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv (Trans. mine): "Merita una particolare attenzione il fatto che Ruggiero compaia in un poema dedicato all' innamoramento di Orlando e non a lui espressamente intitolato, come sarebbe stato ovvio, considerata la sua importanza dinastica. Non solo, ma dell' esistenza di Ruggiero non si fa parola fino alle ultime ottave del primo libro."

character, Mandricardo.”¹²⁷ This has given new energy to the question of whether “the original design of the *Inamoramento* considered [Ruggiero’s] insertion” at all.¹²⁸

But where does this leave our hypothesis about the close relationship and “contradiction” between Orlando and Ruggiero’s stories; a hypothesis suggested, as we have already said, by the stories of their “signs”? Where do the new approaches to “il Boiardo Estense” leave this visual language, which appears to be developed across both his and Ariosto’s poems, as if impervious not only to the linguistic variation that has now been found throughout the *Inamoramento* but also to the many substantial differences, linguistic and otherwise, that have long been acknowledged between Boiardo’s poem and its celebrated continuation?

The next and last section of this chapter is dedicated to exploring how the avenues of interpretation I pursued above, around Boiardo and Ariosto’s “signs,” were in fact blocked by some of their most influential readers in the Cinquecento; the very same ones who executed the linguistic “reforms” and contributed to canonizing, and allegorizing, both poems. This now-buried history will suggest that the attempt to provide new linguistic, typographic, and paratextual “dresses” to the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso* in the Cinquecento impacted also the reception of the visual language that “dressed” the characters and structured the plotlines of these poems.¹²⁹ It will explain how the project of rediscovering the discourses around “signs” within these works must be related to the ongoing projects of studying the cultural agendas of their cosmopolitan editors in relation to the distinctive forms of culture and politics that were fostered at the Este court.

vi. *The Fortune and Misfortune of Boiardo and Ariosto in the Imprese Treatises*

The middle of the sixteenth century saw the emergence on the peninsula of vernacular treatises dedicated to so-called *impresae* and a range of similar, or potentially similar, “signs”.¹³⁰ Many of these texts, and indeed all the very first ones, were closely intertwined with the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*. The *Dialogo dell’impresae militari e amorose* (1551) by Paolo Giovio (1483-1552) was famously the first of this group, representing a discussion between Giovio and Ludovico Domenichi.¹³¹ We will see how it mentions the “signs” of the legendary Carolingian

¹²⁷ Ibid., xxxii (Trans. mine): “Il terzo libro è quasi un’opera a se stante, con gli stesi caratteri delle altre gionte cavalleresche in circolazione: e cioè una ripresa di maniera della trama, con l’ingresso di un nuovo personaggio pagano, Mandricardo.”

¹²⁸ Ibid., xv (Trans. mine): “Non possiamo invece essere certi che il primitivo disegno dell’*Inamoramento* ne contemplasse l’inserimento.”

¹²⁹ On the illustrations added to the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso* in the Cinquecento as windows onto and participants in the poems’ reception history see especially Bolzoni, Pezzini, and Rizzarelli, eds., *Tra mille carte vive ancora’: Ricezione del Furioso tra immagini e parole*; and Bolzoni and Girotto, eds., *Donne Cavalieri Incanti Follia: Viaggio attraverso le immagini dell’Orlando furioso*. In another venue, it could be explored how the woodcut illustrations rendered (or more often neglected to render) the poems’ “signs” by finding other means of identifying characters (i.e. with nametags or initials rather than with the images that the poets had assigned to their armature).

¹³⁰ On the first *impresa* treatises see especially Caldwell, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian impresa in Theory and Practice*, 3-61 (I. The Genesis and Early Development of *Impresa* theory); Manning, *The Emblem*, 37-79; and Arbizzoni, “*Impresae* as Emblems: the European Reputation of an ‘Italian’ Genre,” 1-32.

¹³¹ Initially presented to Cosimo I de’ Medici in the form of a lavishly-illustrated manuscript in 1551, Giovio’s *Dialogo* was printed only posthumously beginning with Antonio Barré’s 1555 edition from Rome. For the textual history and the latest critical edition used here see Travi and Perco eds., *Dialogo dell’impresae militari e amorose*, 353-443. See also Doglio, “Introduzione,” 9-29; and Nova, “*Dialogo dell’impresae*: la storia editoriale e le

knights as well as Ariosto personally. The next to weigh in on the subject of “signs” were Domenichi and Girolamo Ruscelli, who were among the most successful editors of the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso* respectively, and who became rival editors of Giovio’s dialogue in 1556, to which they attached treatises of their own.¹³² Ruscelli in particular made the “signs” of the *Furioso* central to his arguments, which are known to have brought a new level of “theoretical” rigor to the discussion of “signs.” Collectively, this literature exerted a profound and lasting impact on the reading of *insegne* in Boiardo and Ariosto’s poems.¹³³

Giovio was a venerated public personality when he wrote the *Dialogo dell’imprese*, known best for his contemporary history, the *Historiarum sui temporis*, and for his connections to many of the most powerful military and political leaders of his time, which the composition of the histories had facilitated.¹³⁴ Giovio introduces the vernacular dialogue as a respite from his heavier work on the history, and specifically as the record of a discussion between himself and Ludovico Domenichi, his friend and translator, which had taken place in the August heat of Rome in 1551.

The argument of the present *discorso* had its beginning in such a fashion: that *messer* Ludovico Domenichi frequently staying with me for the purpose of his continuing translation of our Latin *Istorie* into the Tuscan vernacular, for good reason began to discuss with me about the material and art of the invention of *imprese*, which the great Lords and noble *Cavalieri* of our time often wear on their surcoats, horses, and flags, to communicate a part of their generous intentions [*per significare parte de’ lor generosi pensieri*].¹³⁵

The dialogue’s contents include a brief history of how “signs” had been used since antiquity; Giovio’s (subsequently famous) “cinque condizioni” for the invention of an *impresa*; and,

immagini,” 73-86. It should be remembered, although the point cannot be elaborated on here, that Cosimo I was a major political rival of the Estensi throughout the middle and the second half of the Cinquecento. See Santi, “La precedenza tra gli Estensi e i Medici e l’*Historia de’ Principi d’Este* di G. Battista Pigna,” 37-122.

¹³² Their editions of Giovio’s dialogue are Ruscelli, *Ragionamento di Monsignor Paolo Giovio sopra i motti et disegni d’arme e d’amore che comunemente chiamano imprese. Con un discorso di Girolamo Ruscelli intorno allo stesso soggetto* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1556); and Domenichi, *Dialogo dell’imprese militari et amorose di Monsignor Giovio Vescovo di Nocera. Con un Ragionamento di Messer Lodovico Domenichi nel medesimo soggetto* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, 1556). About these editions see especially Arbizzoni, *Un nodo di parole e di cose: storia e fortuna delle imprese*, 11-36; and “Giovio, Domenichi e le imprese,” 9-23.

¹³³ Only Giovio and Ruscelli’s engagements with Ariosto and the *Furioso* in their earliest writings on *imprese* are discussed here, and (too) briefly. Other figures who wrote treatises or anthologies of *imprese* and who were also editors and critics of the Este poets include Ludovico Dolce (1508/10-1568) and Scipione Ammirato (1531-1600). Dolce edited the *Imprese di diversi principi, duchi, signori, e d’altri personaggi et huomini letterati et illustri* (Venice: 1562) and oversaw multiple editions of the *Orlando furioso* for the Giolito publishing house in Venice (1552, 1555). He also began work on a “reform” of the *Inamoramento* that was never completed. Ammirato, author of *Il Rota, ovvero dell’imprese* (Naples: Scotto, 1562), produced the “argomenti” for the *Orlando furioso* edited by Ruscelli (Venice: Valgrisi, 1556). An expanded version of this discussion would also consider Francesco Caburacci’s *Trattato dove si dimostra il vero & novo modo di fare le imprese, con un breve discorso in difesa dell’Orlando furioso di Messer Ludovico Ariosto* (Bologna: Giovanni Rossi, 1580). Modern scholarship on the relationship between Boiardo, Ariosto, and the *imprese* treatises is discussed further down in this section.

¹³⁴ The most comprehensive biography is Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio. The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy*.

¹³⁵ Giovio, *Dialogo dell’imprese*, 373 (Trans. mine): “E l’argomento del presente discorso ha auto principio in tal guisa: che usando meco familiarmente messer Lodovico Domenichi per cagione di tradure continuamente l’*Istorie* nostre latine in vulgare toscano, a buon proposito entrò a ragionare della materia e arte dell’invenzione e imprese, le quali i gran Signori e nobilissimi Cavalieri a’ nostri tempi sogliono portare nelle sopravveste, barde e bandiere, per significare parte de’ lor generosi pensieri.”

finally, a long series of examples of *imprese* used by famous personalities, whom the well-connected Giovio had the occasion to know.¹³⁶

Giovio's explicit remembrances of Ariosto fall into this long and anecdotal main body of the *Dialogo*. He mentions Ariosto first as the composer of a *motto* for the "sign" worn by Alfonso I d'Este at the battle of Ravenna in 1512.

Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara, a captain of resolute strength and admirable constancy, when he went to the battle of Ravenna, wore [an image of] a metal ball, full of artificial fire that flamed out of it from certain fissures, and was of such artifice that at a given place and time the fire would erupt and create an uproar for those nearby; but it was missing a *motto*, which was later added by the famous Ariosto, and this was *Loco et tempore*. It was later converted into the French language for greater beauty, becoming *A lieu e temps*. It proved to be bloody on that very day, because Alfonso directed his artillery in such a way as to make a massacre of many men.¹³⁷

Domenichi inquires further down whether "other kinds of men" besides princes, captains and cardinals wore *imprese*.¹³⁸ Beside the "imprese" of other men of letters, Poliziano and Erasmus, Giovio interprets as an *impresa* the set of images and the Latin phrase that appeared in different configurations on the frontispieces of the first two *editiones principes* of the *Furioso* and (the *motto* only) on the *finis* of the third; editions which Ariosto had carefully curated himself.¹³⁹

Ludovico Ariosto made a beautiful *impresa*, showing a beehive to which an ungrateful peasant is setting smoke in order to dig out the honey and the wax, with a *motto* overhead that says *Pro bono malum*, perhaps wishing it to be understood how he had been mistreated by one of his patrons, as one can determine from his *Satires*.¹⁴⁰

This was the first public interpretation of these "signs" in relation to Ariosto's biography and sentiments towards his patrons, and it sparked a debate about their sources and meaning that is

¹³⁶ Ibid., 375 (Trans. mine): "Io m'avveggo bene, Monsignor, che voi avete fresca memoria; e però siate contento ragionarmi di quelle tutte ch'avete vedute, perché so molto bene che avete conosciuti e veduti per faccia tutti i capitani che son contenuti e celebrati nella vostra Istoria; e ragionevolmente avete dinanzi a gli occhi la vaghezza de gl'ornamenti loro." [I see that you have a fresh memory, Monsignor; and so be glad, if you will, to tell me about all of those that you have seen; For I know well that you have known and seen in person all the captains that are part of and celebrated in your *History*; and as a result, you will have the beauty of their ornaments before your eyes].

¹³⁷ Ibid., 396 (Trans. mine): "Alfonso, Duca di Ferrara, capitano di risoluta prodezza e mirabile costanza, quand'egli andò alla battaglia di Ravenna, portò una palla di metallo, piena di fuoco artificiale che svampava per certe commissure, et è di tale artificio che a luogo e tempo il fuoco terminato rompendosi farebbe gran fracasso di quegli che gli fussero incontra; ma gli mancava il motto, il quale gli fu poi aggiunta dal famoso Ariosto, e fu *Loco et tempore*; e fu poi convertito in lingua francese per più bellezza, dicendo: *A lieu et temps*. Mostrolo in quella giornata sanguinosa, perché drizzò di tal sorte l'artegliaria che fece grandissima strage d'uomini."

¹³⁸ Ibid., 417 (Trans. mine): "Ditemi, Monsignore, poi che avete numerato discendendo dal sommo al basso quasi tutti i famosi principi e capitani e cardinali; ècci nessun'altra sorte d'uomini ch'abbia portato imprese? [Tell me, Monsignore, since you have descended from the highest to the smallest all of the famous princes, captains and cardinals, are there no other kinds of men who have worn *imprese*?]

¹³⁹ For reproductions of the pages to which Giovio is alluding here see Masi, "I segni dell'ingratitude: Ascendenze classiche e medioevali delle imprese ariostesche nel *Furioso*," 160-161.

¹⁴⁰ Giovio, *Dialogo dell'impresa*, 418: "Fece una bella impresa messer Ludovico Ariosto, facendo il vaso delle pecchie alle quali l'ingrato villano vi fa il fumo e le ammazza per cavare il mele e la cera, col motto di sopra che diceva: *Pro bono mallum*; volendo forse che s'intendesse com'egli era stato maltrattato da qualche suo padrone, come si cava dalle sue *Satire*."

still essentially ongoing.¹⁴¹ Also still ongoing are speculations into how Ariosto may have contributed directly or indirectly, with his poetry, to the “signs” that actually used and displayed by his most privileged readers and patrons.¹⁴²

Giovio’s initial historical overview about the uses of “signs” since ancient times is arguably the more telling passage regarding how his treatment of the “impresa” related to Boiardo and Ariosto’s treatment of “signs”. Worth quoting at length here, this comes in response to Domenichi’s question of whether “the wearing of these *imprese* was an ancient custom.”¹⁴³ Giovio responds as follows:

There is no doubt that the ancients used to bear crests and ornaments on their helmets and shields, as one can see clearly in Virgil, when he makes the catalogue of the peoples who come to fight in favor of Turnus against the Trojans in the eighth book of the *Aeneid*. Amphiarus (as Plutarch says) in the war of Thebes wore a dragon on his shield. Statius writes similarly of Capaneus and Polynices, that the one wore a hydra and the other a sphinx ... But leaving aside these most ancient examples, one can also turn to the famous Frankish paladins who were in large measure (in truth) not merely fables. And we can see (according to what the writers pointed out) that each one of them had a particular *impresa* and *insegna*, as Orlando had the *quartiere*, Rinaldo the bended lion, Danese the *scaglione*, Salmon di Bretagna the checkerboard, Olivieri the griffin, Astolfo the leopard, and Gano the falcon. One reads the same thing about the barons of the Round Table of Arthur, the glorious King of England; and similarly of those celebrated in the books written in the Spanish language Amadis of Gaul, Primaleon, Palmerino and Tirante il Bianco. In the more modern age, like that of Federico Barbarossa, the time when the *insegne* of families came into use, which we call *arme*, granted by Princes for the merit of *impresa* undertaken in war and to the effect of ennobling valorous knights, the most bizarre inventions for crests and images on shields were born, which one can see in many paintings in Florence in Santa Maria Novella. Now in our own times, after the arrival of King Charles VIII and Luis XII in Italy, everyone that followed the military, imitating the French captains, tried to adorn themselves with beautiful and pompous *imprese*, by which the knights shined, divided company by company, with different liveries (*livre*), embroidered as they were in silver and gold on their sashes and surcoats, and on their chest and back there were the *impresa* of the captains in such a fashion that the display of the men at arms made a most pompous and rich spectacle and in battle the bravery and bearing of the companies could be discerned.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Scholarly discussions of Ariosto’s “impresa” include Beer, *Romanzi di cavalleria*, 161-7; Ceserani, “L’*impresa* delle api e dei serpenti,” 172-86; Santoro, *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, 317-20; Casadei, “Il *pro bonum malum* ariostesco e la Bibbia,” 566-568; and Masi, “I segni dell’ingratitude,” 141-164.

¹⁴² See for example Güntert, “Le imprese di Isabella d’Este Gonzaga e l’*Orlando furioso*,” 445-454.

¹⁴³ Giovio, *Dialogo dell’impresa*, 374 (Trans. mine): “ma ditemi prima s’il portare queste imprese fu costume antico.”

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 374-75 (Trans. mine): “Non è punto da dubitare che gl’antichi usorno di portar cimieri e ornamenti ne gli elmetti e ne gli scudi, perché si vede chiaramente in Virgilio, quando fa il catalogo delle genti che vennero in favore di Turno contra i Troiani nell’ottavo dell’*Eneida*. Anfiarao ancora (come dice Pinadro) alla guerra di Tebe portò un dragone nello scudo. Stazio scrive similmente di Capaneo e di Polinice, che quelli portò l’idra e questi la sfinge ... Ma lasciando da canto questi essempli antichissimi, in ciò ne fanno ancora coniettura i famosi Paladini di Francia, i quali (per la verità) in gran parte non furono favolosi; e veggiamo (per quel che gli scrittori accennano) che ciascuno

The passage shows off a range of thinking on the subject such as might be expected of a man of Giovio's profile: an accomplished humanist; a self-professed reader and fan of "chivalric" legends; and an acute observer of the military and of the fashions of his contemporaries.¹⁴⁵

But something stands out in relation to the poems we have been reading: Giovio's distinctions between antiquity, the earlier and later middle ages, and contemporary times – the latter beginning, precisely in keeping with his *Histories*, with the French invasions of 1494.¹⁴⁶ This suggests how Giovio's history writing influenced his treatment of "signs"; not merely by granting him access to the "signs" of famous men, that is, but also by determining how he would conceive of these things as reflections of distinct historical configurations and their "customs". In the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso*, in contrast, we have seen that "signs" make visible textual and sexual genealogies spanning vast historical timescales from Biblical, Trojan, Carolingian, and later medieval times, to the present.¹⁴⁷ These genealogies become illegible once the "*impresa* or *insegne*" of the Carolingian protagonists of Boiardo and Ariosto's poems are understood as representing one delimited *phase* in the historical development of the *impresa*. Boiardo and Ariosto's images would be equally illegible as manifestations of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century customs alone. However, this is just how Girolamo Ruscelli interpreted them in the influential edition of the *Dialogo* that he published following Giovio's death.

Ruscelli's *Ragionamento di Monsignor Paolo Giovio sopra i motti et disegni d'arme e d'amore che comunemente chiamano imprese* was first published in 1556 ostensibly to bring to light a more accurate and widely available version of Giovio's dialogue than its first printer had been able to produce.¹⁴⁸ As many scholars have shown, it also constituted a decisive intervention on Ruscelli's part into Giovio's subject, intimated first by the decision to change Giovio's title

di loro ebbe peculiare impresa e insegna, come Orlando il quartiere, Rinaldo il leone sbarrato, Danese lo scaglione, Salmon di Bretagna lo scacchiero, Olivieri il grifone, Alfonso il leopardo e Gano il falcone. Il medesimo si legge de' Baroni della Tavola ritonda di Artù, glorio Re d'Inghilterra. L'usarono similmente i celebrati ne' libri della lingua spagnuola Amadis de Gaula, Primaleon, Palmerino e Tirante il Bianco. Ora in questa età più moderna, come di Federico Barbarossa, al tempo del quale vennero in uso l'*insegne* delle famiglie, chiamate da noi arme, donate da' Principi, per merito dell'onorate imprese fatte in guerra, ad effetto di nobilitare i valorosi cavalieri, nacquero bizzarrissime invenzioni di cimieri e pitture negli scudi, il che si vede in molte pitture a Fiorenza in Santa Maria Novella. Ma a questi nostri tempi, dopo la venuta del re Carlo VIII e di Lodovico XII in Italia, ognuno che seguitava la milizia, imitando i capitani francesi, cercò di adornarsi di belle e pompose imprese, delle quali rilucevano i cavalieri appartati compagnia da compagnia con diverse livree, perciò che ricamavano d'argento, di martel dorato, i saioni e le sopraveste, e nel petto e nella schiena stavano l'imprese de' capitani, di modo che le mostre delle genti d'arme facevano pomposissimo e ricchissimo spettacolo e nelle battaglie si conosceva l'ardire e il portamento delle compagnie."

¹⁴⁵ See Travi, "Casa Giovio e la tradizione delle leggende cavalleresche," 7-32.

¹⁴⁶ Zimmermann discusses how Giovio's choice to begin his *Histories* in 1494 was influenced by the Florentine circles in which he was active around Bernardo Rucellai and Francesco Guicciardini. See *Paolo Giovio and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy*, 11 and 30-32, here 32: "The historiographical tradition originating with Rucellai and his contemporaries that 1494 had been a turning point for Italy constituted the first attempt to define distinct periods within the general notion of a rebirth of civilization after the fall of Rome, and Giovio was the first historian to approach universal history in terms of the new division."

¹⁴⁷ The Este court primarily produced genealogical historiography, despite the vogue for *commentarii* and contemporary histories elsewhere on the peninsula. See Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 36-43; Tristano, "History without Scruple: The Enlightenment Confronts the Middle Ages in Renaissance Ferrara," 79-121; and Bezner, "Pellegrino Prisciani und die *Praxis* der *Historia*. Ferrareser Renaissance-Historiographie und ihr Kontext," 353-388.

¹⁴⁸ On the history of Ruscelli's *Ragionamento* see Arbizzoni, *Un nodo di parole e di cose*, 13-14

from the *Dialogo* to the *Ragionamento*, and confirmed by the “*discorso di Girolamo Ruscelli intorno allo stesso soggetto*” that Ruscelli had printed together with Giovio’s work.¹⁴⁹

This *Discorso* takes an approach to the subject that has been called both “theoretical” and “philosophical” in comparison to Giovio’s largely anecdotal dialogue.¹⁵⁰ In particular, Ruscelli is concerned with establishing a more precise definition of the *impresa*; more stringent rules governing its properties and its use; and more rigorous distinctions especially between the *impresa* and other “species” and “genres” of “signs” - including *livree*, *divise*, *insegne*, *motti*, *emblemi*, and *cifri* – which he is loath to mix together.

Today we call an *impresa* that which is completely different from it; And for not knowing how to make the *distinction* that I will outline bellow, many fool themselves into believing that they know how to make *Imprese*. Truly they are fooled in many points by Giovio, who spoke about these things in the previous *Ragionamento* with Domenichi.¹⁵¹

Giovio fooled himself by not having in mind the distinctions that I have made in this *discorso* between *livree*, *insegne*, *motti*, and *imprese*, and all the other species that are not the same but only similar [*non congiunte, ma conformi*]. Since among other things we have clearly seen that *motti* alone are, when they are complete and well-done, a genre of their own, often used and very beautiful. And the same is true for images without a *motto*, which Giovio calls bodies without souls for not having made this distinction for himself or for others.¹⁵²

Most importantly for our purposes, Ruscelli’s arguments about “signs” also rely on the *Furioso*, which he edited for the Valgrisi publishing house and which was printed in the very same year as the *Ragionamento* on “signs” in 1556. Indeed, Ruscelli continuously uses the “signs” of the *Furioso* as an authoritative bank of examples of the best “Italian” customs and vocabularies around “signs”; commensurate with the poem’s status, as he was helping to promote it contemporaneously, as a modern “Italian” classic.

Ruscelli’s *Discorso* deals with several different “species” or “genres” separately, before treating the *impresa* at the end. His method is generally to comment on the meanings and etymologies of the different words for “signs” that he is dealing with; and then to provide examples of how those words were (authoritatively) used. His discussion of the *divisa*, for example, shows how the word “*divisa*” – an Italian translation of the French *livrée*, he argues – both contains its proper meaning etymologically and was used accordingly by the best Italian authors, including Ariosto.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 15-19.

¹⁵⁰ See for example Klein, “The Theory of Figurative Expression in the Italian Treatises on the Impresa,” 3-24; and Nova, “*Dialogo dell’impresa: La storia editoriale e le immagini*,” 80.

¹⁵¹ Ruscelli, *Ragionamento*, 137 (Trans. mine): “oggi chiamiamo imprese che sono quasi del tutto diverse da quelle, & per non saper far questa distintione in quella guisa, che io soggiungerò non molto di sotto, s’ingannano molti nel saper far l’Imprese, & essi veramente in molte ingannato il Giovio, di quelle che egli racconta nel precedente Ragionamento suo col Domenichi.”

¹⁵² Ibid., 210-211 (Trans. mine): “Il Giovio s’ingannò per non aver fatta nella mente sua quella distintione chi o ho fatta in tutto questo mio discorso tra livree, insegne, motti et imprese con tutte l’altre spetie che van con esse non congiunte, ma conformi. Ove fra altre cose abbiamo largamente veduto che i motti per sé soli quando son belli e finiti, sono un genere appartato e molto usato sempre e molto bello. E così ancora delle figure senza motto, che pur il Giovio, per non aver fatta a sé ad altri questa distintione, chiama corpi senza anima.” For Ruscelli’s other statements about the problem of confusing “signs” see Ibid., 147-48, and 194.

Since lords and knights would arrange and display [*ordinavano & divisano*] themselves in various ways with colors, figures, and on their clothing, these things took the name of *divise*, a word which, as was said just above, is commonly in the mouths of all of Italy and used by many excellent writers including the divine Ariosto (the happy spirit who always seems to me worthy of being called by such a name).

*Questi partiti parvero i migliori
A la Donzella, e tosto una Divisa
Si fe ne l'arme, che volea inferire
Disperazione, e voglia di morire.*

And so it is clear that the poet is speaking of the same things we are, he adds:

*Era la sopravesta del colore
Di ch'esser suol la foglia, che s'imbianca
Quando dal ramo e' tolta, e che l'humore
Che facea vivo l'arbore, le manca.
Ricamata a tronconi, era di fuore
Di Cipresso, che mai non si rinfranca
Poi c'ha sentito la dura bipenne.
L'abito al suo dolor molto convenne.*

In this *livrea* or *divisa* of Bradamante's, which certainly is very beautiful in every respect, any perspicacious mind can see for themselves without us spending more time discussing the matter how they are to be made, with colors alone, or with colors and figures both. So, as with this most noble invention, so for *livre*, *insegne* and *imprese*, one can draw from that miraculous poem of Ariosto's the kind of perfect exemplars not only that one would desire but also that one should be required to use.¹⁵³

The passage of the *Furioso* in which Bradamante bears the color brown and the image of the cypress tree as a "sign" of her love-sickness helps Ruscelli to prove that the *divisa* – a word Ariosto uses here - is a "sign" made of colors and figures alone, without words. Ariosto, in turn, is made into a kind of authority on the proper use, language, and distinctions around the "signs" that Ruscelli is discussing.

Ruscelli quotes the *Furioso* repeatedly in this fashion. The poem helps him next, for example, to prove that the word "*insegna*" can refer not only to flags and banners but also to any kind of image used as a "sign" on a range of supports.

¹⁵³ Ruscelli, *Ragionamento*, 554-155 (Trans. mine): "Et per questo perché i Signori & Cavalieri essi medesimi ordinavano & divisavano quei modo, & quelle maniere di colori, di figure, & di vestiti, elle si presero il nome di DIVISE, la qual voce, come ho detto poco avanti, è comunemente nelle bocche di tutta Italia, & usata d'altri buoni scrittori, ancor dal divino (che sempre mi par che quel felice spirito si debba così chiamare) Ariosto, *Questi partiti parvero i migliori / A la Donzella, e tosto una Divisa / Si fe ne l'arme, che volea inferire / Disperazione, e voglia di morire*. Et perché si vegga, che egli parla di queste, che noi diciamo, soggiunge appresso. *Era la sopravesta del colore / Di ch'esser suol la foglia, che s'imbianca / Quando dal ramo è tolta, e che l'humore / Che facea vivo l'arbore, le manca / Ricamata a tronconi, era di fuore / Di Cipresso, che mai non si rinfranca / Poi c'ha sentito la dura bipenne. / L'abito al suo dolor molto convenne*. Nella qual Livrea o divisa di Bradamante, che per certo è bellissima, & in ogni parte, senza che io mi spenda più oltre in doscorrervi possano i leggiadri insegnar venir da se stessi considerando i modi del farle in colori soli, come in colori & figure. Si come tutta questa nobilissima Invention, così di Livree, come d'Insegne & d'Imprese si può trar da quel miracoloso poema del detto Ariosto, in tutta quella perfetione, che può desiderarsi, non che convenirle."

Insegna is a word made from the Latin *insignia*, and by that word one intends the flags, banners, shields, surcoats, and anything else that belong to soldiers, captains, and even magistrates. Today one commonly uses ‘insegne’ without any other words for banners, and this use has become so entrenched that some have wanted to fool me and others into thinking that *insegna* can refer to nothing else in our language except to banners, as I have said, or to flags, including those things that artisans, innkeepers, and others display over their doors. But that these people do not know as much as they should can be shown with the testimony of Ariosto in various places, among which there can be cited (which should suffice for them all) the contest or squabble that occurs between Ruggiero and Mandricardo for the shield with the *Aquila bianca*, which numerous times the author calls an “*insegna*” both from his own mouth and by Ruggiero and Mandricardo.

Tu la mia Insegna temerario porti.

And as the two fight one another, Mandricardo having first cut off a piece of Ruggiero’s shield, and thrown away his own,

Hor s’apparecchia à por le forze estreme

Lo scudo ove in azurro è l’augel bianco

Vinto da sdegno si gittò lontano

E mise al brando l’una e l’altra mano.

Ah (disse à lui Ruggier) senz’altro basti

A’ mostrar, che non meriti quella INSEGNA,

C’hor tu la getti, e dinanzi la tagliasti,

*Né potrai dir mai piu che ti convenga.*¹⁵⁴

Ruscelli’s argument about the word “*insegna*” here is that it encompasses many more specific words for “signs,” including *divisee* and *livree* as well as the *armi* belonging to families and kingdoms; and that “of all these different kinds there are examples in the *Furioso*.”

All along, it is the *impresa* that Ruscelli really cares about. This is, in Ruscelli’s view, “the most beautiful, the most ingenious, the most noble, and the most perfect of all of the other varieties treated up until now in this *Discorso*”; its name deriving from “our very own verb *intraprendere*, which means to resolve to do something with a firm and ostentatious intention to bring it to a resolution.”¹⁵⁵ The passage from the *Furioso* that he uses to prove the distinctiveness

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 156-157 (Trans. mine): “*Insegna* poi è voce fatta dal Latino *insignia*, come la qual voce si intendeano gli stendardi, le bandiere, gli scudi, le sopravesti, & ogni altra cosa tale de’ soldati & de’ capitani, benché ancor de’ magistrati. Oggi a noi communemente per Insegne senz’ altre parole s’intendono le bandiere. & è tanto questa parola così pesa, che alcuni han voluto perfidiar meco & con altri, che Insegne non si metterà mai per altro nella lingua nostra, che per bandiera, come è detto, o stendardo, o per quelle che gli artigiani, gli osti, & altri tengono appese sopra la porta loro. Ma che costoro non sappiano di ciò, quanto si converria sapere, si può chiarir con la testimonianza dell’ Ariosto in più luoghi, sì come (che basterà per tutti) si ha in quella contesa, ò briga, che era tra Ruggiero & Mandricardo per lo scudo con l’Aquila bianca, che molte volte il detto Autor chiama Insegna quello scudo, così per bocca sua, come per quella di Ruggiero & di Mandricardo. *Tu la mia Insegna temerario porti ... Et combattendo i detti due, & havendo prima Mandricardo tagliato un pezzo dello scudo di Ruggiero, & poi gittato via il suo medesimo, Hor s’apparecchia à por le forze estreme / Lo scudo ove in azurro è l’augel bianco / Vinto da sdegno si gittò lontano / E mise al brando l’una e l’altra mano. / Ah (disse à lui Ruggier) senz’altro basti / A’ mostrar, che non meriti quella INSEGNA, / C’hor tu la getti, e dinanzi la tagliasti, / Né potrai dir mai piu che ti convenga.*”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 178 (Trans. mine): “Ora volendo venire a ragionar dell’Imprese, che è la più bella, la più ingenuosa, la più nobile, & la più perfetta di tutte l’altre sorti fin qui trattate in questo Discorso, serberò il mio solito di non lasciar di

of the *impresa* is the one in which Orlando, reunited with his sanity and his *quartiero*, adds to the latter the image of the tower of Babel struck by lightning.

And so as to not make recourse to an obscure author, I will attach only one passage here from our divine Ariosto, in Canto XLI:

*Pel di de la battaglia ogni guerriero
Studia haver ricco e novo abito indosso
Orlando ricamar fa nel Quartiero
L'Alto Babel dal fulmine percosso
Un can d'argento haver vuole Oliviero
Che giaccia; e che la lassa habbia su 'l dosso
Con un motto che dica, FIN CHE VENGA
E vuol d'oro la vesta e di se degna.*

Here one can clearly see two things. The first, which was said before, is that surcoats can receive *imprese*. The other is that Giovio tricked himself when in the preceding *Ragionamento* he said that the *Quartiere* was the *impresa* of Orlando's. For the *Quartiere* neither was nor could be an *impresa* but only a *livrea*, which, since it had been worn by him [Orlando] continuously and not made or used only for a single tournament or battle, as is commonly done for *livree*, had become his *insegna* or his own very *arme*. For this reason we see that, at times and according to the occasion, and over top of the *Quartiero*, he would bear *imprese* that suited him according to the occasion, just like in the above verses where he had embroidered the tower of Babel being struck by lightning. For if the *Quartiero* had been an *impresa*, it would have been extremely foolish of he who had done this, or of the author who wrote it, to have put one *impresa* over another.¹⁵⁶

Ruscelli's argument is that it would be impossible and ridiculous to put two *imprese* over one another. And he uses Orlando's double image of the *quartiero* overlaid with the Tower of Babel as an illustration of the distinction between the *livrea*, *insegna* and *arma*, on the one hand, as "signs" regularly associated with a given identity, and the more "noble" *impresa*, on the other, as the "sign" of an intention expressed in a specific situation or occasion.

In summary, Ruscelli offered a compelling means of reading the "signs" of Ariosto's poem, which completely ignored the ways in which these things make manifest its characters, storylines, genealogies, and themes. In his reading, Ruggiero's *aquila bianca* and Orlando's

diffinire, & di dichiarar la voce che elle tengono, come per nome lor proprio in questa parte. Impresa è voce a oi fatta dal verbo nostro imprendere, che val pigliare a far una cosa con ferma & ostentata intenzione di condurla a fine."

¹⁵⁶ Ruscelli, *Ragionamento*, 187-88 (Trans. mine): "Et per non ricorrere ad Autori oscuri, allegherò solamente un luogo del nostro divino Ariosto, nel Canto XLI. "*Pel di de la battaglia ogni guerriero / Studia haver ricco e novo abito indosso / Orlando ricamar fa nel Quartiero / L'Alto Babel dal fulmine percosso / Un can d'argento haver vuole Oliviero / Che giaccia; e che la lassa habbia su 'l dosso / Con un motto che dica, FIN CHE VENGA / E vuol d'oro la vesta e di se degna.*" Ne' quali si possono veder chiaramente due cose. L'una, questa, che s'è detta poco innanzi, & per la quale si sono allegati, cioè che le sopravesti ricevono Imprese. L'altro che il Giovio s'ingannò quando nel precedente suo *Ragionamento* disse, che il Quartiere era Impresa d'Orlando. Perciocché il Quartiere né era né poteva essere Impresa, ma era solamente Livrea, la quale per che era da lui portata di continuo, & non fatta, o usata a una giostra, o a una guerra sola, come le più volte s'usano le Livree, era passata in titolo d'Insegna, o d'Arme sua propria. Onde si vede, che alle volte secondo le occasioni, egli sopra lo stesso Quartiero usava di portar quelle Imprese, che gli aggradivano secondo l'occasioni, si come si ha ne i sopraposti versi che vi fece riarmar l'alta torre di Babelle, percossa dal Fulmine; che se il il Quartiero fosse stata Impresa, saria stata sciocchezza grande di lui, che l'avesse fatto, o dell'Autor che l'avesse scritto, che egli havesse cavalcata un'Impresa sopra l'altra."

tower of Babel do *not* refer to the different sexual and textual genealogies, experiences of desire, and capacities for interpreting “signs” that distinguish these two characters by the end of the *Furioso*. They constitute, instead, two different “species” of signs - one permanent and one occasional. Orlando’s “Alto Babel dal fulmine percosso” is the more ingenious, perfect, noble, and beautiful “sign” according to Ruscelli, moreover, because of its “genre” alone and without any reference to the character’s story or to the matrix of characters and themes that make up its context in the poem. By imposing a hierarchy among the “genres” or “species” of “signs” with the *impresa* at the top, indeed, Ruscelli upended arguably the entire genealogical discourse of the *Furioso* that had expressed skepticism of unbridled individuality, extended Boiardo’s “invention” of Ruggiero, and celebrated the “sign” and genealogy of the Este House.¹⁵⁷ By separating the “permanent” *insegna* from the “occasional” *impresa*, furthermore, he made it easier to separate the genealogical and “encomiastic” storyline around Ruggiero from the “novel” story around Orlando’s love and madness that are so closely intertwined across Boiardo and Ariosto’s poems.

The *Orlando furioso* may never again have played such a conspicuous role in a treatise on “signs” as it does here, in Ruscelli’s *discorso*. And yet we will see that the “signs” of this poem, and of Boiardo’s too eventually, have essentially been tied ever since to discourses that take for granted the kinds of distinctions between historical periods, and between “genres” of “signs,” which Ruscelli and Giovio affirmed.

The first “modern” scholar to attend to the “signs” of the *Furioso* departed from the double recognition of how prevalent they are in the poem and how the treatises used the poem to arrive at and to prove their arguments about the properties of “signs”, the distinctions between them, and the rules that should govern their invention and use. This was Abd-el Kader Salza (1875-1919), a student of some of the biggest names of the Italian “historical” school (including Pio Rajna) at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁸ Specifically, Salza produced two studies on this topic. His “Imprese e divise d’arme e d’amore nel’*Orlando furioso*” was published in the *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* in 1901; and his “La letteratura delle ‘imprese’ e la fortuna di esse nel 500” was appended to his 1903 monograph on Luca Contile (1505-1574), an

¹⁵⁷ Ruscelli dedicated his edition of the *Furioso* to Alfonso I d’Este and showed himself there to be very aware of Ruggiero’s dynastic story. See Ariosto, *Orlando furioso tutto ricorretto et di nuove figure adornato* (Venice: Valgrisi, 1556), “All’Illus. et Eccel. Signore, il Signore Donn’Alfonso da Este Principe di Ferrara Girolamo Ruscelli” (Trans. mine): “Et veramente a niuno più convenevolmente si dovea questo libro dedicar che a lei. Perciocché essendo stata manifesta inventione dell’Autore di cominciar dalle lodi della persona di Ruggiero, come da antico, & primo ceppo dell’Illustrissima, & eccellentissima casa ESTENSE, si conviene à questo libro portarsi sempre in fronte l’onoratissimo nome di vostra Eccellenza, come per additare al mondo un vero, & chiarissimo essemplio, & come una efficacissima prova, che per somme, & ammirabili che siano le cose, che in questo poema di scrivono di Ruggiero, non son però nè impossibili, nè fuor di credito, poi che molto maggiori ne vien di continuo vedendo il mondo ne i rami, che dopo tanti anni germogliano da questa pianta” [And truly this book had to be dedicated to no one more appropriately than to you. Since, the invention of the Author having been clearly to begin with the praises of Ruggiero, as the ancient and first root of the illustrious and excellent Este house, it is appropriate for this book to bear always on its front the honored name of your Excellency, as if to show to the world a true and clear example and efficacious proof, that the highest and admirable things that are written about Ruggiero in this poem are not impossible or without credit, but indeed to a greater degree today can be seen in the branches that after so many years have sprouted from that plant].

¹⁵⁸ On Salza’s scholarship in the context of Italian positivism, historicism, and cultural studies, see Floriani, “La collaborazione di Abdelkader Salza,” 237-260; and Quondam, “L’erudito formica e il poetucolo accattone. Cosa può insegnarci questo libro,” 7-19.

academician and *poligrafo* whose last publication had been a treatise on “signs” in 1574.¹⁵⁹ In both pieces, Salza read backwards from the Cinquecento treatises onto the *Furioso* to form an idea of Ariosto as an authority on the “signs” of his time and a window, therefore, onto this aspect of the “history of customs” in the Cinquecento.

Whoever frequents this frivolous literature will see continuously mentioned the name and example of Ariosto ... And this was appropriate, since the poet, an exquisite artist, was used to living in one of the most elegant and carefree courts of our splendid Cinquecento.¹⁶⁰

Imprese were a chivalric custom, therefore, and whoever calls to mind the memory of the *Orlando furioso* will remember that Ariosto made not a small use of them, mixing with the true *imprese* all other kinds of symbolic inventions, like *emblemi*, *livree*, *divise*, etc., in which the allegorical significance of color was important ... But we cannot indulge ourselves on Ariosto; it is enough to remember that he became, for the treatise writers on *imprese*, a sure point of reference [*un codice sicuro*], in which they could find confirmation of their opinions.¹⁶¹

Salza betrayed an apologetic stance towards his “frivolous” subject, which he characterized as a symptom of the “least elevated tendencies” of Cinquecento court culture; and this of course came to date his work once *imprese* and their related “symbolic inventions” moved from the margins to the center of Renaissance Studies in the following decades of the twentieth century.¹⁶² Salza’s approach to the “signs” of the *Furioso* became widely accepted, however, and they have even been expanded upon in recent decades by both historians of art and of literature, including Alessandro Nova, Mauda Bregoli Russo, Guido Baldassari, and Emilio Bigi.

Common to this work has been the acknowledgment of the “central role played by Ariosto’s poem in the diffusion of the genre of the *impresa*” and the concomitant assumption

¹⁵⁹ See Salza, “Imprese e divise d’arme e d’amore nel’*Orlando furioso*,” 310-363; and “La letteratura delle ‘imprese’ e la fortuna di esse nel ‘500,” 205-252. Salza recognizes the novelty of his subject at the outset of both pieces. Contile’s treatise, discussed in the following chapter of this dissertation, is the *Ragionamento di Luca Contile sopra le proprietà delle imprese con le particolari degli Accademici de gli Affidati et con le interpretationi et croniche* (Pavia: 1574).

¹⁶⁰ Salza, “Imprese e divise d’arme e d’amore nel’*Orlando furioso*,” 311-312 (Trans. mine): “Chi scorra questa letteratura frivola vedrà continuamente riferito il nome e l’esempio dell’Ariosto ... E così doveva essere, poiché il poeta, artista squisito, era adusato al vivere di una delle più eleganti e spensierate corti di quel nostro splendido Cinquecento.”

¹⁶¹ Salza, “La letteratura delle ‘imprese’ e la fortuna di esse nel ‘500,” 209 (Trans. mine): “Costume cavalleresco adunque fu questo delle imprese e chi richiami alla memoria l’*Orlando Furioso*, ricorderà che l’Ariosto ne ha fatto uso non piccolo, mescolando con le vere imprese tutte le altre fogge di invenzioni simboliche, come gli emblemi, le livree, le divise, ecc. in cui aveva valore unicamente il significato allegorico del colore ... Ma non possiamo indugiarcì sull’Ariosto; basti dire che esso divenne, per i trattatisti delle imprese, un codice sicuro, nel quale andavano a ricercare la conferma delle loro opinioni.”

¹⁶² *Imprese* and other “signs” became increasingly important to Renaissance scholarship after Aby Warburg defended the idea of a “cultural history of accessories” while embarking on their study as evidence of the “crucial stylistic period of transition between late Middle Ages and early Renaissance”: See Warburg, “On *Imprese amorose* in the Earliest Florentine Engravings,” 169-183. The article was first published in 1905. Warburg was a major influence on Mario Praz, whose *Studi sul concettismo* (Milan: La cultura, 1934), revised and translated as *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939), became a founding text for the interdisciplinary study of *imprese* and emblems by students of the Renaissance. See Stimilli, “Aby Warburg’s *Impresa*,” 2-24; and Forti, “I percorsi della memoria. Mario Praz e il Warburg Institute,” 237-255.

that the treatises and the poem should shed light on one another.¹⁶³ For example, Nova has written that Giovio's *Dialogo* might best be understood as less prescriptive than descriptive of the courtly customs that Giovio had been acquainted with earlier in his lifetime and at the Este court in Ferrara among them. Thus Nova:

I think that to understand the Bishop of Nocera's work one does not need to look to what would occur subsequently in the field of *imprese* and that was substantially foreign to his thought ... but rather to the intellectual circles that gravitated around the courts of Leo X, of the Farnese, and of Cosimo I, and beyond, to the small but active Italian courts of the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, to the Mantova of the Gonzaga, to the Florence of Lorenzo the Magnificent where Poliziano created an *impresa* for Piero de' Medici remembered in Giovio's dialogue, to Aragonese Naples, and above all to Este Ferrara, traditionally connected to the customs of the French aristocracy, and where Ariosto conceived the *Orlando furioso*.¹⁶⁴

In "Boiardo, Ariosto e le *imprese*," Bregoli Russo similarly affirms "the critical and interpretative validity of *imprese* in the literature of the two major chivalric poems of the Renaissance, the *Innamoramento* and the *Furioso*."¹⁶⁵ Baldassari poses the question again of how to study the "range of interferences that connect the 'modern' tradition [of the chivalric romance] and the discussions and uses, in the *trattatistica* as well as in daily life, of *imprese* and *insegne nobiliari*."¹⁶⁶ Bigi looks to the "sign" treatises and the "customs of the period," as they were described there, to "clarify the character and functions of the three species" of signs – *imprese*, *blasoni*, and *emblemi* – in Ariosto's poem.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Nova, "Dialogo dell'*imprese*: La storia editoriale e le immagini," 81 (Trans. mine): "il ruolo capitale svolto dell'Ariosto nella diffusione del genere impresistico."

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 80-81 (Trans. mine): "Penso infatti che per comprendere la opera del vescovo di Nocera non si debba guardare a ciò che originò in seguito nel campo delle imprese e che era sostanzialmente estraneo al suo pensiero ... bensì ai circoli intellettuali che gravitarono intorno alle corti di Leone X, dei Farnese e di Cosimo I, e forse più in là, alle piccolo ma fervide corti italiane del Quattrocento e del primo Cinquecento, alla Mantova dei Gonzaga, alla Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico dove il Poliziano creò un'impresa per Piero de' Medici ricordata nel dialogo del Giovio, alla Napoli aragonese, e soprattutto alla Ferrara estense, tradizionalmente legata ai costume dell'aristocrazia francese, dove l'Ariosto concepì l'*Orlando Furioso*."

¹⁶⁵ Bregoli Russo, "Boiardo, Ariosto e le *imprese*," 188-200, here 189 (Trans. mine): "Scopo del saggio è poter dimostrare la validità critica interpretative delle imprese nella lettura dei due maggiori poemi cavallereschi del Rinascimento, L'*Innamorato* e il *Furioso*."

¹⁶⁶ Baldassari, "Tradizione cavalleresca e trattatistica sulle imprese: Interferenze, uso sociale, e problemi di committenza," 61-76, here 61 (Trans. mine): "Se nell'incrocio, per la verità a tutt'oggi poco studiato, con le tendenze della trattatistica coeva il genere 'cavalleresco,' fra Quattro e Cinquecento, trova alcune delle proprie ragioni più esplicite di autonomia e di consapevole diversità rispetto ai modelli classici e autorevoli dell'epica Greco-latina, allora non marginale può divenire lo studio della gamma delle interferenze che intercorrono fra questa tradizione 'moderna' e le discussioni e l'uso, nella trattatistica come nella vita quotidiana, delle imprese e in genere delle insegne nobiliari" [If, in its intersection – still today understudied – with the tendencies of the contemporary treatise literature, the chivalric "genre" between the Quattro and Cinquecento finds some of its most explicit arguments for its autonomy and conscious diversity with respect to the classical and authoritative models of Greco-Roman epic; the study of the range of interferences between this 'modern' tradition and the discussions and uses, in the *trattatistica* as well as in daily life, of *imprese* and *insegne nobiliari* should become less marginal].

¹⁶⁷ Bigi, "Imprese, blasoni, emblemi nell'*Orlando furioso*," 9-21, here 9 (Trans. mine): "Tali figurazioni ebbero però particolare fortuna e diffusione soprattutto nel Cinque e Seicento, e agli usi di questo periodo faremo riferimento anzitutto per chiarire caratteri e funzioni delle tre specie elencate nel titolo; e quindi per esaminare la loro presenza nell'*Orlando furioso*" [These forms had a unique fortune and diffusion in the Cinque and the Seicento especially,

To be sure, other scholars have expressed skepticism about the use-value of the *trattatistica*, as a set of discussions that began in the middle of the sixteenth-century after all, for interpreting the “signs” from earlier periods.¹⁶⁸ Scholars of the emblem have shown that “there was a vigorous visual and verbal culture that was emblematic in all but name before the ‘emblem’ was officially invented.”¹⁶⁹ The fifteenth-century especially has come to be characterized as a period in which “the grammar of symbolic forms” was either not yet established or still “in the process of being intuited.”¹⁷⁰ Kristin Lippencott’s “The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-century Italian *Impresa*” argues that it is in this earlier century that *impresa*’s origins are really to be found; when new iconographic models seem to have been uniquely free to emerge, and before Giovio and his followers sought to codify their distinctions and rules. Lippencott writes,

We tend to underestimate the degree to which the middle years of the fifteenth century were a period of growth and transition. Bounded on one side by the complex iconological systems of medieval scholasticism and on the other by the iconographic handbooks of mid sixteenth-century *trattatisti* ... artists whose lives spanned the last decades of the Quattrocento and early years of the Cinquecento actually were rather unusual in that they were relatively free from the tyranny of iconographic models. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the major problems facing artists during this period was ‘how’ to depict. In most cases, medieval models seemed outmoded and truly classical models were as yet undiscovered or unrecognized.¹⁷¹

Her same article offers suggestions about why the Este court particularly seems to have played a leading role in developing innovative discourses and iconographies for “signs” during the fifteenth century.¹⁷² It also makes a hypothesis, which we pursue in the following chapters of this dissertation, about the existence of a close relationship between the visual culture and the philological practices that were cultivated by the humanists at the Ferrarese “school.”¹⁷³

and we will make reference to the uses of that period above all to clarify the character and functions of the three species listed in the title, and then to examine their presence in the *Orlando furioso*].

¹⁶⁸ These perspectives provide a useful admonition to notice the different kinds of relationships that might exist between a “literary” text and the “sign” treatises whose earliest voices we have been discussing. In the case of Torquato Tasso, for example, who was an author of such a treatise himself and who was deeply familiar with the discussions of “signs” that had proliferated since Giovio, there would be different kinds of reasons for studying the “interferences” between the “signs” treatises and the poetry.

¹⁶⁹ Manning, *The Emblem*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷¹ Lippencott, “The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-century Italian *Impresa*,” 69.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 66-71.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66-67 and 69: “It does seem, however, that in Ferrara during the decade in which Leonello ruled the state, the seeds of the earlier, exclusively philological humanism – as epitomized by the first generation of Italian humanists, Poggio, Niccoli and Guarino himself – took root. The keen interest in antique texts combined with the apparent lack of any substantial tradition in the visual arts offered the intellectual community in Ferrara the opportunity to create their own classical pictorial vocabulary. What one finds in Ferrara, remarkably less evident elsewhere in contemporary Italy, is what one might truly call ‘humanist art’; an attitude towards constructing a pictorial vocabulary which mirrored the philologists’ approach towards the creation of Latin texts – namely, through the compilation of tropes and images (*composizione* in its very broadest sense), which seemed to them to best embody the classical spirit ... But as the Renaissance matured, these ungainly approximations of the ‘antique’ were discarded and their meanings forgotten.”

At the same time, Lippencott's "The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-century Italian *Impresa*" exemplifies one of the serious consequences of applying chronological and national lenses to the study of Este-patronized culture: this culture emerges, as if inevitably in such a framework, as an intermediate or transitional one between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The "transitional" view may be more closely tied to the Cinquecento treatise tradition than Lippencott avows, after all, with its discrete historical periods contributing to a nationally-bounded ("Italian") historical narrative. In terms of explaining the "signs" of Boiardo and Ariosto's poems, moreover, it returns us to the hypothesis with which we were initially dissatisfied and which prompted the present dissertation: the hypothesis that these "signs" represent intermediaries between (medieval) *stemmi*, or coats of arms, and (Renaissance) *imprese*.

The following two chapters will pursue some different avenues for making sense of our poet's sign-languages - related to the connections between philology and image-making, in fact - which Lippencott has suggested and which, as we have seen above, is encouraged by Boiardo and Ariosto's poems themselves. We will also follow Dionisotti, his heirs in Boiardo Studies, and several historians of the Este in recent years, in appreciating the distinctiveness of the Este's humanistic culture, born from its distinctive political physiognomy, geography, and history. Where did the "grammars of signs" elaborated by Giovio, Ruscelli, and so many of their followers in the Cinquecento, come from? And might there have been a distinctive discourse, or set of discourses, around "signs" at the Este court that Boiardo and his continuator drew upon when they produced their incredible genealogies of images in their poetic masterpieces?

II

Humanist Philology and the Grammar of Signs

The introduction into Italy of these allegorical figures, of various species, is certainly to be referred to the populations of the North. It was said in the Cinquecento that Federico Barbarossa had first brought to Italy the use of familial crests [*stemmi gentilizi*]; and from the Trecento we have a treatise by the very celebrated Bartolo of Sassoferrato, *De insigniis et armis*, of which one part is exclusively historical and the other, longer, one treats various questions that could arise around the usage of *armi* between individuals of the same family and between different families. In the fifteenth century, the audaciously critical spirit of Lorenzo Valla approached this same subject, particularly by confuting the great Trecento jurist. However, it cannot concern us to dwell on these essentially juridical discussions while we are to speak of the *imprese* in the Cinquecento, as chivalric exercises of the mind.

- Abd-el-Kader Salza, “La letteratura delle *imprese* e la fortuna di esse nel 500”¹

In “La letteratura delle *imprese* e la fortuna di esse nel 500” (1903), one of the very first modern studies of the Cinquecento *imprese* treatises, Italian historian Abd-el-Kader Salza mentioned in passing a legal treatise, the *De insigniis et armis* (1355-57?) by Bartolus of Saxoferrato (1314-1357), which had come under attack by the “audaciously critical” humanist Lorenzo Valla in 1433. These documents could have been an occasion to view the subsequent *trattatistica* in an entirely different light; specifically, in relation to longstanding power struggles over the display and interpretation of images tied to identity, ownership, and authority. Salza passed up the opportunity, however, by affirming the divisions separating the Trecento from the Cinquecento, *stemmi gentilizi* from *imprese*, and the “juridical discussions” that had engaged Bartolus and Valla from the “chivalric exercises” enjoyed in the High Renaissance. This chapter returns to Salza’s original intuition to explore the connections, rather than the gaps, between these areas. What might a fourteenth-century juridical treatise on “signs” and its (mis)fortunes in the historiography of humanism tell us, after all, about the vernacular treatises that aimed to name, distinguish from one another, and regulate “signs” in the sixteenth century?

Our chapter begins as a study of Lorenzo Valla’s response to the *De insigniis et armis*. It engages with the reception history of these two texts between the history of law, heraldry, and humanism. More than the extant scholarship, our reading highlights Valla’s substantive involvement with the jurist’s subject, *insignia* and *arma*: Valla took advantage of this legal discourse on “signs,” I argue, to launch his polemic against the authority of the juridical profession, and to put forward positive propositions about the authority of philology (or of Latin grammar, as

¹ Salza, “La letteratura delle *imprese* e la fortuna di esse nel 500,” 207 (Trans. mine): “Però l’introduzione in Italia di siffatte figurazioni allegoriche, di qualsiasi specie, è certo da riferire alle popolazioni del Nord. Si diceva nel 500 che Federico Barbarossa avesse per primo portato in Italia l’uso degli stemmi gentilizi, e nel Trecento noi abbiamo un trattato *De insigniis et armis* del celeberrimo Bartolo da Sassoferrato, di cui una parte è esclusivamente storica, mentre l’altra, maggiore, tratta delle varie questioni che possono sorgere intorno all’uso delle armi tra gl’individui di una stessa famiglia e tra più famiglie diverse. Nel sec. XV quello spirito audacemente critico di Lorenzo Valla trattò lo stesso argomento, specialmente confutando il grande giurista del 300. Ma a noi non occorre trattenerci su queste discussioni essenzialmente giuridiche, perché dobbiamo parlare delle imprese nel 500, come esercizio cavalleresco d’ingegno.”

he understood it). A second section of the chapter turns to other writings of Valla's where a "philology of images," as I call it, can be seen developing alongside the philological method of reading texts for which he is now famous. A third section follows this "philology of images" at work in discussions of "signs" carried out by three of Valla's intellectual heirs: Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464), Biondo Flavio (1392-1463), and Guillaume Budé (1467-1540). Lastly, the chapter situates as continuations of this humanist tradition the treatises on *imprese* and other "signs" from the second half of the sixteenth century, which as we have seen are typically thought to have originated with Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell'imprese* in 1551.

This longer trajectory of humanist discourse around "signs" suggests that the "grammars" established by the so-called *imprese* treatises were more actively constructed than merely intuited. Their definitions and distinctions, such as we have seen from Ruscelli, between *imprese*, *insegne*, *divise*, and *armi di famiglia*, relied on technologies of textual criticism and of "picture criticism" that had been developed over generations and that were far from politically neutral.² At stake in these distinctions were distinctions between social ranks, professions, cultures, and historical periods. The type of sign that we call a "coat of arms" today, moreover, was in part an invention of this tradition; supporting and supported by the humanists' invention of the Middle Ages itself. Finally, our investigation here will help to explain why that the *trattatistica sulle imprese* came to offer such potent and poor resources, simultaneously, for interpreting the "signs" of the *Inamoramento de Orlando* and *Orlando furioso*.

i. *Lorenzo Valla and the De insigniis et armis of Bartolus of Saxoferrato*

In February of 1433, Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) addressed an acerbic letter to his friend Pier Candido Decembrio (1392-1477), the secretary and ambassador of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan (1392-1447).³ For just short of two years he had occupied the single and nearly brand new Chair of Rhetoric at the University of Pavia; however, he was about to lose his job.⁴ When the letter became known to professors and students at the University's prestigious law faculty, they interpreted it as an unacceptable affront against the most authoritative jurist in civil law and against their entire professional association by extension.⁵ Weeks later, on the occasion of a graduation ceremony for local law students in the city's cathedral, Valla would be forced to leave the University and the city of Pavia altogether under threats of violence.⁶

² For the formulation "picture criticism," see Kraus, "Picture criticism: Textual studies and the image," 236-256.

³ Regoliosi, "L'Epistola contra Bartolum del Valla," 1501-1531 is the first and only critical edition of the letter and I rely on it throughout. There is also an English translation by Cavallar, Degenring, and Kirshner, eds., *A Grammar of Signs: Bartolo da Sassoferrato's Tract on Insignia and Coats of Arms*, Appendix 5 ("Lorenzo Valla's Letter to Pier Candido Decembrio") 179-199, which is based on Valla's *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1540) 633-43 as well as Regoliosi's proofs. I use this translation throughout with occasional modifications of my own, which are noted. All translations are attributed including my own.

⁴ On the circumstances of the letter's production and reception in Pavia see Barozzi and Sabbadini, *Studi sul Panormita e sul Valla*, 58-67 and 151-156; Corbellini, "Note di vita cittadina a universitaria pavese nel Quattrocento," 238-282; Speroni, "Lorenzo Valla a Pavia," 453-67; Sottili, "Università e cultura a Pavia in età visconteo-sforzesca," 443-444 and 449; and Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 209-211.

⁵ The scandal gave the letter a public character that distinguished it from the bulk of Valla's correspondence, which he never systematically collected or published. See Cook, "Introduction," vii to Valla's *Correspondence*.

⁶ Speroni, "Lorenzo Valla a Pavia," 467 reports the most detailed contemporary account that we possess of Valla's last appearance in Pavia, a letter written by the contemporary law student Francesco Oca who was apparently a witness to one of the decisive events: "Laurentius Valla quodam suo in Bartholum dicendi genere et invectiva quam, ut

The epistle at the heart of this scandal subjected Valla to scrutiny for the rest of his life.⁷ Printed for the first time in 1516, it was included in the first edition of Valla's collected writings, the *Lucubrationes* (Lyon: Gryphius, 1532), and in the *Laurentii Vallae Opera* of 1540 (Basil: Henricus Petrus), which served as the standard edition of his writings for centuries to come.⁸ It then took on a life of its own both in the history of law and in the history of humanism. Although not the first expression of skepticism towards the legal profession in the name of humanist principles, its focused criticism and fierce rhetoric made it a kind of inaugural document of the humanist critique of the lawyers that unfolded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the most heated, arguably, of the so-called *dispute delle arti*.⁹ Earning Valla "the title of the true instigator of the polemic against the medieval interpreters," it placed him at the beginning of a long historical trajectory in which the *doctores legum* of the peninsula came to be identified as glossators (12th-13th centuries) and commentators (14th-15th centuries); and associated with a specifically "Italian" school of law (the *mos italicus iuris dicendi*) as opposed to the French school (the *mos gallicus*) where a self-consciously "humanist jurisprudence" sooner found political support and took root.¹⁰ Valla's biographers, justifiably, have remembered the epistle as one of the first indications of his consummate humanist iconoclasm, which he exercised subsequently in his critiques of Poggio Bracciolini and Bernardo Facio, his "epicurean" dialogue *On Pleasure*, his criticisms and reformulations of scholastic philosophy, and above all his clamorous denunciation of the *Donation of Constantine* as a forgery.¹¹

The 1433 epistle opens with an unabashedly negative appraisal of the discipline of civil law and its practitioners.

aiunt omnem universitatem nostram inimicissimam habet, adeo ut quasi superiore dominica in sacra aede templo vetustissimo, dum comitia laureandi cuiusdam celebarentur, ab omnibus delusus, eum in carcerem mitti iusserit Pontifex noster vel qui eius sacram sedem repraesentat dominus Daniel Bobiensis episcopus. Qua sua compositione ipse Laurentius, inquam, a rhetoricorum lectura semotus est et se apud illic praetorem tuum locavi." Bartolomeo Facio also described the event, possibly based on the eyewitness testimony of Antonio Beccadelli ('il Panormita') in his *Invective in Laurentium Vallam*, 25-27, 91; and Valla responded with his version of events in the *Antidotum in Facium*, IV.13, 20-32, and 391-394.

⁷ See Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, IV 13.21-32; *Elegantiae linguae Latinae (In tertium librum .. praefatio)*, 611; and *Correspondence* 13 (Valla to Joan Serra, 13 August 1440), 75-97.

⁸ No manuscripts of the letter are known to have survived. On its early circulation in manuscript and in print see Regoliosi, "L'Epistola contra Bartolum," 1521-1523.

⁹ On the humanist critique of jurisprudence before Valla see Manzin, *Il petrarchismo giuridico: Filosofia e logica del diritto agli inizi dell'Umanesimo*; and Lupinetti, *Francesco Petrarca e il diritto*.

¹⁰ Maffei, *Gli inizi dell'umanesimo giuridico*, 37 (Trans. mine): "Il titolo di vero iniziatore della polemica contro gli interpreti medievali." Maffei's now-classic account of the sources of humanist jurisprudence helped to lay the foundations for a historical approach to the polemic between the *umanisti* and *giuristi*, and the *mos italicus* and *mos gallicus*, which transcended these polemics' own terms. For overviews of "legal humanism" see Kelley, *History, Law and the Human Science* VI ("Civil Science in the Renaissance: Jurisprudence Italian Style") and VII ("Civil Science in the Renaissance: Jurisprudence in the French Manner"); Osler, "Legal Humanism," 101-106; and Osler, "Humanist philology and the text of Justinian's digest." For an account of some of major trends in the historiography of legal humanism in recent decades see Quaglioni, "Primi appunti per un commento al *De iure* di Leon Battista Alberti," 201-209.

¹¹ See for example Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics*, 12: "A brilliant iconoclast, [Valla] demolished the pretensions of medieval lawyers and theologians by showing that they misunderstood their own canonical texts. He destroyed the reputation of a rival humanist, Poggio Bracciolini, by writing a dialogue in which the cook and stable-boy of another humanist, Guarino da Verona, exposed Poggio's errors in Latinity. And he dismantled the papal claim to lordship over the Western empire by proving that it rested on a forged text." See also Bezner, "Lorenzo Valla," 353-354 (*Valla Criticus*).

Among those I refer to as persons skilled in law, there is almost no one who does not seem to be simply despicable and ridiculous. They are bereft of all the learning one expects to find in a free person, especially of the eloquence that was studied diligently by all the ancient jurists, and without such eloquence one cannot understand their books. They have shallow, stultifying minds and no talent, so that I feel sad for civil law, because it does not feel what it is lacking from the interpreters it has now.¹²

Valla claims that the jurists are unable to be understood or to interpret correctly the texts on which they base their authority, because they lack the necessary grammatical background and expertise. He traces the problem to the sixth century, when the “most unjust Justinian,” the Emperor of Constantinople, confused for posterity the language of the ancient Roman jurists in his attempt to systematize their writings into new codifications, the most important of which was the *Digesta*.¹³

May the gods curse you, most unjust Justinian, who abused the power of the Roman Empire to the detriment of the Romans, good and outstanding citizens. For what could be more unjust than you, if though envy you saw to the destruction of those very jurists, wishing that we (the Romans) would not eclipse Constantinople, where the seat of our empire had been transferred, even by the abundance of our books and the authority of our authors; or what could be more foolish than you, if you hoped that the future would be spared a flood of commentaries?¹⁴

Justinian’s undertaking not only mixed up the *sententiae* of the ancient *iurisconsulti*, Valla insists, but also it allowed for their increasing encrustation with commentaries, the Emperor’s “foolish” prohibition of legal commentary notwithstanding.¹⁵ In any case, he saw that their original language had been debased, forgotten, and obscured.

Since the eleventh century, universities on the Italian peninsula had attracted teachers and students who made their professions out of interpreting and commenting upon Justinian’s codifications. The social prestige and political importance of these *legum doctores* had grown exponentially in the intervening centuries.¹⁶ Among their ranks, several figures had acquired

¹² Valla, *Epistola*, I.3-5 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 179): “Horum quos dico iurisperorum nemo fere est qui non contemnendus plane ac ridiculus videatur. Ea est ineruditio in illis omnium doctrinarum que sunt libero homine digne, et presertim eloquentie, cui omnes iurisconsulti diligentissime studuerunt et sine qua ipsorum libri intelligi non possunt, ea hebetudo ingenii, ea mentis levitas atque stultitia, ut ipsius iuris civilis doleam vicem, quod pene interpretibus caret aut his quos nunc habet potius non caret.”

¹³ Justinian realized four major legislative compilations: the *Digesta vel Pandectae*; *Istitutiones sive Elementa*, *Codex repetitae praelectionis*; and *Novellae constitutiones*. Together these became known as the *Corpus iuris* (the *Corpus iuris civilis* from the 16th century), to which other bodies of legislation were progressively appended. See Kaiser, “Justinian and the Corpus Iuris Civilis,” 119-154; and Radding and Ciaralli, *The Corpus iuris civilis in the Middle Ages*.

¹⁴ Valla, *Epistola*, I.7-8 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 180): “Dii itaque tibi male faciant, Iustiniane iniustissime, qui potentia Romani imperii in Romanorum perniciem bonorumque et clarorum civium abusus es! Nam quid te vel iniustius si, per invidiam, ornatissimos illos iurisconsultos abolendos curasti, cupiens ut Costantinopolium, quo nostri imperii domicilium commigraverat, ne librorum quidem copia et scriptorum auctoritate vinceremus, vel imprudentius, si posteriora secula a commentariis temperatura speravisti?”

¹⁵ On Justinian’s prohibition of legal commentary and the subsequent problems and solutions it generated see Maclean, *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance*, 49-58.

¹⁶ On the social status of the “late medieval” jurists see Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence*; Kelley, “*Jurisconsultus Perfectus*: the Lawyer as Renaissance Man,” 84-102; and Mayali, “The Legacy of Roman Law,” 384-85. On the political contexts in which the rise of this profession took place see Menzinger, “*Consilium sapientum*: Lawmen and the Italian Popular Communes,” 40-54.

prominence particularly, whom Valla singles out for censure. Notably, the Bolognese jurist Franciscus Accursius (1185? -1263) produced standard glosses on the texts of the *Corpus iuris*, which became known as the *Glossa ordinaria* or *Magna glossa*. Among the most celebrated “commentators” schooled on his gloss were Cinus of Pistoia (1270?-1336), his foremost student Barolus of Saxoferrato (1313? -1357), and his student in turn, Baldus de Ubaldis (1327-1400). Thus Valla:

In place of Sulpitius, Scevola, Paulus, Ulpian, and the other swans barbarously snatched away by your eagle, to put it mildly, we have geese like Bartolo, Baldo, Accursio, Cino, and all the others of the same feather, who do not speak with a Roman but with a barbarous tongue, and lacking certain urbane and civil customs, display rustic and untamed savagery ... Shouldn't these dull-witted birds be scared away? not with your hands but your feet. Likewise, in order that they might not dare to go forth again to offend people, I would like to see them silenced – namely, that they might be killed, for they taste much better than they sing. However, we cannot do this, for there are those who forbid us; instead let's do what's possible, so that they will no longer try to peck at our legs – the legs of us orators I mean.¹⁷

Bartolus, the first name on Valla's list of offenders, and his treatise the *De insigniis et armis* specifically, is the target of the detailed critique that comprises the remainder of Valla's letter.

Bartolus was the preeminent name in jurisprudence in Valla's day, even though more than half a century had passed since his death in 1357.¹⁸ Bartolus' commentaries on the standard Roman legal texts, the focus of his teaching career at the University of Perugia, had become objects of commentaries themselves alongside the classics of Accursius. His legal opinions (*consilia*) had been solicited from law courts and sovereigns across Europe and were collected, studied, imitated, and forged.¹⁹ His treatises (*tractati*) had been amongst the first autonomous texts attempting to give legal frameworks within the “Roman” tradition to a set of pressing contemporary issues that lacked a coherent foundation in the Roman and Byzantine sources themselves.²⁰ Their topics included political exile (*De bannitis*), rivers and riverbeds (*De fluminibus/Tiberiadis*), the Guelf and Ghibelline factions (*De guelfis et ghibellinis*), reprisals (*De repraesaliis*), tyrants (*De tyranno*), and *insignia* and *arma* (*De insigniis et armis*), the last of which was also the shortest that Bartolus produced.

¹⁷ Valla, *Epistola* I.10-16 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 180): “In locum Suplicii, Scevole, Pauli, Ulipani aliorumque, ut leviter loquar, cyngorum, quos tua aquila sevissime interemit, successerunt anseres. Bartolus, Baldus, Accursius, Cinus ceterique id genus hominum, qui non romana lingua loquantur, sed barbara, non urbanam quandam morum civilitatem, sed agrestem rusticanamque immanitatem pre se ferant ... Non igitur he stolidae aves reperiende sunt, non manu, sed pede? Item, ut deinceps ad offendendos homines prodire non audeant, vellem etiam ut ad tacendum quoque compelli possent, hoc est ut occiderentur: que suavius comeduntur quam audiuntur. Verum hoc non possumus: sunt qui prohibeant. Id certe quod possumus faciamus, ne nostra crura, oratorum dico, appetere amplius temptent.”

¹⁸ The bibliography on Bartolus is predictably vast. On his reputation and stature there are important contributions in Segolini, ed., *Bartolo da Sassoferrato, Studi e documenti per il VI centenario*; and *Bartolo da Sassoferrato nel VII centenario della nascita: Diritto, politica, società*. See also Ascheri, “Bartolo da Sassoferrato: Introduzione a un giurista globale,” 1029-1040.

¹⁹ See Ascheri, “The Formation of the *Consilia* Collection of Bartolus of Saxoferrato and Some of his Autographs,” 188-201; and “Bartolo da Sassoferrato: il ‘suo’ tractatus consiliare e i suoi *consilia*,” 212-223. On the *consilia* as a legal genre see Ascheri, Baumgärtner, and Kirshner, eds., *Consulting in the Civil Law Tradition*; and Menzinger, “*Consilium sapientum*: Lawmen and the Italian Popular Comunes,” 44-45.

²⁰ See Rossi, “Bartolo alle origini della moderna trattatistica giuridica,” 15-44.

Valla's letter claims that his critique of the *De insigniis* was the consequence of a specific *altercatio* that had taken place in Pavia between himself and a local jurist.²¹ It describes the scene vividly, including the seemingly decisive moment when the jurist in question asserts the superiority of "even the shortest work of Bartolus" to any work of Cicero's.

Yesterday some big shot among the jurists – if anything great can exist in a science of little value – whose name I do not mention for he would be enraged at me, unless he himself is willing to come forward to admit his faults, had the effrontery to insult me by placing Bartolo before Cicero in doctrine, saying many other unthinking things and, in particular, recklessly affirming that none of the works of Marcus Tullius could be compared even to Bartolo's shortest tract, *De insigniis et armis*.²²

Valla records a tense and ironic dialogue to follow, and the reasoning that prompted him to write rather than merely speak in his defense.²³ On the grounds that the affront was a public as well as a private concern²⁴ – Valla would always deny that his letter had been a personal "invective" against Bartolus²⁵ – he describes procuring a copy of Bartolus' "shortest work" from Catone Sacco (c.1390-1463), a respected jurist in Pavia with humanist sympathies.²⁶ That very night, he claims to have penned the document that we are still reading, in order to reveal the most celebrated jurist to be ignorant and "unarmed" (he puns) precisely in his tract on *insignia* and *arma*.²⁷

²¹ Valla, *Epistola* I.18-19 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 180-181): "An vero bonus vir privata solum causa et non publica commovetur? ... Ceterum, si causa privata magis quam publica vis me excitari, accipe cur etiam mea causa debeam commoveri."

²² *Ibid.*, II.1 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 181): "Hesterno die, quidam inter iurisperitos magnus, siquid magnum potest esse in parva scientia (nomen tacebo, ne mihi succenseat, nisi prius de se voluerit confiteri), audebat mihi Bartolum Ciceroni in doctrina antepone: tum multa alia inconsiderate dicens, tum illud furiose affirmans nullum ex operis M. Tullii cum vel brevissimo Bartoli libello, quails erat ille "de insigniis et armis" comparandum."

²³ *Ibid.*, II.2 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 181): "Ego, qui nossem hominem non parve alioquin existimationis et auctoritatis, quasi colapho percussus, incensus sum; sed me repressi iramque cohibui ut alio tempore vehementius ulciscerer et quale non putaret vulnus infligerem, et ridens inquam" (Knowing that this man was otherwise held in no small esteem and authority, it was as if he had punched my face, and I started to burn. But restraining myself and suppressing my wrath, so that I might reserve my revenge for another occasion and inflict a wound that he could not even imagine, I said smilingly).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.18 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 180-181): "An vero bonus vir privata solum causa et non publica commovetur? Alios offendunt, me quoque offendunt: omnibus enim civibus iniuriam facit qui civem aliquem violat et omnes boni iniuriam accipiunt que fit unicuilibet bono" (Can an upright person be moved to action only by a private matter, not by a public one? If they offend others, they offend me as well. One who does violence to a single citizen does injury to all the citizens, and all upright persons suffer the same injury inflicted upon another upright person).

²⁵ Valla, *Aditodum in Facium*, IV.13.22 (Trans. mine): "Invectivam appellas? Quis fere nisi adversus vivos inimicosque invehitur? Nulla invectiva moribus parcit: quid ego in mores Bartoli dixi aut quod illius mihi odium" [You call it an invective? Which is launched against none but one's living enemies? No invective spares the target's habits: Did I speak about the habits of Bartolus or of anything else of his that was hateful to me?]

²⁶ It is not known what manuscript tradition of Bartolus' text Valla would have accessed from Sacco and consulted. See Regoliosi, "L'Epistola contra Bartolum," 1530. For a profile of Catone Sacco at the University of Pavia see Sottili, *Università e cultura in Pavia*, 376-383; Rosso, *Il Semideus di Catone Sacco*; and Rosso, "Catone Sacco e l'umanesimo lombardo. Notizie e documenti," 31- 90.

²⁷ Valla, *Epistola*, II.22 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 183): "Itaque pudendum mihi esse arbitrari si contra barbaram de litteris, contra imperitum de sapientia, contra iacentem et inermem stans armatusque pugnarem" [I thought it embarrassing to engage a barbarian on a matter of letters, to attack an ignorant on a matter of wisdom, and to fight an unarmed person lying on the ground while I am standing, armed]. Valla's pun returns to the classical meaning of word *arma* (weapon) via *armatus* (armed), which he compares to Bartolus' use of *arma* as a kind of "sign" along with *insignia* and *signum*. The classical meaning of *arma* is discussed below in connection with the work of Biondo Flavio.

Since the earliest “modern” studies of Valla’s epistle, this scene has been understood as a verisimilar description of an encounter with a jurist in the streets of Pavia and as “the occasion that spurred Valla to compose the *libellum*.”²⁸ In part because of this reading, Valla’s critique of the *De insigniis* has been understood as a coincidence and a pretext for Valla to voice arguments of greater import than “signs”. In her commentary to the first and only critical edition of the letter, for example, Mariangela Regoliosi wonders “how it would have been possible, with Valla’s a-scientific procedure, to construct a rule of signs [*normativa delle insegne*], which nevertheless – so it was said – was indispensable.” She concludes that “this is certainly not the problem that Valla poses”: “He intends rather to highlight the contradictions of a logical and philosophical nature inherent in the practice of law, and to show the shortcomings of the methods that were still accepted by so many.”²⁹ In “Valla e il diritto,” legal historian Giovanni Rossi affirms that Valla’s “declared objective is to demolish the presumptuous assertion of the Pavian jurist by showing the incongruences and fallacies of the reasoning behind the *De insigniis et armis*”:

Having laid that premise, the humanist was himself disinterested in the contents of the tract, which he analyzed for the sole purpose of showing the logical holes and cultural inadequacies that could only be lacking in a medieval author ... The *querelle* over the specific assertions of the *De insigniis et armis* therefore assumes its just measure as a mere pretext for reflections of a much different dimension.³⁰

From a rhetorical perspective, however, the scuffle at Pavia need not be taken at face value. Nancy Streuver points out in her study of Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum* (1353) – surely a model to Valla in 1433 – that the “specific and often informal human occasion” was a standard feature of humanist invectives. This was in part because invectives *were* often “motivated simply by steady ill-temper” and “nourished by personal encounters”; but also because “skepticism [was] not a metaphysical gesture but a productive practice” for many humanists, “in so far as its causes

²⁸ See Speroni, “Valla a Pavia,” 459 (Trans. mine): “L’occasione che spinse il Valla a comporre il libello, fu l’affermazione ‘pazzesca’ di un giurista non *parvae extimationis et autoritatis*, secondo cui ‘nessuna opera ci Cicerone poteva paragonarsi al più breve trattatello di Bartolo, quale era il *De insigniis et armis*” [The occasion that provoked Valla to compose the *libellum* was the ‘crazy’ assertion of a jurist of not inconsiderable reputation and authority (*non parvae extimationis et autoritatis*), according to whom ‘no work of Cicero could compare to the shortest work of Bartolus’, which was the *De insigniis et armis*]. For other ‘literal’ readings of the *altercatio* see Corbellini, “Note di vita cittadina a universitaria,” 244; Mancini, *Vita di Lorenzo Valla*, 78; and Regoliosi, “L’Epistola contra Bartolum,” 1509.

²⁹ Regoliosi, “L’Epistola contra Bartolum,” 1514 (Trans. mine): “Non so davvero come fosse possibile, con il procedimento ‘a-scientifico’ del Valla, costruire una normativa delle insegne, che pure – come si diceva – era indispensabile. Ma non è questo certo il problema che si pone il Valla. Egli intende piuttosto far saltare le contraddizioni insite nella giurisprudenza di impianto logico-filosofico, mostrando le angustie di quel metodo pur da molti accettato.”

³⁰ Rossi, “Valla e il diritto,” 552 and 556 (Trans. mine): “L’obiettivo dichiarato di Valla è quello di smontare la presuntuosa asserzione del giurista pavese evidenziando incongruenze e fallacie del ragionamento svolto nel *De insigniis et armis*. Posta tale premessa, l’Umanista si disinteressa del contenuto del trattato, analizzato all’unico fine di potervi riscontrare quelle pecche logiche e quelle carenze culturali che non possono mancare nello scritto di un autore medievale ... La *querelle* sulle avventate asserzioni reperibili nel *De insigniis et armis* assume allora il suo giusto valore di mero pretesto per una riflessione di ben altro spessore.” See also Frova, “La riflessione del giurista Bartolo da Sassoferrato su ‘insegne e armi,’” 223 (Trans. mine): “Al di là di motivi più puntuali di polemica, per l’umanista è l’occasione per denunciare la debolezza epistemologica della *scientia iuris* e ridicolizzarne la pretesa di farsi norma della convivenza sociale” [Beyond the specific reasons for the polemic, for the humanist it is an occasion to deounce the epistemological weaknesses of the *scientia iuris* and to ridicule its pretenses to create the norms of social life].

and duties [were] radically particular.”³¹ Valla’s squabble over “shortest work of Bartolus” should appear more deliberate than coincidental in this light, as an *occasio* curated by a talented rhetorician to frame his polemic. Why then was Bartolus’ tract on “signs” specifically the humanist’s target?

Valla’s first and foremost problem with the *De insigniis* is its “obscure” language. His criticism begins by asking for clarification on “the exact title of the book, so that I might not err, for I did not understand it clearly.” Still ‘recording’ his exchange with the jurist in Pavia, Valla quips: “I’m not totally unfamiliar with the meaning of words, but I do not understand what this title means. I do understand the term *de armis*, but not *de insigniis*.”³² This sarcastic remark gets to the heart of his objections to the legal tradition as a whole. It is the same problem that his successful textbook on Latin grammar and vocabulary, the *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*, would seek to remedy, by clarifying the meanings of and the distinctions between Latin words with carefully-chosen ancient examples.³³

Valla was already working on his Latin textbook in these early years at Pavia.³⁴ Its third preface is dedicated to the eloquence the *Digest* and explains that Valla’s admiration for the Latin language, and indeed his very conception of Latin *elegantia*, was indebted to his close reading and study of Roman Law.³⁵ He had discovered in the law books, as Cicero and Quintilian had before him, a model of Latin prose distinguished by propriety of diction (*verborum proprietas*) and economy of phrase.³⁶

But we cannot judge the eloquence of the ancient jurists from whom we don’t have anything to read. From those whom we do have at hand, however, there is nothing in my opinion that could be added or taken away, and not so much on the level of eloquence (*eloquentiae*), which indeed the material does not call for, as much as on the level of Latinity and elegance (*elegantiae*), without which every form of knowledge is blind and enslaved (*illiberalis*), in particular civil law. As Quintilian says, “all of law consists in the interpretation of terms and in the distinction between the just and the depraved.” And indeed the importance of the interpretation of words

³¹ Streuver, “Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum*: An Early Confrontation of Rhetoric and Medicine,” 669. The model holds for Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini’s epistolary critique of the jurists as well, influenced by Valla’s in turn, in which an anonymous jurist appears to provoke him to write. See Piccolomini, *Epistola CXI* (“Poesim laudat et iuris scientiae praefert”) in *Opera quae extant omnia*, 500. On the invectives as a tradition see Ricci, “La tradizione dell’invettiva tra il Medioevo e l’Umanesimo,” 405-15.

³² Valla, *Epistola*, II.7-9: (Trans. Cavallar et al., 181-2): “Verum dic, rogo iterum, quis titulus libri, ne forte errem: non plane intellexi” ... Ego, qui non penitus abhorreo ab intelligentia verborum, quid hoc est ‘de insigniis’ non intelligo, ‘de armis’ intelligo” [But, I said, please tell me once again the exact title of the book, so that I might not err, for I did not understand it clearly ... I’m not totally unfamiliar with the meaning of words, but I do not understand what this title means. I do understand the term *de armis*, but not *de insigniis*].

³³ Regoliosi, “L’Epistola contra Bartolum,” 1507-8. On the *Elegantiae* as a “battle-standard” in the movement for the reform of Latin across Europe see Bowersock, “Introduction” to Valla’s *On the Donation of Constantine*.

³⁴ A draft of the *Elegantiae* was ready by 1434 and the *editio princeps* in 1449. See Regoliosi, *Nel cantiere del Valla. Elaborazione e montaggio delle Elegantie*.

³⁵ Rossi, “Valla e il diritto,” 507-599.

³⁶ See Mantovani, “L’elogio dei giuristi romani nel proemio al III libro delle *Elegantie*,” 115-129, 212; and Valla’s notes to the *Istituto oratoria* 9.2.98 in his *Le Postille all’Istituto oratoria di Quintiliano*, 191: “Eleganter’ est ‘proprie’, ‘vere’ ac ‘recte’, ut in iure civili adeo frequenter, ut pene sola hac voce in approbandis aliorum sententiis iurisconsulti utatur.”

is attested above all by the books themselves of the ancient jurists, who to this end especially dedicated their efforts.³⁷

He had come to believe that Justinian's *Digest* deserved the highest praise, despite its imperfections, because it had preserved the ancient jurists' writings and thereby the Latin language, which alone could be the instrument of a revived and universal scientific community.

Civil law endured as the only still inviolate and intact science, almost like the Tarpean rock in the middle of the devastated city. The Goths, more than the Gauls, under the pretense of friendship, tried, and continue to try, to pollute and overturn this too ... I therefore believe that we owe these books as much as we owe the men who defended the Capitoline from the arms and assaults of the Gauls (*ab armis Gallorum atque insidiis*), because by these books the city could not only be destroyed, but could also be fully reconstituted (*restitui*). It was indeed thanks to daily reading of the *Digest* that the Roman language has always, at least in part, remained intact, honored, and will soon be recovered in all its dignity and reach.³⁸

This shows how the letter of 1433 developed the *pars destruens* of Valla's positive view of Roman law; by denouncing the false and corrupted lawgivers ("legulei") who, in his view, had failed to protect the ancient legal writings from loss, perversion, and decay.³⁹

Valla's problem with Bartolus' title is specifically its grammatical error (*insigniis* for *insignibus*) and circumlocution (*armiis et insigniis*): "When you want to explain the meaning of one word, you fail to explain the word itself and obscure a second."⁴⁰ As he sarcastically points out, Bartolus' words fail to clearly divulge what the *materia* of his tract will be: "This must be a new and unexplored subject, one that has a new title." The jurist's purported reply in Pavia is that "it is a new subject, discovered and fully treated by Bartolo, but it is not an obscure and new title."⁴¹ From Valla's point of view, this is simply paradoxical and misguided reasoning. How could a newly discovered subject be given an old title? The question of the proper use and adaptation of

³⁷ Valla, *Elegantiae*, "In terrium librum ... praefatio," 290 (Trans. mine): "Et prisca illi quidem Iurisconsulti quales quantique in eloquendo fuerint, iudicare non possumus, quippe quorum nihil legimus, his autem, qui inter manus versantur, nihil est, mea sententia, quod addi adimive posse videatur, non tam eloquentiae, quam quidem materia illa non magnopere patitur, quam latinitatis, atque elegantiae; sine qua caeca omnis doctrina est et illiberalis, praesertim in iure civili. Ut enim Quintilianus inquit, 'Omne ius aut in verborum interpretatione positum est, aut in aequi praeque discrimine.' Et quantum momenti in verborum interpretatione sit, ipsi iurisconsultorum libri maxime testantur, in hac re praecipue laborantes."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 292-93 (Trans. mine): "Una superat iuris civilis scientia adhuc inviolata et sancta, et quas tarpeia arx urbe direpta. Hanc etiam isti Gothi, non Galli, per speciem amicitiae polluere atque evertere tentaverunt evertereque pergunt ... Tantum igitur deberi puto huius facultatis libris quantum illis olim qui Capitolium ab armis Gallorum atque insidiis defenderunt; per quos factum est ut non modo tota urbs non amitteretur, verum etiam ut tota restitui posset. Ita per quotidianam lectionem Digestorum, et semper aliqua ex parte incolumis atque in honore fuit lingua Romana, et brevi suam dignitatem atque amplitudinem recuperabit."

³⁹ Valla, *Epistola*, II.28-29 (Trans. Cavallar et alt. 183): "Nam, praeter illud quod in communi quadam intelligentia est situm et leges meminerunt, quod signa non fiant ad aliorum iniuriam, cetera omnia in libello illo supervacua sunt et odiose ac perverse diligentie plenissima; qualia fere sunt omnia nostrorum iurisperitorum volumina, non a viris, ita enim grandia sunt et vasta, sed ab asinis portanda" (Beyond what pertains to a certain common understanding, and the laws mention, namely, that signs should not be made to injure others; the rest of what is said in that booklet is useless and full of despicable and perverse attention to details, just as are all the tomes of our jurists, which are so oversized that they have to be carried not by men but by asses).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II.10 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 182): "Incertior sum quam dudum. Cum vis declarare unum verbum, nec ipsum declaras et alterum obscuras."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II.8 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 181-182): "Nova et non pervagata debet esse materia que novum titulum habet ... Et vere nova materia est et a Bartolo inventa et accuratissime tractata, sed non est obscurus et novus titulus."

the Latin language for new phenomena in modern times is at stake in this exchange. Could an ancient word (such as *insignia*) be applied to a new subject? Also at stake is the question of the proper relationship between *verba* and *res*, words and their referents. Did the two words in Bartolus' title represent the same thing or different things? If they represented the same thing, the use of both words was superfluous and inelegant from Valla's perspective. If they represented different things, he reasoned, their distinction should be made clear and apparent within. These then were some of the specific questions with which Valla pressed the *De insigniis*: Is its subject new or old? Are *insignia* the same thing as *arma*? What is Bartolus' subject, after all?

The last of these questions has still not been answered today, ironically, as the two most recent editors and translators of the *De insigniis et armis* have openly quarreled about what constitutes the subject. In 1994, the legal historians Osvaldo Cavallar, Susanne Degenring, and Julius Kirshner published a new edition, translation, and commentary of the text as *A Grammar of Signs: Bartolo da Sassoferrato's Tract on Insignia and Coats of Arms*. This presents what had been previously interpreted as a "medieval heraldry treatise" as a forward-looking legal *tractatus* situated squarely within the specialized discourse of civil law in which Bartolus certainly operated. In their view, the tract was an attempt to "set forth the principles ... governing the assumption, protection, and transmission of signs ranging from coats of arms to trademarks"; It had simply been co-opted and misinterpreted by "heraldists" since shortly after the great jurist's death.⁴² In 1998, the medievalist and heraldry scholar Mario Cignoni published another edition and commentary questioning this position and reaffirming the previously-held status of the *De insigniis* as "the first real European heraldry treatise."⁴³ A critical response to Cignoni's edition by Cavallar and Kirshner, with a renewed defense of their edition and its claims, appeared subsequently in the legal journal *Ius Commune: Zeitschrift für Europäische Rechtsgeschichte*.⁴⁴

The recent quarrel had to do with the disciplinary backgrounds and competencies that the editing and interpretation of the *De insigniis et armis* primarily required, the history of law or the history of "medieval heraldry."⁴⁵ There were also textual problems about which the two parties disagreed.⁴⁶ The legal historians argued that the text should be divided into two halves and that only the first half was in fact authored by the Trecento jurist, dealing with a series of properly legal questions of the use and regulation of "signs": Who is allowed to bear a "sign"? May two parties bear the same one? What is the value of a "sign" conferred by a prince compared to one that is not? How are "signs" transmitted from one individual or corporation to another? Can illegitimate

⁴² Cavallar et al., "Introduction," 1-8.

⁴³ Cignoni, *De insigniis et armis* ("Introduzione"), 14: "il primo vero e proprio trattato di araldica europea."

⁴⁴ Cavallar and Kirshner, "'Ne ultra scarpas': Un cultore d'araldica fuorilegge," 297-311.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 299: (Trans. mine): "In reazione alla nostra edizione e a dispetto della nostra insistenza sul fatto che il trattato è un'opera giuridica che, per la sua edizione, richiede abilità filologiche e, per la sua intelligenza, familiarità con il sistema interpretativo del diritto comune, ha proposto una sua edizione del trattato ... Stando a quanto Cignoni scrive, l'ideoneità ad una tale impresa gli deriva dalla convinzione 'che soltanto uno storico dell'araldica medievale può affrontare con la metodologia necessaria un testo come questo' [In reaction to our edition and against our insistence on the fact that the treatise is a juridical text that required, for its edition, philological abilities and, for its understanding, familiarity with the interpretative system of ius commune, he proposed his own edition of the text ... According to what Cignoni writes, the necessity of such an enterprise derives from his conviction that 'only a historian of medieval heraldry can affront a text such as this one with the necessary methodology']".

⁴⁶ Textual instabilities and problems of attribution are characteristic of Bartolus' writings as a result of their popularity and authority. See Ascheri, "Bartolo globale," 31-33.

children bear signs?⁴⁷ The tract's second half deals with the execution and display of "signs," around such questions as the proper depiction of animal figures, the arrangement of these figures on their material supports, the relative value and meanings of colors, and the problems presented by certain materials and spaces for the display of signs. The legal historians argued that these topics were alien to juridical discourse and concluded that this part of the tract was unlikely to have been written by Bartolus at all.⁴⁸ For Cignoni, in contrast, Bartolo was responsible for the whole treatise and is therefore to be considered "the first and principle theoretician of the legal, aesthetic, and technical aspects of heraldry":

The contemporary heraldist could argue that the so-called 'laws of heraldry' were theorized, possibly for the first time, precisely in Bartolus' treatise. These 'laws' are the norms of blason which regulate the technical composition of the figures and colors on coats of arms (*stemmi*) and which thus render the European medieval heraldic system coherent and unique.⁴⁹

The two positions have a considerable bearing on the interpretation of Valla's critique. While Bartolus' "heraldry treatise" is considered Valla's target, Valla seems to be an iconoclast of the heraldic tradition from a humanist perspective.⁵⁰ For the legal historians, in contrast, "the target of his entire assault seems to be the second part alone, which the jurist did not in their view compose."⁵¹ What stands out for them is the "failure of Valla's philological skills to detect interpolations"; and the fact that "Valla's attack, rather than demolishing the *De insigniis*," ironically "contributed more than anything else to perpetuating the belief that Bartolo authored the entire tract."⁵² This reading has been supported by several historians of law and of heraldry in recent years, and has allowed for Bartolus' tract to be rehabilitated and revalorized in despite of the humanist's pointed criticisms. According to Giovanni Rossi, for example,

[It is] a paradoxical consequence that Valla, who was so proud of his philological preparation (the same that would allow him to appreciate the fragments of the *Pandects*, and that will put him in a position to demonstrate with impeccable arguments the falsity of the so-called "Donation" of Constantine), seems to have fallen into a non-trivial error (even in good and numerous company) in having taken for *bartoliano* that which was not at all; and to have lashed out with ardor and spite against a false target (certainly motivated by the

⁴⁷ Bartolus' authorship of two discrete passages in the first half of the treatise have been disputed: the first concerning his receipt of an *insignia vel arma* from Emperor Charles IV; and the second implying his knowledge of Hebrew. See Cavallar et al., *A Grammar of Signs*, 18-29.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 39-40: "The second part, which is unremittingly alien to juridical discourse and reads as a conventional medieval treatise on optics and colors, if not as a manual for painters, explains the tract's appeal to the heralds."

⁴⁹ Cignoni, *De insigniis et armis*, 18 (Trans. mine): "il primo e il principale teorico dell'aspetto legale, estetico e tecnico dell'araldica"; "L'araldista odierno potrà constatare che le cosiddette 'leggi dell'araldica' sono state, forse per la prima volta, terrorizzate proprio in questo trattato di Bartolo. Tali 'leggi' sono quelle norme del blasone che regolano la tecnica della composizione delle figure e degli smalti negli stemmi e che rendono così unico e unitario il sistema araldico medievale europeo."

⁵⁰ See for example Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 114-116: "[I]n the course of a savage attack on the Trecento academic lawyer Bartolus of Saxoferrato, Valla lays about the late medieval hierarchy and symbolism of colours – traces of which are still very clear in Alberti – mainly by appealing to common experience." Baxandall's reading is discussed in more detail further down in this section.

⁵¹ Cavallar et al., *A Grammar of Signs*, 86-87.

⁵² Ibid., 87.

shamless provocation of the Pavian jurist, out of which his reading of the *De insigniis et armis* was born).⁵³

It has not been acknowledged by either side how substantially Valla did engage with the tract, however, and not only with selective arguments from its second half, but indeed with the whole; its title, subject, and the “obscurity” of speech that was a necessary corollary of its participation in the *ius commune* tradition.

One way to gauge the “obscurity” of speech that Valla complains about is to track the interventions that both modern editors of the *De insigniis* have made in their translations of the original Latin, evidently to clarify its meaning. The legal historians translate *arma* as “coat of arms”; leave *insignia* as is; and render *signum* as “trademark,” “mark,” “watermark,” “sign,” and “insignia” depending on the context in Bartolus’ tract.⁵⁴ Cignoni specifies that “with the ancient term *arma* ... the heraldic shield is intended”; and introduces “some technical terms” to clarify Bartolus’ meaning throughout his Italian translation further. He renders “*insignia artificii*” as “marchi di una certa professione” in one passage; “*insignis quibus utuntur notarii*” as “i contrassegni di notai”; and “*signa*” as “filigrana” in others.⁵⁵

In fact, the Latin texts provided by both editors show that the words *insignia*, *arma*, and *signa* designate a variety of images and objects there without clearly distinguishing between them, precisely as Valla complains. In the first paragraph, the word *insignia* alone designates the “signs” proper to certain “ranks or offices”:

I say that some *insignia* are proper to a rank or office and that anyone may bear these if he holds that rank or office, as for example the *insignia* of proconsuls or legates.⁵⁶

Throughout the next paragraphs, both *insignia* and *arma* are used seemingly without distinction to name the “signs” of kings, princes, and other lords, as well as those of private persons either granted by a superior or assumed at will.

Some *insignia* are proper to anyone of a particular rank, as we see for example that any king, prince, or other potentate has his own *arma* and *insignia*, and it is permitted to no one else to bestow them or to depict them on their own belongings.

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⁵³ Rossi, “Sull orme di Lorenzo Valla: una rilettura del trattato *De insigniis et armis*,” 95 (Trans. mine): “Con la paradossale conseguenza che Valla, così fiero della sua profonda preparazione filologica (quella stessa che gli permetterà di apprezzare i frammenti raccolti nelle *Pandette* e che lo metterà in grado di dimostrare con argomenti impeccabili la falsità della c.d. “Donazione” di Costantino), pare proprio essere incorso nell’errore non veniale (pur se in ottima e numerosa compagnia) di aver preso per bartoliano ciò che non lo era affatto e di essersi scagliato con ardore e livore (certo motivato dalla sfacciata provocazione del giurista pavese da cui nasce la sua lettura del *De insigniis et armis*) contro un falso bersaglio.”

⁵⁴ Cavallar et alt., *A Grammar of Signs* (Appendix 2: Translation. Bartolo da Sassoferrato, On Insignia and Coats of Arms), 145-157.

⁵⁵ See Cignoni, *De insigniis et armis* (Insegne e Armi), 46-48: “[con] l’antico termine *arma* ... si intende lo scudo araldico”; “alcuni termini tecnici.”

⁵⁶ Bartolus, *De insigniis*, 1 (Trans. mine): “Circa primum dico, quod quedam sunt insignia dignitatis vel officii, que potest portare quilibet habens illam dignitatem vel officium, ut insignia proconsularia et legatorum, ut l. i., ff. *de officio proconsulis et legati* (Dig.1.16.1), et l. *sanctum, de rerum divisione* (Dig.1.8.8.), sicut de facto videmus hodie insignia episcoporum, et ista potest portare quilibet habens illam dignitatem, ut dictis legibus. Aliis autem portare non licet, immo portans incurrit crimen falsi, ut ff. *de [lege Cornelia de] falsis, l. eos, § finali* (Dig.48.10.27.2). Et idem puto quod illi, qui portant insignia doctoratus cum non sint doctores, teneantur illa pena.”

⁵⁷ *De insigniis*, 2 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 145): “Quedam sunt insignia in modum singularis dignitatis, ut videmus quilibet rex, quilibet princeps et ceteri potentiores habent arma et sua insignia, et ista nemini alteri licet deferre vel sub

Some *insignia* or *arma* belong to private persons, either nobles or commoners, and some of these have *arma* and *insignia* which they bear by the grant of an emperor or other lord.⁵⁸

Some assume *arma* or *insignia* on their own initiative, and we should consider whether they are permitted to do it.⁵⁹

Both words describe images transmitted through a family line.

I ask how such *arma* or *insignia* pass on to successors. I reply that some belong to a house or agnation and these pass on to all agnates, whether or not they are heirs of the father or his ancestors.⁶⁰

A third term, *signum*, appears in some passages to encompass *insignia* and *arma* both;⁶¹ while in other passages it designates a kind of image seemingly distinct from the other two:

Sometimes it may happen that the use of the same *arma* or *insignia* may impinge on the many members of the community. Let us provide an example of other signs (*aliis signis*) than those which are borne *pro armis*. Suppose that there is a very skilled craftsman who places certain *signa* on his swords and on the products he makes, by which one recognizes that those products are made by that master.⁶²

The word *arma* does not seem to correspond here to the English *coat of arms*, the Italian *stemma* or *arma*, or the German *Wappen*, as we understand these words today and as Bartolus' modern editors have claimed. Whether the tract was primarily about "heraldic" or about other "signs" may be a moot point if clear distinctions between these words did not exist before Valla's letter and its humanistic reception.

Bartolus of Saxoferrato was not as "obscure" as Valla would have his readers believe, however; nor should the "rehabilitation" that the *De insigniis* has partially enjoyed in recent years be retracted. In Valla's letter, the anonymous Pavian jurist tries to justify the vocabulary of his predecessor by explaining that jurists' as a professional group cared for meanings over words: "*Non est nobis cura de verbis, sed de sententiis*," he protests.⁶³ A better explanation of Bartolus'

rebus suis depingere." Here and throughout, I have retained Bartolus word *arma* in the English translations where Cavallar and his colleagues have rendered it "coat of arms".

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 145): "Quedam sunt insignia seu arma privatorum hominum nobelium et popularium; de istis quidam reperiuntur, qui habent arma vel insignia que portant ex concessione imperatoris vel alterius domini."

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 145): "Quidam tamen arma seu insignia sua propria auctoritate assumunt sibi, et istis an liceat videndum est."

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10 (Trans. Cavallar et alt.): "Quero qualiter ista arma seu insignia transeant ad successors? Respondeo: quondam sunt unius domus seu agnationis, et ista transeunt ad omnes de illa agnatione descendentes, sive sint heredes patris sive avi, sive non, ar. ff. *de religiosis*, l. *familiaria*, et l. *sequente*." I have removed an additional insertion of the word "coat of arms" in the second sentence here because it is not warranted by the translators' own Latin edition.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 148): "Quero qualiter ista arma seu insignia transeat ad successores? ... Ex hoc posset queri, an bastardi vel spurii possunt uti illis signis" [I ask how such *arma* or *insignia* pass on to successors ... And it is possible to ask whether bastards or illegitimate children can use these signs].

⁶² Ibid., (7) 111 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 147): "Quandoque potest esse quod multorum de populo interest. Ponamus exemplum in aliis signis quam in his que portantur pro armis. Pone quondam fabrum doctissimum, qui in gladiis et aliis suis operibus facit certa signa, ex quibus opus huius magistri esse dignoscitur."

⁶³ Valla, *Epistola*, II.18 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 182): "Non est nobis cura de verbis, sed de sententiis, non de frondibus arborum, sed de pomis et fructibus, quemadmodum vobis oratoribus, qui verba aucupamini, vim atque utilitatem sententiarum omittitis et semper in ridiculis et rebus inanibus occupati estis, ut nunc tu facis, qui, cum non ignores quid significant 'insignia', tamen a me queris et, cum nihil habeas quod opponas solidum et virile, ad ineptias te

“obscurity” has come from legal histories showing how linguistic flexibility was necessary in the *ius commune* tradition to creatively extend the written word of the ancient law books to the legal problems of their own time.⁶⁴ If the goal of the *De insigniis et armis* was to provide a template for regulating “signs” in the Trecento, with reference to the Roman and Byzantine legal sources that were the foundation of Bartolus’ authority as a doctor of law, then necessarily distinctions between words, their referents, and their “proper” historical contexts would be blurred.

Historical distinctions are obscured in very first paragraph of the tract, for example, where Bartolus makes the case that certain *insignia* are exclusive to certain offices or ranks.

I say that some *insignia* are proper to a rank or office and that anyone may bear these if he holds that rank or office, as for example the *insignia* of proconsuls or legates, as in the law *de officio proconsulis et legati* and the law *sanctum, de rerum divisione*, just as we can indeed see today with the *insignia* of bishops. And anyone who has the rank can bear the *insignia*, as the laws say. Others are not permitted to bear them and if someone who is not entitled to bears them he incurs the charge of fraud, as in the law *de falsis*. Likewise I think that those who bear the *insignia* of the *doctores* when they are not *doctores* are liable to that penalty.⁶⁵

Three paragraphs are referenced here from the *Digest*: A paragraph on the office of proconsuls and legates (*De officio proconsulis et legati*) in which it is stated that *proconsularia insignia* could be worn by the officer even where his authority did not reach;⁶⁶ a paragraph (*De divisione rerum et qualitate*) in which the definition of the word *sanctum* recalls the herbs (*sagmina*) that were carried by Roman ambassadors (*legati*) as a sign of their inviolability in archaic times;⁶⁷ and a paragraph on forgery (*De falsis*) which includes illicitly borne *insignia* in a longer list of crimes subject to

convertis, quasi nihil sit tibi aliud quid agas” [It is not the task of the jurists to be concerned with words but with meanings, not with the foliage of trees but with their fruits, not like you orators who chase words and neglect the power and utility of meanings and are always occupied with ridiculous and inane matters, just as you are now, when you know full well the meaning of *insignia* but still ask me about it. Since you don’t have substantial and vigorous arguments to put forth, you resort to foolish trivialities as if you had no other resources].

⁶⁴ See Kelley, *History, Law and the Human Sciences*, II (“Clio and the Lawyers: Historical Consciousness in the Medieval Lawyers”); and Mayali, “The Legacy of Roman Law,” 376-366.

⁶⁵ Bartolus, *De insigniis* 1 (Trans. mine): “Circa primum dico, quod quedam sunt insignia dignitatis vel officii, que potest portare quilibet habens illam dignitatem vel officium, ut insignia proconsularia et legatorum, ut l.i., ff. de officio proconsulis et legati (Dig. 1.16.1), et l. sanctum, de rerum divisione (Dig. 1.8.8.), sicut de facto videmus hodie insignia episcoporum, et ista potest portare quilibet habens illam dignitatem, ut dictis legibus. Aliis autem portare non licet, immo portans incurrit crimen falsi, ut ff. de [lege Cornelia de] falsis, l. eos, § finali (Dig.48.10.27.2). Et idem puto quod illi, qui portant insignia doctoratus cum non sint doctores, teneantur illa pena.” Bartolus used short-hand citations to his legal sources, which have been traced in full by his modern editors to their paragraph references in modern editions the *Digest* and so forth for Bartolus’ other sources. Neither Cavallar et al. or Cigoni however include Bartolus’ legal citations in their translations of the *De insigniis et armis*. This unexpected especially in the former edition given its forceful argument for the tract’s legal status. I have thus modified their translations here so as to include Bartolus’ legal references in the English. For the text and translation of the *Digest*, I am relying on the standard modern edition of Mommsen, Kreuger and Watson eds., *The Digest of Justinian*.

⁶⁶ *Digest* I.xvi,1 (Trans. Watson): “Proconsul ubique quidem proconsularia insignia habet statim atque urbem egressus est: potestatem autem non exercet nisi in ea provincia sola, quae ei decreta est” [The Proconsul bears everywhere his proconsular insignia wherever he is from the moment he leaves the city. But he only exercises power in that one province which has been assigned to him].

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I.viii, 8 (Trans. Watson): “Sanctum est, quod ab iniuria hominum defensum atque munitum est. Sanctum autem dictum est a sagminibus: sunt autem sagnima quaeam herbae, quas legati populi Romani ferre solent, ne quis eos violaret, sicut legati Graecorum ferunt ea quae vocantur crycia” [This term (*sanctum*) derives from the word *sagmina*. *Sagmina* are certain herbs which legates of the people of Rome customarily carry to ward off outrages, just as ambassadors of the Greeks carry the things which are called *cerycia*].

criminal punishment.⁶⁸ Each of these ancient legal opinions touch on *insignia* of some sort, in the contexts in which they were produced; and Bartolus brings them together to apply these opinions to the “signs” of his own society, like those worn by bishops and *doctores* as he says.

The treatise blurs semantic distinctions, in addition to historical ones, in its application of legal opinions or ordinances about “signs” with various names in antiquity to those that Bartolus calls *insignia*, *arma*, and/or *signa* in the present. For example, the second paragraph argues that individuals cannot bestow the *arma* and *insignia* of kings, princes, and lords onto others or on their own belongings:

Some *insignia* are proper to anyone of a particular rank – for example, any king, prince, or other potentate has his own *arma* and *insignia*, and it is permitted to no one else to bestow them or to depict them on their own belongings as in the Code *de his qui potentiorum nomine*.⁶⁹

This sentence references an ordinance from Justinian’s *Codex* which prohibits the hanging of *titulos potentium* - “placards” displaying the names of powerful citizens - on private property for the property’s protection.⁷⁰ The argument asks us to apply a law about *titulos potentium* to a law about *insignia* and *arma*. A similar example can be found further down, when the jurist argues that the duplication or multiplication of a given *insignia* or *arma* should be prohibited should it cause harm to the life, property or honor of a member of the community. Here he references a Justinian ordinance prohibiting the sign of the cross from being used in contempt of the Christian faith.⁷¹

Other parts of the tract rely on fragments of ancient law that are not about “signs” at all, blurring distinctions thereby not only between words, but also between things. On the basis of Bartolo’s suggestion that *insignia* and *arma* are like names, whose primary purpose is identification, he calls upon ancient legislation on names and naming to argue that more than one person could display the same or similar “signs,” just as two people could share the same name.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid., XLVIII, X, xxvii, 2 (Trans. Watson): “Qui se pro milite gessit vel illicitis insignibus usus est vel falso diplomate vias commeavit, pro admissi qualitate gravissime puniendus est” [A person who has acted as if he were a soldier, or used illegal marks of rank, or travelled the roads with a forged passport, is to be punished very severely according to the degree of his crime].

⁶⁹ Bartolus, *De insigniis* 2 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 145): “Quedam sunt insignia in modum singularis dignitatis, ut videmus quilibet rex, princeps et ceteri potentiores habent arma et sua insigna, et ista nemini alteri licet deferre vel sub rebus suis depingere, ut C. *de his qui potentiorum nomine*” [Some insignia are proper to anyone of a particular rank – for example, any king, prince, or other potentate has his own arma and insignia, and it is permitted to no one else to bestow them or to depict them on their own belongings as in Codex. *de his qui potentiorum nomine*].

⁷⁰ *Codex* II, XV (XIV) (Trans. Blume): “*De His Qui Potentiorum Nomine Titulos Praediis Affigunt*. Plurimos iniustarum desperatione causarum potentium titulos et clarissimae privilegia dignitatis his, a quibus in ius vocantur, opponere. At ne in fraudem legum adversariorumque terrorem in nominibus abutantur et titulis, qui huiusmodi dolo scientes connivent, afficiendi sunt publicae sententiae nota” [*Concerning those who put placards on their landed estates in names of powerful men*. Many defendants, in despair of the righteousness of their causes, oppose the placards of influential men and the privileges of men of honorable rank to those by whom they are used. And lest the misuse of these names and placards be in fraud of the laws and to the terror of adversaries, persons of influence who knowingly connive such fraud shall be by public sentence branded with infamy]. I have used the translation of Justinian’s Code by Justice Fred H. Blume, published online at <http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/>. As I was completing this chapter, a new annotated translation with parallel Latin and Greek text was published under Cambridge University Press and edited by Bruce W. Frier.

⁷¹ *Codex* I, viii (Trans. Blume): “*Nemini Licere Signum Salvatoris*” [That noone shall be permitted to engrave or paint the sign of the savior christ on stone or marble].

⁷² *Digest* XXVI, ii, 30 (Trans. Watson): “*Duo sint Titii, pater et filius, datus est tutor Titus, nec apparet du quo sensit testator. Quaero quid sit iuris* (There are two men called Titius, father and son; Titius is appointed tutor, and it is not clear of whom the testator was thinking. I ask: What is the legal position)?

This comparison suggests the further argument that “signs” are public goods - as names are - and allows Bartolus to apply legal opinions dealing with public property to contemporary “signs,” whereby he reinforces his case that the “same” (apparent) *insignia* and *arma* could be legitimately used by multiple users.⁷³ Ancient legislation on the division of rivers and other natural resources helps him further down to determine the limits of sharing “signs” when the individual or public welfare may be at risk.⁷⁴ Legislation on wills and estates helps him to establish guidelines for the transmission and/or inheritance of “signs” within collective bodies or institutions, such as businesses.⁷⁵ In summary, even the first half of the *De insigniis et armis* that is confidently attributed to Bartolus today falls short of Valla’s linguistic ideal of direct and precise correspondences between words and things. Valla, for his part, refuses to acknowledge the (valid) reasons why it should do so. Since the jurist’s linguistic operations do not seem to have been uncommon compared with other legal literature of its time, meanwhile, the question remains open of what drew Valla’s attention to this tract specifically in 1433.

Another avenue that can be explored to explain Valla’s interest in the *De insigniis* is the tract’s subject, if the latter may be broadly defined as images or “signs” marking identity, ownership, and authority in ancient and/or modern societies. Notably, the treatise twice mentions the images that jurists themselves used as markers of their professional office and dignity.⁷⁶ The first paragraph mentions the *insignia* of the *doctores legum* in such a way that links their office to ancient, ecclesiastical, and feudal dignitary systems.⁷⁷ A later paragraph mentions a specific *insignia* or *arma* that Bartolus received from the Emperor Charles IV as his own.

Some *insignia* or *arma* belong to private persons, either nobles or commoners, and some of these have *arma* and *insignia* which they bear by the grant of an emperor or other lord. I have seen the Serene Prince Charles IV, Emperor of the Romans and King of Bohemia, grant many *insignia* and *arma*. Among the concessions, the prince gave me his counselor and my agnates a red lion with two tails on a golden field (*leonem rubeum cum caudis duabus in campo aureo*).⁷⁸

⁷³ Ibid., XIII, vi, 5.15 (Trans. Watson): “Usum autem balinei quidem vel porticus vel campi uniuscuiusque in solidum esse (neque enim minus me uti, quod et alius uteretur)” (On the other hand, the use of a bath, a colonnade, or a square is entire to each several person (for the use by others does not mean I use it less)).

⁷⁴ Ibid., XXXXIII.xiii, 6 (Trans. Watson): “Sed nec hoc quibusdam placet: neque enim ripae cum incommodo accolentium muniendae sunt” (But others do not accept this, as not even banks are to be built up at the cost of inconvenience to those living around).

⁷⁵ Ibid., XXII.iv, 6 (Trans. Watson): “Si de tabulis testamenti deponendis agatur et dubitetur, cui eas deponi oportet, semper seniore iuniori et amplioris honoris inferiori et marem feminae it ingenium libertino praeferemus” (Where the issue is with whom a will should be deposited, we always prefer the elder to the younger, the heither in rank to the lower, male to female, and freeborn to slave born.)

⁷⁶ There is a growing body of research on the “signs” of the juridical profession in late-medieval and early modern Italy. See for example Salvemini, *La dignità cavalleresca*, 376-382; Martines, “The Composition of *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence*,” 3-6; Gado, *Stemmi del Museo nazionale del Bargello*, x-liii; Sorbelli, *Le iscrizioni e gli stemmi dell’Archiginnasio*; Mclean, “Don’t screw with the law: Visual and Spatial Defenses against Judicial and Political Corruption in Communal Italy,” 179-200; and Wolff, “Visualizzazioni giuridiche in pietra e su pergamena. Gli stemmi dei podestà di Firenze,” 207-220.

⁷⁷ Bartolus, *De insigniis*, 1 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 145): “I say that some insignia are proper to a rank or office and that anyone may bear them if he holds that rank or office, as for example the insignia or proconsuls or legates, or, as we can see today, the insignia of bishops. And anyone who has that rank can bear these insignia. This is not permitted to others, and if someone who is not entitled to them bears them he incurs the charge of fraud. And so I think that those who bear the insignia of the doctor of law when they are not doctors are liable to that penalty.”

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3 (Trans. Cavallar et alt.): “Quaedam sunt insignia seu arma privatorum hominum seu nobilium vel popularium; de istis quidam reperiuntur, qui habent insignia vel arma, quae portant ex concessione Imperatoris vel

These passages appear particularly relevant from the perspective of research on law and aesthetics, which has shown how legal systems regularly produce “visiocracies” in order “to impress upon the community the majesty of the law, law’s history, autonomy, and continuity.”⁷⁹ Images for this reason have presented crucial openings for the enactment of legal critique; and legal revolutions in turn are often accompanied by “modifications of the regime of images.”⁸⁰ Could Valla not have used Bartolus’ law of images precisely because he recognized how images made manifest authority of different kinds, including the legal authority he was calling into question?

A conspicuous strategy of his epistle is to characterize Bartolus and his peers as “barbarians” and animals.⁸¹ This leitmotif has been attributed to two of Valla’s classical sources especially: Cicero’s *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*, in which the orator compares his *accusatores* to a flock of geese; and Virgil’s comparison, in his ninth eclogue, between real poets and swans versus false poets and geese.⁸² These sources were especially efficacious, I would argue, because Valla could refer to Bartolus’ remarks about the representation of animal figures both in the *tractatus* generally and on the jurist’s own *insignia vel arma*, as it is reported there.⁸³

alterius domini, ut vidi concedi multis a serenissimo principe Carlo quarto Romanorum Imperatore, necnon rege Bohemiae. Et mihi consiliario eius concessit inter caetera, ut ego et caeteri de agnatione mea, leonem rubeum cum caudis duabus in campo aureo portaremus.” This is one of the passages marked by Cavallar et al. as an inauthentic interpolation into Bartolus’ tract: See *A Grammar of Signs*, 8-12. For our purposes, its possible inauthenticity is less important than the fact that it became part of the transmission of the tract. On the embassy to Pisa in which Bartolus did participate to greet the Emperor Charles IV in 1355, see Langelo and Fratoi, “L’Ambasceria a Carlo IV di Lussemburgo,” 271-332.

⁷⁹ Gearey, *Law and Aesthetics*, 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 31-34. Other publications in this field include Legendre, *Dieu au Miroir: Étude sur l’Institution des Images*; Douzinas and Nead, eds., *Law and the Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law*; Madero, *Tabula picta. La peinture e l’écriture dans le droit médiéval*; and Goodrich and Hayaert, eds., *Genealogies of Legal Vision*.

⁸¹ Valla, *Epistola*, I.10-17 (Trans. Cavallar et al., 180): “In locum Suplicii, Scevole, Pauli, Ulipani aliorumque, ut leviter loquar, cygnorum, quos tua aquila seivissime interemit, successerunt anseres ...” [In place of Sulpitius, Scevola, Paulus, Ulpian, and the other swans barbarously snatched away by your eagle, to put it mildly, we have geese ...].

⁸² See Cicero, *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino* XX.57-59 (Trans., Freese, 171): “Simillima est accusatorum ratio. Alii vestrum anseres sunt, qui tantum modo clamant, nocere non possunt, alii canes, qui et latrare et mordere possunt” [It is just the same in the case of the accusers. Some of you are geese, who only cackle but cannot do any harm, others are dogs, who can both bark and bite]; and Virgil, *Eclogue* IX.36 (Trans. Fairclough): “sunt et mihi carmina, me quoque dicunt vatem pastores; se non ego credulus illis./ nam neque adhuc Varius videor nec dicere Cinna/ digna, sed argutos inter strepere anser olores” [I too have songs; me also the shepherds call a bard, but I trust them not. For as yet methinks I sing nothing worthy of a Varius or a Cinna, but cackle as a goose among melodious swans]. On Valla’s use of these sources see Regoliosi, “L’Epistola contra Bartolum,” 1506-7 and 1534-5.

⁸³ Bartolus, *De insigniis*, 14 (Trans. Cavallar et al., 150): “[D]ico quod ars imitatur naturam quantum potest, unde ista insignia debent esse secundum naturam rei quam figurant et non aliter... Unde quodcunque animal designetur in vexillis, facies eius debet respicere hastam, cum de natura faciei sit antecedere” [I say that art imitates nature as much as possible. Whence, the *insignia* ought to conform to the essence and nature of the things they depict and not otherwise ... Therefore, whatever animal is depicted on the banner should have its head looking at the staff since it is in conformity with nature for the head to be in front]; and Ibid., 15-16 (Trans. Cavallar et al., 151): “Sed dubitatur qualiter dicta animalia debeant designari, utrum quasi stent recta? An quasi per terram plane ambulent, vel quo modo? Respondeo: dicta animalia debent designari de nobiliori actu eorum, et etiam quod magis vigorem suum ostendant ... Nunc ad propositum dico quod quaedam animalia sunt quorum natura fera est, ff. *De Postulando* L.i. *bestias*, et ista debent designari in actu feroci, ut leo, ursus, et similia” [One might wonder how these animals should be depicted [designari], whether standing upright, or walking on the ground, or in some other way. I reply that these animals should be depicted in their noblest positions, so that they might evince their own strength ... Concerning this, I say that some animals are wild by nature, and these animals must be depicted in a fierce stance, such as the lion, bear, and similar animals]. For a discussion of these passages see Regoliosi, “L’Epistola contra Bartolum,” 1511.

Why are you caviling about horses, you ass? Flags (*bandiere*), quarters (*quartiere*), bands (*biste*), arms (*arme*), nails (*clodi*), and hindquarters (*crope*) – aren't those the words of an ignorant ass? Why didn't you include clubs with which we could hit your back and beat your entire body to the point of death?⁸⁴

We have said enough against the positioning of signs (*signorum*), in which Bartolo babbles and makes a fool of himself, if he ever had any sense to begin with. Look at the following examples. If one bears a lion, he says, let it bite; if a horse, let it run; if a bull, let its horns threaten; and, of course, if an ass, let it roll in the dust! You demand that everything be represented in its “natural” form, and simultaneously you ask those who produce signs (*signa*) in the future to obey your laws.⁸⁵

In other words, Valla's mocking criticisms were especially incisive because they targeted the jurists' own “signs” of honor and transformed them into “signs” of shame. This may partly explain why the epistle was perceived as an affront to the *universitas* of jurists as a whole, and why the public scandal in Pavia erupted at a ceremony in which graduating law students were to be awarded their doctoral rank and *insignia*.⁸⁶

The importance of images and “signs” to Valla's agenda can be seen also through the lens of the positive program that his letter articulates, countering the jurists' *osbcuritas*, *animalitas*, and *barbaritas*, as he sees it, with the opposite values of *latinitas*, *humanitas*, and *libertas*.⁸⁷ The images Valla invokes to show the limitations of Bartolo's prescriptions almost invariably visualize a humanist program of classical *renovatio* too. From Valla's experience as a classical scholar, for example, he remembers the seals on the Greek books that he had seen from Constantinople.⁸⁸ He also recalls the *signum* that his family had arranged – representing an image of a writing hand – for the tomb of Melchior Scribani, his maternal uncle who had renounced the practice of civil law for the study of rhetoric.⁸⁹ Several additional images Valla recalls from classical texts and materials.

⁸⁴ Valla, *Epistola*, III.20 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 192): “Quid equos argues, asine? An non asinorum verba sunt ‘bandiere’, ‘quarterie’, ‘biste’, ‘arme’, ‘clodi’, ‘crope’? Cur etiam non addebas ‘bastones’, quibus cropam tuam atque adeo totum corpus ad necem usque crederemus?”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, V.1-5 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 190-191): “Sed satis contra signorum positionem diximus: in quibus ne sileamus quantopere Bartolus deliret atque desipiat (si modo unquam sapuit), accipite sequentia. “Si leo est,” inquit, “pro signo, mordeat; si equus, currat; si Taurus, cornu minetur”; nimirum si asius est, se volute in pulvere, siquidem omnia ut naturalia sunt postulas! Quod cum dicis, simul eos qui posthac signa facturi sunt ad istam tuam legem vocas.”

⁸⁶ For the accounts of the epistle's reception in Pavia see Facio, *Invective*, I. 90-91; and Francesco Oca, “Lettera ad Andrea Carpano” in Speroni, “Lorenzo Valla a Pavia: il *Libellus* contro Bartolo,” 467. On the kind of ceremony in which the scandal is said to have taken place, see Naso and Rosso, *Insignia Doctoralia: Lauree e Laureati all'Università di Torino fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, 56-64.

⁸⁷ On the constructive potentialities of humanist invectives see Streuver, “Petarch's *Invective contra medicum*,” 661.

⁸⁸ Valla, *Epistola* III.54-55 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 188): “In lupa hoc mihi exigis, cum Veneti, quem populum tu nosti quantus sit, aversa ora teneant abbe a parte in quam lembulis cimbulisque vehuntur. Et Greci quidem in signaculis librorum ut nuper videre potuisti, cum legati Constantinopolitani ad me venerunt” [the Venetians, whom you know are a great people, keep their faces turned away from the direction in which they are carried in their small, fast boats. And the same holds for the Greeks, in the seals of their books, as you might have seen recently when the legates of Constantinople came to me].

⁸⁹ Valla, *Epistola* IV.10-12 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 189): “Fuit mihi avunculus Melchior, vir cum in ceteris laudandus, tum vero in hoc quod, cum aliquot annis iuri civili studuisset, ad artem oratoriam postea totum se convertit ... cuius de sepulcro oranando nunc consultamus, signaque ad levandum luctum suorum, et ut moris est, supra sepulcrum tam clari viri affigere destinavimus. Condocefacias nos, Bartole, quondam ‘modo’ hec figuranda sint: Est autem manus dextra cum lacerto scribens, unde Scribana progenies nuncupatur. Si postulas utique ut aspectus scribentis in hastam

From the *Aeneid*, he remembers how Virgil's ekphrastic rendering of Turnus's shield showed Inachus, the river god, pouring water out of an urn.⁹⁰

Pay attention now, Bartolo. Raise your eyes a little and be vigilant: your king of Bohemia and Emperor has consulted you! He just recently read in Virgil that on the shield of King Turnus there was "father Inachus pouring water from a well-wrought jar" (*celata fundens amnem pater Inachus urna*) [Ae.VII.792]. Imagine now that the Emperor wishes to bear the effigy (*effigiem*) of Inachus not on a shield (*clipeo*), for he does not use one, but on a banner (*vexillo*). Teach me, you who are such a great jurist and counselor of the emperor, how this effigy has to be depicted: Caesar, civil law, geometry, mathematics, and philosophy command that every gesture should be directed toward the staff (*hastam*), and it is not permitted to depart from this law. You will place the god in the inferior and hanging part of the banner, almost flat on his back, pouring water upward from an inclined jar.⁹¹

Valla remembers the Capitoline she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus in the same guise:

Bartolo, what you forbid me, namely, that the face of animals should look toward the right or left side, seems to me on certain occasions magnificent, for instance, that the lion is seated with the face turned sideways, and so too "the seated she-wolf with its smooth neck turned backward" as the poet says. If the she-wolf is recumbent, how can she be seen to go forward, since she is resting? Nevertheless, her face should be turned toward the direction in which she is being carried. But it

dirigatur, video vel dextram in altero latere mutandam esse in sinistram, cuius non est naturale scribere, vel exteriorem manus partem pro interiori ostendam" [I had a maternal uncle, Melchior, in every respect praiseworthy, and especially because, after he studied civil law for a few years, he devoted himself totally to the study of rhetoric ... We have to decide how to adorn his tomb. And we decided to affix to the tomb of such an illustrious person signs (*signa*) to alleviate the grief of his close kin, as is the custom. Enlighten us, Bartolo, as to how we should go about this. It is the right hand with the upper arm in the act of writing, as if he were the offspring of the Scribani clan. In any case, you require that the countenance of the writer should face the staff. I see no other solution than that, on the other side of the tomb, the right side should turn to the left. Yet writing with the left hand is contrary to nature, or should I show you the external instead of the internal part of the hand]? On Valla's relationship to his uncle see Rocca, "La famiglia di Lorenzo Valla e i Piacentini nella Curia di Roma nel secolo XV," 225-51. On his assumption of the name "Scribani" for himself see Corbellini, "Note di vita cittadina e universitaria pavese nel Quattrocento," 200. On the transformation of names into images (Scribani transformed into the image of as a writing hand), a practice largely associated with the heraldic tradition today, see Pastoureau, "Le nom e l'armoirie. Histoire et géographie des armes parlantes dans l'Occident médiéval," 75-92.

⁹⁰ The passage is Virgil, *Aeneid* VII. 798-792 (Trans. Fairclough): "at levem clipeum sublatis cornibus Io/ auro insignibat, iam saetis obsita, iam bos/ argumentum ingens, et custos virginis Argus, / caelataque amnem fundens pater Inachus urna" [But on his polished shield Io with uplifted horns was emblazoned in gold – Io, wondrous device, already covered with bristles, already a heifer – and Argus, the maiden's warder, and father Inachus pouring his stream from an embossed urn]. An earlier passage at *Aeneid* VII 371-72 (Trans. Fairclough) explains that Inachus and Io are ancestrally related to Turnus: "et Turno, si prima domus repetatur origo./ Inachus Acrisiusque patres mediaeque Mycenae" [Turnus, too, if the first origin of his house be traced back, has ancestry in Inachus and Acrisius and mid-most Mycenae].

⁹¹ Valla, *Epistola*, III.29-36 (Trans. Cavallar et alt. 187): "Nam quis ais, Bartole? Attolle paulisper oculos et vigila. Consuluit te tuus rex Boemie et Cesar. Legerat paulo ante apud Virgilium quod in regis Turni clipeo erat 'celata fundens amnem pater Inachus urna.' Vult hanc ipse effigiem Inachi non in clipeo (non enim clipeo utitur), sed in vexillo gerere. Doce tu, et tantus iurisconsultus et consiliarius Cesaris, quonam modo illa pingenda sit. Cui vix attollens tu lumina, Bartole dices: 'Ius civile, o Cesar, et geometria et arithmetica et philosophia iubet ut omnes gestus ad hastam dirigantur, nec fas et hanc legem prevaricari. Collocabis igitur deum in ima atque pendenti parte vexilli et quasi supinum, qui versus hastam, id est in altum, aquas, inclinata urna, effundat?'"

is much better for the she-wolf to face the little boys, whom she is stroking one at a time.⁹²

He remembers the ubiquitous *S.P.Q.R.* of the Roman Republic:

The Roman people have four letters as their sign: S.P.Q.R. Where would you wish them to begin? Will you write them as if moving toward the staff? ... Why then do you exempt letters from this rule? Are letters animals?⁹³

He remembers the signs (*signa*) carried by Roman consuls and emperors, as seen on ancient monuments and reliefs:

Finally, in order that you may understand how valid your reasons are, I will give you an example which is suitable everywhere (*exemplum quod ubique plurimum facit*). Former Roman consuls and emperors carried signs (*signa*), as one can see from sculptures representing battle scenes (*ex simulacris marmorum insculptorum pugnas continentium*), not as if the signs were fluttering or almost turning backward, as we do now, and tossed around by the wind, but in an open and visible manner, so that they could be seen and feared in a truly intimidating manner, and be seen from every side, unaffected by the wind.⁹⁴

He even remembers fantastical and “unnatural” images from Plautus and other literary sources, to reject Bartolus’ requirement that animal figures be represented in their most “natural” form.

I am unable to discern the reason for not giving preference to, and not finding meaning in, those things that depart from the order of nature, things that our forebearers (*maioribus*) found agreeable, like the centaur, chimera, sphinx, Minotaur, and, as we find in Plautus, “the rising sun riding a chariot” (*sol cum quadrigis oriens*) pulled by a four-horsed team, as well as winged people in ancient coins and reliefs (*in priscis numismatibus atque marmoribus*). If, Bartolo, you wish to discard these with bitterness and censoriousness, why don’t you reform customary speech (*usum loquendi*), correct the code of dress, and change letters (*litteras*)?⁹⁵

⁹² Valla, *Epistola*, III.51-53 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 187): “Preterea, cur mihi inderdicis, Bartole, ne facies animalium aspiciant in dexterum aut sinistrum? quod mihi interdum magnificentius fieri videtur, ut leo sedens et in latus alterum faciem vertens, et illud *tereti cervice reflexam procubuisse lupam*, que si recumbit, quomodo potest videri ire, cum quiescat? ‘Tamen facies eius convertatur illuc quo fertur’. At ipsa multo melius conversa est ad pueros quos *mulcet alternos*.” Valla is remembering the figures of Romulus and Remus represented by Vulcan on Aeneas’ shield (*Aeneid* VIII, 630-634, Trans. Fairclough): “fecerat et viridi fetam Mavortis in antro/ procubuisse lupam, geminos huic ubera circum/ ludere pendentis pueros et lambere matrem/ impavidos, illam tereti cervice reflexa/ mulcere alternos et corpora fingere lingua” [He had fashioned, too, the mother wolf lying stretched out in the green cave of Mars; around her teats the twin boys hung playing, and suckled their dam without fear; with shapley neck bent back, she fondled them by turns].

⁹³ Valla, *Epistola*, III.39-40 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 186): “Is nunc gerit, pro signo, quattuor litteras: S.P.Q.R. Unde tu vis illas litteras incipere? An ita ut tendant in hastam? Sed istud est hebraice scriber non latine! Eas nemo intelligat preter te, qui scis e contrario legere, aut preposterous erit ille ordo litterarum, R.Q.P.S. ... Cur ergo ab ista regula excipis litteras? An littere animalia sunt?”

⁹⁴ Valla, *Epistola*, III.57-59 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 188): “Postremo, ut scias quid tue rationes valeant, afferam exemplum quod ubique plurimum facit. Romani olim consules et imperatores, ut ex simulacris marmorum insculptorum pugnas continentium licet videre, non ita ut nunc voliantia et quasi retro fugientia signa et aura semper ventilanda gestabant, sed patentia et sese, ut aspici timerique possent, ostentantia et vere infesta et ad quancunque partem volumus convertenda nec vento obnoxia.” This passage is a good example of Valla’s understanding of the Roman precedent as “universal” norm.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, V.14; (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 191-192): “Mihi vero illa ipsa que magis a naturali recedunt nescio quid videntur pre se ferre tum gratius tum significatius, quod maioribus quoque nostris video placuisse, ut centaurus, chimera, sphinx,

Valla's recourse to these classical images as examples and models takes us back to the idea that changes in law have often resulted in changes in the "regime of images" around the law. We have learned in recent years how emblems were "invented" by the eminent Italian humanist, philologist, and jurist Andrea Alciato (1492-1550) in the first decades of the sixteenth century, and used by "humanist jurists" throughout Europe subsequently, to manifest the new practices and self-conceptions of their discipline.⁹⁶ It appears here that Valla's earlier criticism of "medieval" jurisprudence was a critique of its reigning *ius imaginum* already, intimating how images of (legal, and not only legal) authority would need to be remade in an increasingly "humanist" culture.

What is also apparent from the above passages is the convergence between Valla's arguments about language and about images. His charge that the jurists' language departed from the language of the ancient *iurisconsulti* is accompanied by his charge that their images, and their guidelines for making images, differed from the images that had *de facto* filled the ancient Roman world. This explains his sarcastic charge that if the jurist wanted to discard the example of Roman precedent he would also have to discard customary forms of speech, or the *usum loquendi*. This relationship between Valla's philology and his "picture criticism" has been missed in the letter's critical history, however, both in the new reading of the epistle from legal history, where Valla is considered to have failed as a philologist to perceive the inauthenticity of the text he was criticizing; and in the previous reading from heraldry and Renaissance studies, where the document is understood as essentially unconnected to Valla's pioneering work as a grammarian.

The most influential perspective from Renaissance studies on this question has, arguably, been Michael Baxandall's in *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting and the Invention of Pictorial Composition* (1971). Here Valla's 1433 letter supports the thesis that Valla was a "critic *manqué*" who missed crucial opportunities to "fully exploit the critical potentialities of humanism" in the realm of visual experience.⁹⁷ Baxandall reads the letter as a purely iconoclastic gesture against a rigid and naive medieval law.

In the course of a savage attack on the Trecento academic lawyer Bartolo da Sassoferrato, Valla lays about the late medieval hierarchy and symbolism of colors – traces of which are still very clear in Alberti – mainly by appealing to common experience ... This more than any humanist criticism of painting seems to be carrying out the liberating role of humanism.⁹⁸

This reading takes Valla's presentation of himself as an advocate of "freedom" at face value, and focuses exclusively on his appeals to common experience, rather than to classical precedent.⁹⁹ Our

minotaurus et ille apud Plautum [*Amph.* 422] *sol cum quadrigis oriens* et, in priscis numismatibus atque marmoribus, homines alati. Quod si placet omnia tam acriter et censorie excutere, cur non usum loquendi?"

⁹⁶ See Drysdall, *Heiroglyphs, Speaking Pictures, and the Law: The Context of Alciato's Emblems*, 1-19, and 227-300; Goodrich, *Legal Emblems and the Art of Law: Orbiter depicta as the Vision of Governance*; and Hayaert, *Mens emblematica et humanisme juridique: Le cas du Pegma cum narrationibus philosophicis de Pierre Cousteau (1555)*.

⁹⁷ Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 114.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹⁹ For an example of Valla's presentation of himself as an advocate of freedom in the epistle see Valla, *Epistola*, VI.45-46 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 196): "Eamus nunc et hominem audiamus a divinis atque humanis rebus dissentientem et puellis Ticinensibus (ver enim adventat) legem imponamus ne sarta, nisi quomodo Bartolus prescribit, texere audeant neque ad suum cuiusque iudicium atque voluntatem facere permittamus. Nam ut inquit Satiricus 'velle suum cuique est nec voto vivitur uno' [Persius, *Sat.* V.53] ut illum qui nobis hanc libertatem eripere tentat, non secus ac si in servitutem nos vellet asserere, sit conflagrandum" [Let's impose a law on the girls of Pavia – for spring is approaching – that they should not weave garlands except in the manner prescribed by Bartolo. And let's not permit them to weave garlands in accord with their own judgment and wishes (*iudicium atque voluntatem*).

touchstone study of the relationship between humanist scholarship and art criticism missed, as a result, this instance of how the two areas were connected.

In the *Elegantiae linguae latinae*, Valla determines correctness in Latin vocabulary and grammar by highlighting particular examples from classical texts, arguing for the precedence of “usage” (“*usum oratorum*” or “*Latini loqui*”) over the generalized precepts of the late-antique grammarians.¹⁰⁰ As Lodi Nauta has written, Valla was a consistent reader of the classics, especially the Latin classics, “as an archive of common usage in speaking and of common sense in thinking”; and as a bank “of norms to which he held philosophers, like everyone else, accountable.”¹⁰¹ His epistle of 1433 shows that he posited texts and artifacts from the Roman world as an archive for a *nomos* of images as well. It was Bartolus, from his perspective, who had usurped the prerogative to “freely” invent images and “signs” by disregarding the realities of ancient precedent.¹⁰² It was also a new class of men, a new language, and a new kind of expertise for mediating the authority of ancient culture - his own - that Valla’s epistle posits as legitimate legislators of the images that would signal identity, authority, and ownership in the present day.

ii. Valla’s Philology of Images: Philosophy, Textual Criticism, Historiography

Valla pursued several different projects that engaged with visual “signs” throughout his career, suggesting that his interest in the topic in 1433 was not an isolated case. Indeed, these projects show how images and their names were profoundly related to his thought and cultural politics.

For as the satirist says, ‘Each has his own desires, nor do we all pray for the same lives.’ Let us be incensed at that man who tries to snatch this freedom away from us, no less than if he wished to claim us as slaves].

¹⁰⁰ See for example Valla, *Elegantie* I.17: “Neque in hoc toto meo opera tam licentiam poetarum consector, quam usum oratorum. Neque si quid aliter penes autores reperitur mihi obesse debet, qui non legem scribo, quasi nunquam aliter factum sit, sed quod frequentissime factitatum est, praesertim a Marco Tullio Marcoque Fabio.” On the distinction between “use” and (grammatical) “law” for Valla see Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia*, 181-2; Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare*, 121-65; and Marsh, “Grammar, Method and Polemic in Lorenzo Valla’s *Elegantie*,” 104-7. Ironically, one could draw a parallel between Valla’s declared preference for customary use over grammatical precepts and the primacy in Bartolus’ thinking of contemporary custom over the written *lex*. On Bartolus’ negotiation of custom, customary law, and the written law, see Ullman, “De bartoli sententia: Concilia repraesentat mentem populi,” 708-716; and Frova, “La riflessione del Giurista Bartolo da Sassoferrato su ‘insegne e armi’,” 228.

¹⁰¹ Nauta, “Introduction,” viii in Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations*: “Throughout a brilliant career, his purpose never wavered: to read the classics – especially the Latin classics – as an archive of common usage in speaking and of common sense in thinking. In those ancient texts, he found the norms to which he held philosophers, like everyone else, accountable. Failure to understand those norms and honor them, according to Valla, was the besetting sin of philosophy in his own day and in the medieval era.”

¹⁰² In the Trecento, Bartolus had been a champion of the “free” invention of “signs” by reserving a legitimate space for noble and non-nobles alike to assume images for themselves, even without the concession of a superior. As he had written in the *De insigniis et armis* 4 (Trans. Cavallar et al. 145): “Quidam tamen arma seu insignia sua propria auctoritate assumunt sibi, et istis an liceat videndum est. Et puto quod liceat” [Some assume *arma* and *insignia* on their own initiative, and we should consider whether they are permitted to do it. I think that they are permitted]. This position mirrored his most influential political doctrine in support of the “free” city-states and their right to sovereignty (“*civitas sibi princeps*”) within the limits of their own territories. For Bartolus’ theory of sovereignty and its legacy see Maiolo, *Medieval Sovereignty*, 232-235. On other connections between his legal doctrines and communal politics, see Quaglioni, *Politica e diritto nel Trecento italiano*; Cavallar, “River of law: Bartolus’ *Tiberiadis* (*De alluvione*),” 31-129, esp. 33; and Rossi, “Bartolo alle origini della moderna trattatistica,” 20. Another word of caution may be inserted here, in this light, against reading Bartolus’ tract on signs as an attempt to either “curb the use of heraldic insignia” or to “standardize” and (over-)“regulate insignia” naively and meticulously, as in Vismann, “Image and Law – A Troubled Relationship,” 3.

One of the earliest examples is his proposal for the reform of philosophy, first drafted during the years in Pavia under the title *Ripastinatio dialectice et philosophie* (*The Retrenchment of Dialectic and Philosophy*).¹⁰³ This work argued, among many other things, that the philosophers' distinctions between concrete and abstract terms had produced "unimaginable" and therefore "unreal" entities:

First of all, one ought to mock their belief that quality can exist without any subject or at any rate that quality can be separated mentally (*certe cogitatione fingi*). They call abstract (*abstractum*), words like 'whiteness' (*albedinem*) and 'blackness' (*nigredinem*). I do not remember even thinking (*finxisse*) of things like this even when I was burning with a fever. For whoever pictures (*imaginantur*) these things must imagine (*imaginantur*) them united with some subject or substance: either snow, or a cloud, or a wall, or a piece of clothing, if he thinks of whiteness. But these people want to imagine (*fingi*) man, horse, lion, animal without any individual instance. Not even angels could grasp this with their imaginations (*imaginatione*).¹⁰⁴

In an evolved form, the argument made it into Valla's third and last version of this text, the *Dialecticae disputationes*, on which he was still working at his death in 1457:

They say that 'white', 'black', 'tawny' and similar terms that they call 'concrete' signify a white thing – two items, in other words: a body (when the word refers to a body) and also the quality that in itself is called 'abstract', like 'whiteness', 'blackness', 'tawnyness' (*albedinem, nigredinem, rutilitatem*) and other such terms. On this matter, I cannot make a general pronouncement and instantly condemn these people with a single word, even though I believe they are certainly to be condemned. Lest I go too fast and stumble, I shall proceed step by step on this issue. First of all ... when we say 'white' of an egg and 'white' of an eye and 'white tablet' of a praetor or judges or decurions, it signifies a thing plus whiteness, and yet it does not (as these people take it) signify just any such thing, randomly and generally, but something particular and definite, in the way that some use 'black' and 'red' for black script and red script.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ On the various redactions of this work see Nauta, "Introduction," x in Valla's *Dialectical Disputations*.

¹⁰⁴ Valla, *Ripastinatio*, Vol. 2, 373-374 (Trans. Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 60): "Atque ante omnia deridendum quod volunt qualitatem posse esse sine subiecto, aut certe cogitatione fingi: quod 'abstractum' appellant, ut 'albedinem', 'nigredinem' et similia, qualia ne febri quidem estuantem, memini me aliquando finxisse. Quicumque enim hec imaginatur, una quoque subiectum sive substantiam imaginatur: aut nivem aut nubem aut parietem aut vestem, si de albore cogitat: rursus aut carbonem aut corvum aut vestem aut cavernam aut nocturnum tempus, si de nigrore. At isti fingi volunt posse hominem, equum, leonem, animal, sine aliquo individuo: quod nec angeli ipsi imaginatione assequi possent."

¹⁰⁵ Valla, *Dialectical Disputations* I.3.2-3 (Trans. Lodi Nauta, p.37-39.): "Album, nigrum, rutilum, et similia quae vocant concreta aiunt significare rem albam – hoc est duo: corpus (sin omen hoc ad corpus refertur) et praeterea illam qualitatem quae per se dicitur abstractum – albedinem, nigredinem, rutilitatem et item cetera. Ego de hac re non possum in universum pronuntiare et istos uno statim verbo damnare, cum putem utique condemnandos. Pedentim pergam ne quo in loco nimis festinabundus offendam. Ante omnia ... album ovi cum dicimus et album oculi et alcum praetoris, album iudicum album decurionum, et si res cum albedine significatur, non tamen amplivage et universaliter et quancunque rem talem (ut isti accipiunt) significant, sed certam et diffinitam, sicut aput quosdam nigrum et rubrum pro nigra scriptura et rubra." For a fuller discussion of Valla's argument in this passage and the philosophical distinction between *concretus* and *abstractus* that he is challenging, see Nauta, "Notes to the Translation," 332-334 in the *Dialectical Disputations*; and Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* ("Abstract and Concrete Terms"), 72-81.

Both versions drew on some of the arguments Valla used to deride Bartolus in his 1433 epistle: His criticism of the jurist's classification of colors, as if they could be disassociated from the infinite variety of their concrete appearances; and his criticism of the jurist's description of figures, as if they could be abstracted (both visually and ontologically) from temporal, spatial, and/or narrative contexts.

A little later [Bartolus] says that white is the noblest of colors, black is the lowest, and that the remaining colors are good as they approach white and inferior as they approach black. Of all these things, which should I reproach first? That he did not recall that there are many varieties of color, as if fearing my rebuke? That he placed white above all colors? That he gave black the lowest position? ... What should I say concerning the color black? I don't find it unfavorably compared to white, for both the raven and the swan are sacred to Apollo; and Horace calls attractive someone with black eyes and hair [*Ars poetica* 37]. Do you, Bartolo, think your eyes, which I think resemble those of an ass, are more beautiful than the black eyes acclaimed by Horace? Or do you think the hair of an ass more beautiful than the black hair of a horse, so elegantly described by Virgil ... "whom a dappled Thracian steed conveys" (*quem Tracius albis / portat equis bicolor maculis*) [*Aen.* IX.50]?¹⁰⁶

Although [Bartolus] admits that the lion should always be red, always roaring, always rising, and tearing something apart, he does not provide the lion with prey on which it can display its ferocity; at least he could have the lion facing toward the sky, so that we may think it displays its ferocity against the Nemean lion. The horse should be always running, but Bartolo forgets to place a rider on the horse, someone who presses the horse to run ... Aren't these fooleries verging on madness?¹⁰⁷

These passages suggest that Valla associated both the philosophers and the jurists with a repertoire of images as well as with an academic language, disciplinary methodology, and caste of individual authorities that he wished to overturn. What's even more interesting is that between the *Ripastinatio*, the *Dialecticae*, and the 1433 epistle, the contours of a common representational (i.e. visual) *style* seem to be associated with the elegant Latinity and the simplified philosophical system that Valla was working to revive. Modeled on ancient visual culture, it was a mimetic rather than an ontological form of "naturalism" that represented concrete figures in concrete spatial, historical, and/or literary contexts.

¹⁰⁶ Valla, *Epistola*, V.24-33 (Trans. Cavallar et alt. 194-195): Paulopost ait 'album esse nobilissimum colorum nigrum abiectissimum; alios vero ita quenquam optimum ut est albo coniunctissimus, rursus ita quenquam deterrimum ut est nigredini proximus'. Horum quid primum reprehendam? An quod aurei coloris non meminit, quasi meam increpationem timuisset? An quod album omnibus pretulit? An quod nigro infimum locum dedit? ... De nigro autem quid dicam? quem cum albo comparatum invenio nec minoris prestantie putatum, unde corbus et cyngus propter hand ipsam causam dicuntur Apollini consecrati et Horati 'spectandum' ait qui sit 'nigris oculis nigroque capillo'. Tu vero, Bartole, oculus tuos qui, ut opinor, erant simillimi asininis, pulchriores putas nigris Horatii oculis, aut pilum asini pilo equi nigri, qualem ob decorem precipue Virgilius descripsit *quem Tracius albis / portat equis bicolor maculis!*"

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., V.17-18 (Trans. Cavallar et alt., 192): "Leonem semper rutilum, semper fremere, semper insurgere, scindere, nec dat ei bestiam in quam possit irasci (saltem in celum aspicientem faceret, ut contra Nemeum leonem irasci putaremus!); equum semper currere, nece meminit apponere sessorem, qui equum currere compellat ... Nonne hec sunt plena ineptiarum postremque dementie?"

Valla attended to images and “signs” in still other works during the middle phase of his career, while he received patronage from Alfonso V of Aragon between 1435 and 1447.¹⁰⁸ One of these is the celebrated 1440 confutation of the Donation of Constantine, the *Declamatio de falso credita et ementita donatione Constantini*. As is well known, the legal document of the donation purported to describe and enact the conferral by Constantine the Great of extensive imperial properties and distinctions to Pope Sylvester (314-336) and his heirs, including all of Italy, additional Western provinces, the Lateran palace, and imperial “signs” of power and authority. It had not only been widely accepted as genuine since the ninth century but also had been used politically by popes and their supporters in real contentions over the boundaries of papal authority. Valla’s exposé, written while Alfonso was warring with Pope Eugenius IV over territories on the peninsula, was the first definitive proof of its spuriousness, demonstrating on both historical and philological grounds the impossibility of its composition in the fourth century. What is important for our purposes is how Valla’s confutation emphasized the embeddedness of “signs” within specific social institutions, on the one hand, and within language, on the other hand, to make them a potent tool of his textual criticism.

Analyzing the language of the purported Donation, Valla isolated among other passages the descriptions of “standards, banners, and imperial decorations” (*signa atque banna et diversa ornamenta imperialia*) which, according to the Donation, had been handed over from Constantine to Sylvester.¹⁰⁹ Following his usual practice of citing and then refuting specific passages of his opponents, Valla showed the forger to have been ignorant of both the “signs” themselves which would have been appropriate to Constantine’s and Sylvester’s respective stations, and the words which would have properly described them.

*We hand over, he says, the Lateran palace ... Then the diadem: as if those present do not understand, he glosses, that is, the crown. But here he did not add of gold, although later, treating the same subject, he says of purest gold and precious gems. This ignorant man was unaware that a diadem was made of cloth (panno), or perhaps of silk (serico). Hence the wise and often told story of the king, who is said, before putting on his head the diadem that had been given to him, to have held and long pondered it, and declared, “O cloth (pannum), more noble than fortunate! If anyone really knew with how much anxiety, danger, and misery you are fraught, he would not want to pick you up even if you were lying on the ground! [Valerius Maximus, Memorabilia 7.2.5]*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ On Alfonso’s patronage of Valla see Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples*, 108-122; and Ferraù, “Valla e gli Aragonesi.” For a general introduction to Valla’s confutation of the Donation see Bowersock, “Introduction” to *On the Donation of Constantine*.

¹⁰⁹ Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine*, 49 (Trans. Bowersock, 83): “Beato Silvestro, eius vicario, de presenti tradimus palatium imperii nostri Lateranense, deinde diadema, videlicet coronam capitis nostri, simulque phrygium necnon et superhumerales, videlicet lorum quod Imperiale circumdare solet collum, verum etiam chlamydem purpuream atque tunicam coccineam et omnia imperialia indumenta seu etiam dignitatem imperialem presidentium equitum, conferentes etiam ei imperialia scepra simulque cuncta signa atque banna et diversa ornamenta imperialia et omnem processionem imperialis culminis et gloriam potestatis nostre” [To the blessed Sylvester, his [Peter’s] vicar, as of now we hand over the Lateran palace of our empire, then the diadem – that is, the crown on our head and at the same time the Phrygian tiara and the superhumeral band (which is the strap that normally goes around the imperial neck) and also the purple cloak and the scarlet tunic and all imperial vestments, for the rank of commanders of the imperial cavalry. We confer on him as well the imperial sceptres and at the same time all standards and bannars and various imperial decorations, and every possession of our imperial eminence and the glory of our power].

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50 (Trans. Bowersock, 87): “*Deinde diadema: et quasi illi non videant, qui adsunt, interpretatur videlicet coronam. Verum hic non addidit ex auro, sed posterius easdem res inculcans inquit ex auro purissimo et gemmis*

And at the same time the Phrygian tiara and the superhumeral band (which is the strap that normally goes around the imperial neck): Who ever heard of a Phrygian tiara in Latin? Although you talk like a barbarian, you apparently want me to think this is the language of Constantine or Lactantius. In his play *Menaechmi* Plautus used the word *phrygio* for a clothes maker [*Men.* 246], and Pliny calls embroidered garments *phrygions* because the Phrygians invented them [*Natural History*, 8.196]. But what would a Phrygian tiara signify? You fail to explain what is unclear; and you explain what is altogether clear. For you do not imagine that a leather band, which is what we mean by a strap, was put around the emperor's neck as an ornament.¹¹¹

We confer on him as well the imperial scepters (imperialia scepra): What a way to talk! What glamor! What balance! What are those imperial scepters? There is just one scepter, not several. If only the emperor carried a scepter, will the pontiff carry a scepter in his hand? Why shall we not give him a sword, a helmet, and a javelin? *And at the same time all standards and banners (signa atque banna):* What do you understand by standards? Standards are either statues (*statue*) – we often say “standards and panels” (*signa et tabulis*) for “sculptures and pictures” (*sculpturis ac picturis*) since the ancients did not paint on walls (*parietibus*) but panels (*tabulis*) – or else legionary ensigns (*vexilla*), hence standards (*signa*) and matched eagles (*pares aquilas*) ... Was Constantine giving Sylvester his statues (*statuas*) or his military eagles (*aquilas*)? What could be more absurd?¹¹²

While Valla had previously used his Roman sources to prove that Bartolus' fourteenth-century prescriptions had not been followed in antiquity, here he used such sources (Valerius Maximus, Pliny, Plautus, Lucian, etc.) to prove that the ornaments of power described in the Donation could have neither existed nor been described in the fourth century, as they were in that document.¹¹³

preciosis. Ignoravit homo imperitus diadema et panno esse aut fortassis ex serico. Unde sapiens illus regis dictum celebrari solet, quem ferunt traditum sibi diadema, priusquam capiti imponeret, retentum diu considerasse ac dixisse: O nobilem magis quam felicem pannum, quem is quis pentius agnosceret, quam multis sollicitudinibus periculisque et miseriis sis refertus, ne humi quidem iacentem vellet tollere [Valerius Maximus, *Memorabilia* 7.2.5].”

¹¹¹ Ibid., 51 (Trans. Bowersock, 87): “*Simulque phrygium nec non superhumerales, videlicet lorum, quod imperiale circumdare solet collum: quis unquam phrygium latine dici audivit? Tu mihi, dum barbaram loqueris, videri vis Constantini aut Lactantii esse sermonem? Plautus, in Menechmis, ‘phrygionem’ pro concinnatore vestium posuit [Men. 246], Plinius ‘phrygionas’ appellat vestes acu pictas, quod earum Phryges fuerint inventores [Natural History, 8.196]: phrygium vero quid significat? Hoc non exponis, quod obscurum; exponis, quod est clarius: superhumerales ais esse lorum nec quid sit lorum tenes. Non enim cingulum ex corio factum, quod dicitur lorum, sentis circumdari pro ornamentis Cesaris collo.*”

¹¹² Ibid., 53 (Trans. Bowersock, 91): “*Conferentes ei etiam imperialia scepra: que structura orationis! qui nitor! qui ordo! Quenam sunt scepra ista imperialia? Unum est sceptrum, non plura. Si modo sceptrum gerebat imperator, num et pontifex sceptrum manu gestabit? Cur non ei dabimus et ense et galeam et iaculum? Simulque cuncta signa atque banna: quid tu signa accipis? Signa sunt taut statue, unde frequenter legimus ‘signa et tabulas’ pro ‘sculpturis ac picturis’ – prisci enim non in parietibus pingebant, sed in tabulis – aut vexilla, unde illud signa, pares aquilas [Lucian, *Pharsalia* I.7] ... Num ergo statuas aut aquilas suas Silvestro dabat Constantinus? Quid hoc absurdius?*”

¹¹³ Ingo Herklotz has also pointed out the convergence of Valla's philology with his “antiquarianism” in these passages of the Confutation. See Herklotz, “Arnaldo Momigliano's ‘Ancient History and the Antiquarian’: A Critical Review,” 127-153, here 132: “It was not only Valla's expertise in Latin but also his familiarity with ancient material culture that enabled him to prove the alleged Imperial document a post-classical fake. After all, the author of the Donation was not aware that the Imperial diadem was a decorated stripe of linen or silk, rather than a ring of gold, as were medieval crowns. Speaking of *imperialia scepra*, the suspicious writer had forgotten that the Roman emperor never

Precisely because these kinds of images and objects were embedded in history and in language, however, they posed difficulties to Valla when he became a historian himself, tasked to tell the life and deeds Ferdinand I of Aragon (1379 ca. – 1416), his patron’s father, while also trying to model his writing on the best historiography of the ancients. This was the burden of the *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Araganorum*, Valla’s first and only work of historiography, which he drafted for Alfonso between 1445-6. As is well known, this text was attacked by Valla’s fellow courtiers and rivals in Naples, Bartolomeo Facio (c.1410-1457) and Antonio Beccadelli (‘il Panormita’) (1394-1471), before it could ever be brought to publication.¹¹⁴ It was also prefaced with a now-famous humanistic statement on the value and goals of history writing.¹¹⁵ We are interested here in how the body of the text manages the description of “signs.”

The first of the *Gesta*’s three books focuses on Ferdinand’s role in the re-conquest of Moorish Spain during his co-regency of Castile, a campaign that culminated in the successful capture of Antequera under his leadership in 1410. Valla describes Ferdinand’s departure for his “crusade” at the head of the Christian army; and, in one passage, remembers a short series of *vexilla* that provide a vivid rendering of the scene to supplement Ferdinando’s direct speech to his wife (“I leave for this campaign for religion, for glory of our house, and for your own benefit”).¹¹⁶

Having spoken these things, and kissed and embraced his sons one after another, he departed in full display with banners before him (*vexillis precedentibus*), the first of which had the image of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross (*imaginem Domini nostri in cruce pendentis*); the other of the Virgin with the Angel Gabriel announcing the birth of the Holy Spirit; the third of Saint Jacob; the fourth of the kingdom, and so forth for the others. And in this order they detached from the rest of the army, which for some days had been stationary, and towards Antequera, which was situated to the north of Granada, set up camp.¹¹⁷

The successful ending of the war, at the end of the book, is marked by a description of the *signa militaria* removed from the conquered Islamic strongholds and replaced by the Christian victors:

Up to two thousand military signs (*signa militaria*) were seized upon, all of them glittering together. One in particular, of Granada, was raised, where there was depicted in the middle a pomegranate – which they vulgarly call a Punic apple (*malum punicum*) – gaping open with seeds.¹¹⁸

The second and third books of the *Gesta* deal with Ferdinand’s struggles over and successful acquisition eventually of the Aragonese throne despite a series of aggressive

used more than one sceptre. As to senatorial insignia, he names nothing but the characteristic shoes, and not, as one would have expected with Valla, the much more prominent *laticlavus*.”

¹¹⁴ See Besomi, “Introduzione” to Valla’s *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Araganorum*; Regoliosi, “Introduzione” to Valla’s *Antidotum in Facium*; Regoliosi, “Per la tradizione delle *Invettive in L. Vallam* di Bartolomeo Facio,” 389-97; and Viti, “Facio, Bartolomeo.”

¹¹⁵ See Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi*, “Proemium,” 22-25; and Regoliosi, *Lorenzo Valla e la concezione della storia*.

¹¹⁶ Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi*, I.VIII.14 (Trans. mine): “‘Quid tu,’ inquit, ‘uxor, tantopere sollicitudine mei te afflictas? ... in hac militia et in hac militia exercebis cum pro religione, pro gloria domus, pro amplitudine vestra in alia militia ago.’”

¹¹⁷ Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi*, I. IX.1 (Trans. mine): “Hec locutus, filios deinceps amplexus osculatusque, abiit cum flore copiarum, vexillis precedentibus, quorum primum habebat imaginem Domini nostri in cruce pendentis, alterum matris eius cum angelo Gabriele conceptum Spiritus Sancti annuntiante, tertium sancti Iacobi, quartum era regium, deinde reliqua. Atque hoc ordine a cetero exercitu excerptus est, ubi cum pauculis diebus stativa habita essent, Anticheram versus, que ad aquilonem Granate vergit, castra novit.”

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.XI.16 (Trans. mine): “Capta sunt signa militaria ad duo milia, candida ferme omnia. Unum preterea Granate, cuius in medio pictum era *granatum* – ita enim *malum punicum* vulgo vocant – hians et phenicia grana exerens.”

competitors.¹¹⁹ These books contain numerous episodes in which Ferdinand desecrates the “signs” of his rivals in his attempts to secure his position. In the episode about “the royal banner (*vexillo*) that Federick wore and on the king’s censure by modifying it,” for example, Ferdinand humiliates his rival Frederick Count of Luna by altering the latter’s *vexillum* with a bend (*fasciam*) that openly advertises the latter’s illegitimate birth.¹²⁰ In another episode, Ferdinand subdues his most serious rival, James II Count of Urgell, by stripping and mutilating the “herald” (*araldum*) that James had sent to his court:

He [the Count] sent off to Barcelona a messenger (*fecialem*) for the king, whom they call a herald (*araldum*), dressed with clothes supporting pictures (*pictas*), inscriptions (*conscriptas*), and hostile threats, who went riding through the whole city ... When he [Ferdinando] saw this he ordered the herald bound and undressed and that the pictures and inscriptions be remade with a piece of wood as if painted and written on his very body as clothing, and in this way sent him back to his master.¹²¹

These passages help to situate Ferdinando’s actions in a courtly environment where images function as currencies of both power and vulnerability, honor and shame.¹²² Arguably, they also provide occasions for Valla as a historian to achieve the quality of *enargeia* in his narration – vividness and palpability – which classical historiographers and his most important mentors, Cicero and Quintilian, recommended.¹²³

However, the articulation of these “signs” was awkward at times for the humanist historian. In the critique of the *Gesta* that his rivals launched (under Facio’s name) with the *Invective in Laurentium Vallam* (1446), it was claimed that Valla’s description of Ferdinando’s “banners” was both superfluous and without equivalents in the best ancient models.

¹¹⁹ The Aragonese throne had belonged to Ferdinand’s maternal grandfather Martin I (1356-1410) and its succession was compromised by the death of Martin’s son by the same name in 1409. See Besomi, “Introduzione” to the *Antidotum in Facium*, xv-xxvi.

¹²⁰ Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi*, III.1-3 (Trans. mine): “De vexillo regio quod Federicus portaverat et de censura regis emendato vexillo”. “Trecentos enim equites ad numerum arcium, quibus singulos prefecerat, ducebat et, quod invidiosius est, vexillum permistis Aragonie ac Sicilie signis et ad regii vexilli magnitudine sericisquoque fimbriis valentine artificio adornantibus ... Allatum rex contemplans, laudare artificium, laudare materiam, dicere non aliud sibi velle. Denique accersito vexillario qui simile conficeret, impetrat a puero facili ac volente accommodari ad exemplar imitandum. Opifex ut era iussus, eo exemplo vexillum fecit, sed transversa fascia coloris veneti, que indicaret, consueto apud magnas familias more, illegitimos natales ... Sed edoctus puer a suis fasciam illam ignominie esse argumentum, nunquam postea nisi albam gessit et breve vexillum, haud clam testatus egro se ferre animo regis castigationem, et contumaciam adversus summum imperium vel presumens vel detegens, quasi vero tolerandum id regi fueri, uempiam sibi regios honores vindicare et eum presertim, qui videri poterat hoc facto testari ad se regni spectare successionem.”

¹²¹ Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi*, III.III.1.7-9 (Trans. mine): “Ea de re fecialem, quem araldum vocant, Barcelonam mittit, indutum veste pictas conscriptasque habente prodiones inimici, qui universam urbem perequitans passim ... Ille ubi rem rescivit, iubet araldum comprehendi denudarique, et quacunq[ue] transisset pictus inscriptusque eadem urbis parte virgis cedi, ipsum corpus pro veste pingentibus atque scribentibus: talemque remitti ad herum.”

¹²² Valla, *Correspondence*, Valla to Flavio Biondo, 13 January 1444 (Trans. Cook, 158-161): “Mandaverat autem mihi iampridem rex historias suas scribendas, repetitis altius principiis iam inde ab infantia eius. Que quia non habui a quibus plane docerer, malui non attingere quam fidem historie obliviosorum quorundam senum memorie credere” (The king ordered me long ago to write the history of his reign, going back to its very beginning and his infancy. But since there was no one who could give me a clear account of those matters, I preferred not to attempt it rather than have my history rely on the memories of some forgetful old men.)

¹²³ On the role of vividness or *enargeia* in classical historiography see Ginzburg, “Ekphrasis and Quotation,” 3-19.

*With banners [vexillis] before them, the first of which had the image [imaginem] of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross; the other of the Virgin with the Angel Gabriel announcing the birth of the Holy Spirit; the third of Saint Jacob. A plebian elocution wholly and truly worthy of Lorenzo, superfluous and first of all contrary to brevity in the narration of things! These should be narrated summarily, not in their details. Indeed, in what work was such a place made for the mention of banners (vexillis)? Did you see any passage in Livy, when he wrote about the Roman consuls going to a campaign, making mention of the signs (signis) that they were carrying? And yet we know that they did not go waging war without these signs. On the contrary, however, he did mention it when the signs of the enemy were captured, since he knew this to be a worthy deed of the Roman people.”*¹²⁴

Facio saw Valla’s passage as having violated the two virtues - *dignitas* and *brevitas* - that he considered fundamental to historiography.¹²⁵ The “banners” also seem to have brought to Facio’s mind the frequent descriptions of such images in vernacular popular and “chivalric” traditions, whose memory he believed had not been thoroughly enough expunged from Valla’s text:

*Let us rediscover within us those virtues which in this region bring remembrance of Orlando and Rainaldo, which I have often heard of also in Hector, Aeneas, Achilles and other ancients. Here you clearly and openly indicate your admirable prudence, as you cite the vulgar examples of Orlando and of some unknown Rainaldo, who even among the Gauls, from whom they are descended, no strong memory of a literary character exists. And you compare them to Hector, Aeneas, and Achilles, whom the greatest poets and greatest historians exhausted with praise to heaven.*¹²⁶

Facio revealed the disconnect or irony here between the fact that Valla’s protagonists had modeled themselves on “vulgar” heroes, whilst Valla the historian wished to model his text on ancient precedents alone.

In the self-defense that Valla composed the following year (*Antidotum in Facium*, 1447), Valla argued forcefully that Christian “signs” were appropriate to a Christian history; and that ancient historiographers had in fact attended to these kinds of objects in detail, far beyond the brief descriptions of spoils (*signa capta*) that Facio remembered.¹²⁷ Valla cited the *signa* described in

¹²⁴ Valla, *Invectiva Prima*, 77 (Trans. mine): “*Vexillis precendibus, quorum primum habebat imaginem Domini Nostri Iesu Christi in cruce pendentis; alterum matris eius cum Angelo Gabriele conceptum Spiritus Sancti anuntiante; tertium Sancti Iacobi. Plebia sane ac vere Laurentio digna elocutio, et supervacua in primis rerum narratio brevitati contraria. Hec enim summam non particulatim narranda sunt. Quid enim opus erat de vexillis hoc loco mentionem facere? An vidisti usquam Livium, cum de consulibus Romanis in expeditionem euntibus scribit, de signis que ferebant mentionem facere? Et tamen sine signis eos non isse ad bellum gerendum scimus. Secus autem facit cum hostium signa capta erant, quoniam eam rem dignitati populo Romano sciebat esse.*”

¹²⁵ See Regoliosi, “Introduzione,” in Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, lxxv.

¹²⁶ Facio, *Invectiva primum*, 78 (Trans. mine): “*Ut renovemus in nobis ea que de Orlando ac Rainaldo in hac regione gesta memorantur, qualia fuisse Hectoris Enee, Achillis aliorumque principum frequenter audivi. Hic plane apertissime indicas admirabilem prudentiam tuam, qui vulgaria inducens exempla Orlandum nescio quem et Rainaldum, de quibus vel apud Gallos, unde orti sunt, vix ulla extat memoria litterarum monumentis prodita, Hectori, Enee atque Achilli, quos summi poete et historici summis in celum laudibus extulerunt comparas.*”

¹²⁷ Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, III.II.I: “*Reprehendis orationem meam quod plebian, quod brevitati contraria, quod a verterum uso dissonant; et quod plebian quidem sit agnosco causam, quod videlicet Iesum, non Iovem, Mariam, non Minervam, immo Venerem, Iacobum, non Baccum, Gabrielem, non Briareum aut Priapum nomino. Plebia enim apud vos atque ignobilia sunt nomina, nec letterato exculptoque viro digna et que orationem, ut soles predicare, maure Panormita, applaudente Fauto scytha (honor sit ceterorum auribus), permingant atque conspurcent Iesus, Maria,*

Livy's description of a sacrifice;¹²⁸ and the elaborate *ornamenta* described on King Darius in Curtius Rufus.¹²⁹

Whose narration, I ask, is more superfluous? Whose is longer? Certainly if mine seems boring to you then I can imagine you had the same opinion of Livy's, whom you mention and who without a doubt did take note of the golden standards (*de auris sericisque vexillis*), and the signs of the cypress (*signis cupresseis*), not to speak of the other strange and curious things he describes. And in what context? As everyone knows, the second Punic war, which, as he himself testified, was the greatest subject of all. Hear, moreover, what Curtius wrote and if afterwards it seems superfluous and unusual to you I will reproach my narration.¹³⁰

Both the refutation of the Donation and the defense of his own history evidently provoked Valla to attend closely to the language and decorum of "signs" in ancient historiography.

A separate but related point of contention between Valla and Facio had to do with the Latin vocabulary appropriate to this broad class of images and objects. Facio wished to see exclusively "classical" words in modern writing - the *verbum a maioribus usitatum* - and counseled circumlocutions where necessary.¹³¹ Valla, famously, held the opposite position that "a new thing needs a new word" (*nova res novum vocabulum flagitat*).¹³² "Signs" became easily involved in this debate because they often overlapped with two areas of experience - Christianity and military technology - whose novelty with respect to antiquity posed notorious difficulties in humanistic Latin.¹³³ However, Valla himself equivocated in his history between the words *vexillum*, *segnum*, and *sericum* for apparently equivalent "signs"; and between *fecialis*, *araldus*, and *nuntius* for the

Iacobus, Gabeli similiaque, sicut e contrario illa velut gemme ornant Iuppiter, Apollo, Minerva, Venus, Bacchus, Hercules, Priapus et ceteri. Facessite, impiissimi homines, piaculi tanti propediem luituri supplicium."

¹²⁸ Ibid., III.II.I: "Et nihilominus quoniam me ad huius legem auctoris accusas, audi quid ipse narret: 'Confestim ad aliud sacrificium eidem dive a decemviris edicta dies, cuius ordo talis fuit. Ab ede Apollinis boves femine albe due porta Carmentali in urbem ducte; postea duo signa cupressa Iunoni regine portabantur; tum septem et duodecim virgines longam indute vestem carmen in Iunonem reginam canentes ibant, illa tempestate forsan laudabile rudibus ingeniis, nunc abhorrens et ineruditum si referatur; virginum ordinem sequebantur tridecim coronati laura pretextatique. A porta tergemina Iugaro vico in forum venire; in foro pompa cosistens, per manus reste data virgines conum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes inceserunt. Inde vico Tusco Velabroque per boarium forum in vicum publicum atque edem Luonnis regine.'"

¹²⁹ Ibid., III.II.I: "Untrunque regis latus ex auro argentoque expressa decorabant, distinguebant internitentes gemme iugum ex quo eminebant aurea simulacra cubitalia, quorum alterum Nini, alterum Beli; inter hec aquilam auream pennas extendenti similem sacraverant. Cultus regis inter omnia luxuria notabatur: purpuree tunice medium album intertextum erat, pallam auro ditinctam aurei accipitres, velut rostris inter se concurrent, adornabant et zona aurea muliebriter cinctus acinacem suspenderat, cui ex gemma vagina erat. Cidarim Perse vocabant regium capitis insigne: hoc cerulea fascia auro distincta circuibat."

¹³⁰ Ibid., III.II.I (Trans. mine): "Utra queso magis supervacanea narratio? utra longior? Certe siquid in me videretur ociosum, apud equa iudicia poteram putari Livium imitatus, a quo tu recedentem facis qui haud dubie de aureis sericisque vexillis mentionem fecisset, cum de signis cupresseis, ut alie sileantur ineptie, tam curiose narret. At qua in materia? Nempe secundi belli punici, quod, ut ipse testatur, fuit omnium maximum. Audi preterea quid Curtius scribat et si tibi postea videbitur superflua me et insueta narrantem reprehendito."

¹³¹ Facio, *Invective*, I. 73, 21-25.

¹³² Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, I, xiv, 19. On Valla's arguments in favor of neologisms see Besomi, "Dai 'Gesta Ferdinandi regis Araganorum' del Valla al 'De orthographia' del Torelli," 77-121; Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: Storia di una questione umanistica*, 159-65; and López Moreda, "At nova res novum vocabulum flagitat: Neologismos y nuevas acepciones en la prosa latina de los humanistas," 469-506.

¹³³ On the debate between Valla and Facio over vocabulary see Regoliosi, "Introduction," lx-lxi in Valla's *Antidotum in Facium*.

apparently equivalent office.¹³⁴ These were the kinds of imprecisions he had always sought to avoid, and their presence in his *Gesta* ironically raised some of the very same questions that he had posed to Bartolus over a decade prior. Were *insignia* and *arma* ancient or modern words and things? Were there a range of words that could express similar “signs,” or was there a technical and specialized vocabulary around “signs” that needed to be mastered? Who, and on what basis, possessed the authority to determine the proper meaning of these words and the proper uses of the things they designated?

iii. *Between the ars historiae, the antiquitates, and the discovery of Medieval Studies*

Valla was not the only one to have asked these questions. Several figures who were inspired by his philological methods and cultural polemics continued investigating the subject. As they did so, it seems that *insignia*, *arma* and other “signs” came into being as subjects of concerted historical investigation. Eventually, they even came into the purview of two growing areas of humanistic historical inquiry under the umbrella of “antiquarianism,” on the one hand, and as a part of the investigations of the “barbarian” centuries that had followed the collapse of Rome, on the other.

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405-64) obliquely treated the issue of the origins and value of *insignia* and *arma* in an epistle he wrote in June 1451. Precisely, the question this letter posed was “where name and office of the heralds derived” (“*Heraldorum nomen et officium unde exortum sit*”).¹³⁵ As a student of civil law in his hometown of Siena as young man from 1425, Piccolomini had been inspired by Valla’s critique of Bartolus in 1433, and had even written his own critique of contemporary jurisprudence in the form of an epistle after Valla’s example.¹³⁶ By 1439, he was a papal legate to Germany; by 1440 a trusted secretary to the Emperor Frederick III (1415 - 1493); and by 1447 Bishop of Trieste.¹³⁷ He addressed the document we are interested in here to an imperial jurist and the future bishop of Trent, Johannes Hinderbach (1418-86), as well as to a wider group of his colleagues at the imperial chancery in Vienna.¹³⁸

The letter’s contents describe Piccolomini’s personal discovery of an anonymous Latin translation of Thucydides in Saint Paul’s Church in London, which he had visited during an

¹³⁴ Valla’s brief discussion of the *nuntius* in the *Elegantiae* does not address the problem of the distinction between this office and similar ones: “Nuntius, inquit idem, est qui nuntiat, quod autem nuntiat,” 708.

¹³⁵ The letter was first printed in Piccolomini’s *Epistulae familiares* (Nürnberg: Kroberger, 1481, 1486, and 1496). I am using here the version printed as *Epistola CXXXVI* (“Heraldorum nomen & officium unde exortum sit”) from the later *Opera quae extant omnia* (Basil: 1551) 652-54. A modern edition of the same letter (“Bischof Eneas an Johan Hinderbach ... Über Heroen und Veteranen”) can be found in Piccolomini, *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*, Vol. III (Vienna: Holder, 1918), 10-16. The two most comprehensive studies dedicated to its meaning and reception are discussed below: Fürbeth, “Vom Ursprung der Herolde: Ein humanistischer Brief als heraldischer Lehrtext,” 437-488; and Bock, “*Omnia degenerant, nec est hominum genus, quod stet suis legibus*. Zur Schrift ‘Vom Ursprung der Herolde’ des Enea Silvio Piccolomini,” 31-58.

¹³⁶ See Kisch, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini und die Jurisprudenz*, 117; Strnad, “Der ‘Jurist’ Enea Silvio Piccolomini.” 293-97; and Rossi, “Enea Silvio e la polemica umanistica contro la scienza del diritto,” 610-12.

¹³⁷ For Piccolomini’s biography see his *Commentaries* and its “Introduction,” vi-xxiv, by Meserve and Simonetta.

¹³⁸ On Piccolomini’s career at the imperial chancery see Izbicki, Christianson, and Kay, eds., *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius*, 26-48; Baldi, “Un umanista alla corte di Federico III. Il Pantalogus di Enea Silvio Piccolomini,” 161-71; and Fuchs, Henig and Wagendorfer, eds., *König und Kanzlist, Kaiser und Papst: Friedrich III und Enea Silvio Piccolomini in Wiener Neustadt*.

embassy to Scotland in 1435.¹³⁹ In fact, this *vetus historia* was either misattributed or invented by Piccolomini, because one copy of the Greek history had been jealously guarded in the Florentine chancery since the 1410s and another, retrieved from Constantinople in 1435, had been given to Pope Nicolas V and then to Lorenzo Valla, whose Latin translation was the very first to be brought to completion in 1452.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Piccolomini's letter makes this extraordinary claim and asserts that the discovered text had resolved a particularly "doubtful" question concerning "heralds".¹⁴¹ On the basis of the document's contents, and a false etymology to boot, it argues that modern-day *heraldi* are the degenerated descendants of an ancient class of *heroes*.

Heralds (*heraldi*) are those whom our predecessors called *heroes*, who were held to be greater than men and less than gods. For when the ancients saw a remarkable person doing great deeds, dear to the people and sublime in virtue, they counted him in the ranks of the gods in such a way that the deeds they performed were held to be outside of nature and miraculous. And if not miraculous, their virtue seemed nevertheless admirable, whereupon they thought to hold it neither of the Gods nor of men but in the middle of both and by chance they called them with the word "hero", almost as a demi-god. Thus introduced as *heroes* they were later named with the corrupt word "heralds."¹⁴²

The letter proceeds to describe the history of the institution from its purported origins in Dionysus' Indian campaign; how the legendary conqueror honored a group of his *veteranes milites* with "*arma, insignia, nomina, & ornamenta ... quae Reges decent*" and then commanded them to assist their civic leaders, deliberate on the common good, extoll virtues, weed out vices, and guard over a state system of privileges and honors.¹⁴³ On the basis of still other unnamed textual sources, a dizzying genealogy of kings and emperors is listed who purportedly maintained this institution and their *ornamenta* intact. Piccolomini proceeds from Dionysus to Hercules; Alexander the Great to the Jewish Kings; Julius Caesar to Augustus; and Theodoric to Charlemagne. He claims that

¹³⁹ See Piccolomini, *Commentaries*, I.5 ("Aeneas made secretary to the cardinal of Santa Croce, who takes him to France and later sends him to Scotland") and I.6 ("Captivity of Alfonso. Aeneas exposed to grave perils on his journeys. Storms at sea and the marvels of England").

¹⁴⁰ See Pade, "Valla's Thucydides. Theory and Practice in a Renaissance Translation," 275-301; "Thucydides' Renaissance Readers," 779-810; and Chambers, *Valla's Translation of Thucydides in Vat. Lat. 1801 with the Reproduction of the Codex*. On Valla's patronage with Nicolas V following his years with Alfonso of Aragon, see Pagliaroli, *L'Erodoto del Valla*, 19-20; and Coluccia, *Niccolò V umanista: Papa e riformatore. Renovatio politica e morale*.

¹⁴¹ Piccolomini, "Heraldorum nomen" in *Opera quae extant omnia*, 652: "Quae res mihi quoque aliquando fuerunt dubiae. Sed cupienti plurima nosse, ut est humanum ingenium, quarentique certior fieri apud Anglaim, quae olim Britannia dicebantur, in sacrario nobilis aedis sancti Pauli Lundoniensis, vetus historia in manus venit, ante annos sexcentos, ut signatum erat, conscripta, quae si vera est & meae potesta & alio tum satisfacere cupidiati. In ea quid invenerim tibi scribere decrevi, ut acri tuo iudicio cum viro primario & doctissimo Domino Ulrico de montesolis quid tenendum sit censeas, mihi que rescribas. Author historiae Thucidides Graecus annotatus erat, quem fama celebrem clarum novimus, translatoris nomen nullum inveni. Constat tamen peritum fuisse, qui magnum illum et facundissimum autorem Latinae linguae non minorem quam Graecus est reddidit. Non teneo verba historiae, ut erant contexta, sententiae memini."

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 652 (Trans. mine): "Heraldi sunt qui apud maiores nostros Heroes vocitabantur, quos maiores hominibus, diis minors fuisse tradunt. Nam quem Prisci rebus insignem videbant, gratum populis, virtute sublimem, in Deorum cetum colligebant, si modo miracula extabant, quibus eum supra naturam aliquid opera tum fuisse constaret. At si miraculi nihil erat, virtus tamen admirabilis videbatur, hunc neque Deum neque hominem compellere phas putabant, sed medium inter utrumque sortiti vocabulum, heroem vocabant, quasi semideum. Sic Heroës introducti a quibusdam corrupto vocabulo Heraldi sunt appellati."

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 653-654.

each of these leaders rewarded their soldiers not only with stipends for their material needs but also with honors and *virtutis insignia*.¹⁴⁴ Finally, Piccolomini complains that both the institution and the “signs” of honor it distributed had degenerated considerably:

Why it is that, in our times, certain lowly men who do not even fight have arrived at this name, I do not know except that all things degenerate, nor is there any institution among men which adheres permanently to its laws. For nowadays unlearned *doctores* receive *insignia*; and he who never saw a blade declares himself a knight (*militiam*) and decorates himself with golden spurs (*calcaribus aureis*); and men ascend to the pontifical throne, if we may speak of an even greater dignity, who are deprived of both learning and virtue, and vacuous in both their life and their speech.¹⁴⁵

The letter ends with this lamentation and with an exhortation to revive the memory of the *heroes* and their *insignia*, to revive the piety, civic virtue, military achievement, and stability that the ancients – and the Romans in particular – had achieved.¹⁴⁶

The tone and purpose of this document is puzzling, with the nature of Piccolomini’s interest in the office of the “heralds” and their “signs” still unresolved. Interestingly for our purposes, the first concerted study of the letter proposed that it must have been a “humanist finger exercise” whose “medieval” subject matter acted as a pretext for Piccolomini to teach his German colleagues some lessons in humanist epistolary style (the *topos* of the found manuscript, the recourse to multiple ancient sources, the argument from etymology, etc.).¹⁴⁷ This mirrors the thesis that Valla’s critique of the *De insigniis at armis* was also a pretext to articulate more serious concerns (i.e. Latin eloquence and the law). Meanwhile, new readings of Piccolomini’s letter have emerged. Nils Bock situates the letter within the humanistic discourses about the “decline of virtue” and nobility with

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 653: “Nec labor est ullus qui praemia non expectet. Ea propter maiores nostri militibus qui bene pugnassent, non solum stipendia quibus se suamque possent nutrire familiam, se honores amplissimos constituerunt ut coronas, armillas, hastas, & alia virtutis insignia quasi solamen & praemium laboris exacti. Similiter & nos facere decet, qui diis faventibus & magna virtute militum rem Romanam restitimus, & altam pacem toto reformavimus orbe, ne milites qui longa & durissima nobiscum bella peregerunt, ac plurimum sanguinis tum sui tum hostium effuderunt sine mercede tanti laboris evadant.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 654 (Trans. mine): “Cur autem nostris diebus, qui non quam militarunt, et abiecti quidam homines hoc nomen assequuntur, nescio causam nisi quia omnia degenerant, nec est hominum genus quod stet suis legibus. Nam & indocti doctores insignia recipiunt, & qui nudum numquam ensem viderunt, militiam profitentur, nitentque calcaribus aureis. atque ut de nostra dignitate dicamus, absque moribus, sermone leves atque vita, cathedram Pontificalem audemus ascendunt.”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 654 (Trans. mine): “Similiter & nos facere decet, qui diis s/faventibus & magna virtute militum rem Romanam restitimus, & altam pacem toto reformavimus orbe, ne milites qui longa & durissima nobiscum bella peregerunt, ac plurimum sanguinis tum sui tum hostium effuderunt, sine mercede tanti laboris evadant” (And we should do similarly, who wish to revive the friendly gods and great virtue of the Roman military and to restore great peace in the world, lest the soldiers who carry out long and harsh wars with us, and who spill much blood both of their own and of the enemy, go from such labor without reward); “Quaere religiones, percurre mechanicas artes, omnes oberrant, nihil est quod suis legibus puris inviolatisque perseveret” (Bewail the religions; follow the mechanical arts; all of them change; nothing stays the same according to pure and inviolable laws).

¹⁴⁷ Fürbeth, “Vom Ursprung der Herolde,” 438: “In diesem Kreise war der Gegenstand des Briefs, eine Untersuchung über den Namen, das Herkommen und die Geschichte des Heroldsamtes, wohl als kleine humanistische Fingertübung ohne näheren Zweck gedacht. Er bietet eine kunstvolle Verschränkung der wichtigsten humanistischen Gattungen des Briefs, der Geschichtsschreibung und der Rede, geschmückt mit gelehrten Etymologien, dem – fast schon obligatorischen – Fund einer verschollenen Handschrift eines antiken Textes und schließlich den Verweisen auf einen möglichst großen Kanon antiker Quellen; sein Ziel ist zu zeigen, was wir aus den antiken Schriften über der Herolde erfahren können.”

respect to ancient times. Bock remembers that Piccolomini was in contact with professional “heralds,” and very likely with their writings as well, at the imperial court in Vienna and in the international conferences in which he made his career, such as the Councils of Basil (1431) and Arras (1453).¹⁴⁸ Piccolomini also complained bitterly after Frederick III’s coronation in 1452 about how “heralds” had decorated hundreds of undeserving knights and ignorant doctors with prestigious *insignia*.¹⁴⁹ In light of these contexts, Bock argues that the letter was probably a parody of the heralds’ own “myth-histories” of their origins; a historiographical tradition, ironically, that the letter would then go on to influence by giving the heralds around the imperial court a new arsenal of ancient associations.¹⁵⁰

A burgeoning field of humanistic attention to “signs” might also have been a context for the letter, building on Valla’s remarks of which Piccolomini was certainly aware. For not only the modern reception of Piccolomini’s letter, but also its very operation mirrored Valla’s letter against Bartolus in some important respects. The earlier text showed the language and images of the jurists to be “barbaric” and corrupt in contrast with the language and images of the ancients. This later one traced a history of ancient kings, *heroes*, and their images of honor and authority, which cumulatively demonstrated how an originally ancient institution for distributing “signs” of honor had declined into the form in which it was visible at present. The decline of ancient virtue and nobility had been topical since at least the Trecento and even earlier;¹⁵¹ but one thing that seems to be innovative about Piccolomini’s letter is its attempt to describe the history of an institution (from *heroes* to *heraldi*) responsible for distributing “signs” as inseparable from the history of the words that named this institution. Piccolomini’s affinity with Valla’s operation is also suggested by his implication that specifically humanistic knowledge and expertise – knowledge of ancient texts and languages – might be needed and able to replace the knowledge and expertise that other institutions (in this case the “heralds”) were still claiming over “signs” in the present day.

As for the history of the “heralds” that Piccolomini produced, it was confused and flawed. Piccolomini could not have found information about Dionysus in Thucydides; and where he did learn of Dionysus (in Arrianus, who had been recently translated by Pier Paolo Vergerio) there is no account of the “founding” of the *heroes* or of Dionysus’ speech, as Piccolomini claimed.¹⁵² Piccolomini was, however, the dedicatee of the work that arguably succeeded for the first time in finding a serious place for *insignia* and *arma* in humanist scholarship and as objects of study in their own right. This was the *Roma triumphans* by Biondo Flavio of Forlì (1392-1463), one of the rising stars of Quattrocento historiography.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ On these international councils as places of encounter for heralds see Paravicini, “Le héraut d’armes: ce que nous savons et ce que nous ne savons pas,” 475.

¹⁴⁹ Bock, “*Omnia degenerant, nec est hominum genus, quod stet suis legibus*,” 51.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43. On the origins of the heralds’ office see Melville, “Hérauts et héros,” 81-97; “Das Herkommen der deutschen und französischen Herolde. Zwei Fiktionen der Vergangenheit zur Begründung einer Gegenwart,” 47-60; and “Pourquoi des Hérauts d’Armes? Les Raisons d’une institution,” 465-490. See also Boudreau, “Les herauts d’armes et leurs écrits face à l’histoire: enquête sur la diffusion du mythe des origines de leur office (XIV – XVII siècle),” 453-476.

¹⁵¹ See for example Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists*, 1-23.

¹⁵² Fürbeth, “Vom Ursprung der Herolde,” 440.

¹⁵³ The classic study on Biondo is Nogara’s “Introduction” to the *Scritti inediti e rari di Biondo Flavio*, xix-clxxiii. See also Fubini, “Biondo Flavio,” 536-559; and recently Mazzocco and Laureys, eds., *A New Sence of the Past: The Scholarship of Biondo Flavio (1392-1463)*.

Biondo dedicated his *Roma triumphans* to Piccolomini at the 1459 Congress of Mantua, which had been convoked by Piccolomini himself, now Pope Pius II, in response to the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453.¹⁵⁴ The text consisted of a monumental survey of Roman institutions and customs, which served the “express purpose,” James Hankins has argued, “of making known to modern Europeans the glorious victories of their Roman ancestors over the barbarians, thus inspiring them to similar deeds against the Turk.”¹⁵⁵ Biondo’s methodology and engagements with the particular subject of “signs” are what interest us here. For in this synchronic and in-depth investigation of the institutions and customs ancient Rome - a perspective which would not take long to be identified with “antiquarianism” and to secure for its author the name of “father” of the Renaissance antiquarians - *insignia* and *arma* received a new kind of scholarly attention, and with new results.¹⁵⁶

The *Roma triumphans* is divided into ten books that cover five major areas of Roman civilization: religion (Books 1-2); public administration (Books 3-5); the army (Books 6-7); private institutions (Books 8-9); and the triumphs (Book 10). The discussions of “signs” fall into the sixth book alongside the customs and organization of the Roman army.¹⁵⁷ Following his oft-repeated method of explicating his terms, Biondo begins here by investigating the meaning of the word *arma* in an array of predominantly, but not exclusively, legal sources.¹⁵⁸

Arma, Varro says, are the things with which we combat the enemy. And Festus says that *arma* comes from *armis* since things such as a shield, sword, dagger, and spears with which we engage in battle from a distance, are held up by the arm. And Ulpian the jurist (*iureconsults*) [in the interdict] on armed violence (*de vi armata*) says that *arma* are all kinds of weapons, that is, even cudgels (*fustes*) and stones (*lapides*), and not only swords (*gladii*) and spears (*hastae*) and javelins (*frameae*), as Caius affirms in *de verborum significatione*. Aulus Gellius uses the word *arma* often without distinguishing (*expositione*) a staff (*hasta*), heavy javelin (*pilum*), missile (*phalarica*), and small sword (*lingua*).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ On the context of the dedication to Piccolomini see Mazzocco, “Some philological aspects of Biondo Flavio’s *Roma Triumphans*,” 3-4. On the intellectual relationship between Piccolomini and Biondo, see Baker, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror*, 53-66.

¹⁵⁵ Hankins, “Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II,” 123.

¹⁵⁶ The distinction between “diachronic” historiography and “synchronic” antiquarianism, as the latter was revived by Biondo Flavio, was the central argument of the classic essay by Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (1950), which has been reconsidered and recalibrated in recent years. See Miller, “A Tentative Morphology of European Antiquarianism, 1500-2000,” 69-71. On the application and appropriateness of the term “antiquarian” to Biondo’s writings, see Fubini, *Storiografia dell’umanesimo in Italia*, 77-89.

¹⁵⁷ Biondo, *De Roma triumphante libri decem* (Basil: Froben, 1531), 134-137. I am relying throughout on this edition, one of the six printings that followed the *editio princeps* (Mantova, 1472) in the Cinquecento. On the print history see Mazzocco, “Some philological aspects of Biondo Flavio’s *Roma Triumphans*,” 7.

¹⁵⁸ See Pellegrino, “From the Roman Empire to Christian Imperialism: The Work of Flavio Biondo,” 278; and Fubini, *Storiografia dell’umanesimo in Italia*.

¹⁵⁹ Biondo, *De Roma triumphante libri decem*, 134 (Trans. mine): “Arma Varro dicta inquit, quod hi arcemus hostem. Et Festus arma proprie dicuntur ad armis id est, humeris dependentia, ut scutum, gladius, pugio, sica, & ea quibus procul proeliamur tela. Et Ulpianus iureconsultis de [vi] armata: arma inquit, sunt omnia tela: hoc est, Fustes & lapides, non solum gladii hastae & frameae, quod affirmat Caius *de verborum significatione*. Armorum vocabula Aulus Gellius multa sine expositione sic ponit, hasta, pilum, phalarica, lingua.”

Weapons were not kept privately by Roman soldiers, Biondo continues, but were returned after military campaigns to the Tarpean rock or specifically designated *armilustrium*.¹⁶⁰ *Signa*, on the other hand, were images displayed in both public and private contexts: “We shall speak now of *signa*, *insignia*, clothing, and military ornaments, both public and private.”¹⁶¹ Less than thirty years after Valla’s attack on the *De insigniis et armis* and its “obscure” title, *arma* were here firmly distinguished from *signa* and *insignia* here on the grounds of Roman “usage” in practice and in language.

Biondo’s discussion of “signs” continues by explaining that the most archaic Roman “sign” was the *fascia*, used as a sign of peace. *Signa militaria* were later established with figures of eagles, wolves, minotaurs, horses, and *aliae variorum animalium figure*. These changed historically (“*alia item signa militaria per diversa tempora fuerunt*”) and according to the preferences of individual military leaders (“*prout unicuique principi & duci placuit*”).¹⁶² Biondo notes some of the different media that displayed these things - such as the *labarum*, *paludamenta*, and *ephippium* - and cautions that the same term could be used in different ways; for example, *paludamenta* could be a specific form of ceremonial dress as well as a synecdoche for *ornamenta* generally.¹⁶³ Next, he reviews military *ornamenta* including forms of dress, silver and gold pieces and coverings for weapons, precious gems, and figurative decorations, which transcend the category of *signa* proper. He emphasizes one again that the shapes these *ornamenta* took, and the uses to which they were put, were determined both by the decisions and practices of individuals and by inherited cultural practices. There were diverging opinions on the appropriateness of military *insignia* and *ornamenta* amongst the generals, for instance, since some favored austerity while others favored excess.¹⁶⁴ At

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 134: “Arma autem cives Romanos privatim non tenuisse, sed in reditu legionum exercitumque in tarpeiam rupem, aut in armilustrium fuisse condita satis constat. Nam videmus quotiens exercitus educi oportuit, arma inde fuisse accepta. Unde Caesar Lucano [iam] rupes tarpeia sonat. & Spartianus dicit, Vespasianum ex armilustrio arma legionibus permisisse. Et Plinius scribit in foedere, quod expulsis regibus populo Romano dedit Porsenna nominatim comprehensum, ne ferro nisi in agricultura uterentur: & magni Pompeii terii consulatus extare edictum in tumultu necis Clodiana, prohibens ne telum ne telum esset in urbe.”

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 134 (Trans. mine): “Signa iam, insignia, indumenta, & ornamenta militaria dicamus, tam publica quam privata.”

¹⁶² Ibid., 134-35: “Signa iam, insignia, indumenta, & ornamenta militaria dicamus, tam publica quam privata. Signum militare primum Romanis si nimis vetera repetere volumus fuere [manipuli], quales ex [foeno] supra Ovidii carmina describunt. Sed alia post parum fuerunt signa quae in [aerario] pacis temporibus servabant, de quibus Livius septimo: signa eo die a quae [storibus] ex aerario prompta, quae autem fuerint ipsa Romanorum in bello signa, & quando primum haberi coepta, Plinius in naturali historia sic ostendit: aquilam Romanis legionibus C. Marius in secundo consulato suo proprie dicavit. Erat & antea prima eum quatuor aliis Lupis, minotauris, equis, apris, que singulos ordines anteibant: paucis ante annis sola aquila in acie portari coeperat, reliqua in castris relinquebantur.”

¹⁶³ Ibid., 135: “Nam era labarum quod signum in historiis frequentatum, Romae etiam nunc in monumentis principum marmore videmus incisum, labans quadratum vexillum cordula hastae appensum, erant & draconum & aliae variorum animalium figure, prout unicuique principi & duci placuit. Insignia vero & ornamenta militum in bello militaria haec fuerunt, paludamenta primo, de quibus Varro sic habet. Paludamenta insignia atque ornamenta militaria. Ideo ad bellum cum exit imperator & lictores mutarunt vestem & litua incinuerunt, dicitur paludatus proficisci, qui tunc fiunt palam, ut conspiciant. Et Festus Paludati, armati, ornati, omnia enim militaria ornamenta paludamenta dicebant.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 135: “Fuerunt vero principum variae opiniones de militum ornamentis. Suetonius enim de Caesare, post magnam pugnam atque victoriam remisso officiorum munere, licentiam omnem passim lasciviendi permittebat: lactare solitus milites suos etiam ungentatos bene pugnare posse: nec milites eos pro concione sed commitiones appellabat, habebatque tam cultos, ut argento & auro politis armis ornaret, simul & ad speciem, & quo tenaciores eorum in praelio essent metu damni. Helius Spartianus de Pescenio nigro contrarium opinioni Caesaris habet. Idem vet(s)uit, ne zonam milites ad bellum, item aureos vel argenteos nummos portarent, ne ad hostem aliquid praedem perveniret: sed liberis, & uxoribus servaretur. Idemque Helius de Alexandro severo, Inuit parthicam expeditionem, quam tanta disciplina, tanta reverentia sui egit, ut non milites, sed senatores transire dicerent, quo cunque inter legiones

last, Biondo reports on the origins of the practice of hanging decorative shields covered with the *imagines* of family ancestors in private Roman homes, a practice which Pliny had described in his discussion of portraiture in Book XXXV of the *Natural History*.¹⁶⁵ This became an important passage, as we will see further down, for later accounts of the origins of specifically “medieval” signs.

The *Roma triumphans* established Biondo as a kind of “humanist herald” in the meantime, which is to say a recognized expert on the order and distribution of honor and its visible manifestations, not only in ancient Rome but also in the present in so far as Rome offered a cultural model and standard. This is testified by the content and context of Biondo’s next work, the *Borsus*, on the comparative dignity of the *ars iuris* and *ars militaris*, whose composition resulted from a *querelle* Biondo was asked to adjudicate as the Council at Mantua unfolded.¹⁶⁶ This short tract complained of the degradation of these once-illustrious offices in the present, following Piccolomini and so many others before him, but the complaints were based on a much more solid conception of the institutional and visible forms that military and judicial honor took in ancient Rome and thus offered a clearer measure of the changes that had taken place in the meantime.¹⁶⁷ Biondo explained here, for example, that the status of the *equites* had declined drastically since the fall of the Roman empire, while the status of the *iurisconsulti* had increased.¹⁶⁸ He also argued that the modern *doctores legum* and their *insignia* could not be considered equivalents to or even descendants of their Roman counterparts.

When the name of doctor of law (*doctor legum*) was invented we are not able to affirm, but we believe it to have been little earlier than the beginning of this century.

facient. Milites vestiti honeste, calciati ad decorem, armati nobiliter, equis etiam instructi & ephippiis, & frenis decentibus, prorsus ut Romanam rem publicam intelligerent, quicumque Alexandri viderunt exercitum. Capitolinusque de Maximinio iunior: Usus est aurea sorica exemplo Ptolemeorum: usus est & argenea, & clipeo gemmato inaurato, & hasta inaurata: fecit & spatas argenteas, fecit etiam aureas, fecit galeas gemmatas & bucculas.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 135-36: “Ultimaque militum ornamenta Plinius ponit clipeos cum templis post finitam militiam affigerentur, primus Appius Claudius qui consul cum Servilio fuit anno urbis conditae CCLXX posuit in Bellonae aede scutum. Virtutes suas placuit in excelso specatris & titulos honorum legi: post eum Marcus Aemilius collega in consulatu Q. Lutatius non in basilica modo aemilia, verum & domi sui posuit. Id quoque antiquo exemplo, scutis enim qualiter apud Troiam pugnatum est continebantur imagines. Unde & omen habere, clipeorum origo plena virtutis, faciem reddi in scuto cuiusque qui fuerit usus illo.”

¹⁶⁶ The tract was named after Borso d’Este Duke of Ferrara, its dedicatee. See Rossi, “Il *Borsus* di Biondo Flavio: *militia e iurisprudencia* a confronto dall’antica Roma all’Italia delle corti rinascimentali,” 1-26; and Pincelli, “Introduzione” in Flavio, *Borsus*.

¹⁶⁷ See Biondo, *Borsus*, III.10: “Militum multae et diversae fuerunt species suo unaquaeque vocabulo cognitae. Equites nanque, classici, dimissaneis, conducti, tutulli, proletarii, beneficiarii et legionarii pariter milites appellati sunt, quod diligenter ostensum ad propositam quaestionem plurimum faciet.” Ibid., XVIII.105-106: “Nomina iam collegisse videmur a priscis tradita eorum, qui iuris et iustitiae artibus dediti erant, quique in nostro presenti opere cum militibus de honore et dignitate decertant. Suntque hi iureconsulti, patroni, advocati, obnubatores, praevicariatores, subscriptores, cognitores, procuratores, quibus omnibus unica nunc est doctoris legum aut notarii appellatio.” On Biondo’s major project dedicated to the decline of Roman institutions, the *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades*, see Fubini, *Storiografia dell’umanesimo in Italia*.

¹⁶⁸ Biondo, *Borsus*, XXII.121-23: “Quavis vero priscis temporibus equites digni dignissimis etiam iureconsultis praeferrere et honore ac gloria digniores haberi consueverint, alia tamen nunc utrorumque ratio est habenda. Multo nanque per factam insignem vel potius enormem imperii Romanorum satus et conditionis mutationem magis equites quam iureconsulti gradu suo sunt delapsi, ut satis esse videatur eos ex equitibus et dimissaneis, qui virtutibus praepollentes, potentatu etiam, quo saepius quam iureconsulti muniuntur, et recte vivendi norma insignes sint, iureconsultis, pratronis, et advocatis in suo genere eis similibus praeferrere.”

Nor are we able to determine when that custom or artifice (*modum vel potius artificium*) of adorning the law students and *doctores* with gold was founded.¹⁶⁹

This text is testament to the success, and evolution, of Valla's project to reassess the foundations of authority in his society on new historical and linguistic grounds that privileged Rome. It also suggests why "medieval heraldry," as we define it today, could not yet be articulated: The Middle Ages was not, for Biondo and his community, a *locus* in which origins - of images, no less than of customs or of words - were to be found.¹⁷⁰

Steps towards the "discovery" of the Middle Ages as an autonomous era and object of study were made in the following century, and in France above all.¹⁷¹ This process is often associated with the name of Guillaume Budé, the learned secretary to Louis XII (1467-1515) and then François I (1494-1547) of France.¹⁷² Budé's legal and philological masterpiece, the *Annotationes in quattuor et viginti Pandectarum libros* (1508, 1528), continued the project of reconstructing and elucidating the language of Justinian's major legal compilation that Valla and other Italian humanists had initiated.¹⁷³ At the same time, Budé paid more attention than his Italian predecessors to the later derivatives and developments of ancient legal terms, procedures, and social customs. While remaining a "classicist" himself - tracing the origins of feudal law to ancient Roman clientage, for example - Budé became famous for his influence on the first generation of French jurists, scholars, and secretaries who possessed the political will (principally the argument for French sovereignty) and the scholarly means to claim autochthonous status for feudal law and the Middle Ages together. It can be shown that Budé's commentary on the *Pandects* made a related contribution to the study of "signs" by suggesting how certain classes of these things could be both ancient in origin and new, insofar as they became used for new purposes and endowed with new names after Rome's decline.

Budé's commentary to the *De origine iuris* discusses the origins of the "modern" images appearing on shields, which Budé calls *insignia gentilia*.¹⁷⁴ This begins by repeating Biondo's discussion of *signa militaria* amongst the Romans; but it goes on to address the question of how these *signa* had evolved. Budé surmises that certain "modern" practices derived from an already

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., XVIII:106-107 (Trans. mine): "Quam quidem doctoris legum appellationem, etsi quando inchoaverit satis affirmare nescimus, paucis ante seculis initium habuisse certissimum habemus ... Quis autem primus fuerit qui modum vel potius artificium doctorandi et doctores auro ornandi adinvenerit, nec invenire potui nec ab ipsorum aliquo intelligere." For a discussion of this passage and more on Biondo's ideas about the relationship between contemporary and ancient jurists see Rossi, "Il Borsus di Biondo Flavio," 20-24.

¹⁷⁰ On Biondo's relationship to the "discovery" of the Middle Ages see Hay, "Flavio Biondo and the Middle Ages," 59-90; and Pontari, "'Nedum mille qui effluerunt annorum gesta sciamus.' L'Italia di Biondo e l'invenzione del Medioevo," 151-176.

¹⁷¹ My understanding of this phenomenon is especially indebted to Kelley, "De origine feudorum," 207-228; Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, 53-86 ("The Science of Philology: Guillaume Budé Begins the Restoration of Roman Law"); and Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*.

¹⁷² See Sandy, "Guillaume Budé: Philologist and Polymath. A Preliminary Study," 79-108; and Ducos, "Legal Science in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 297-313.

¹⁷³ Sandy, "Guillaume Budé: Philologist and Polymath. A Preliminary Study," esp. 89-108. Budé's title refers to the Greek (*Pandectae*) rather than Latin (*Digesta*) title of the Justinianic compilation. His *editiones principes* are the *Annotationes in Quattuor et Viginti Pandectarum Libros* (Paris: Bade, 1508) and *Alter Editio Annotationum in Pandectas* (Paris: Bade, probably 1526). I am using a later edition here, Budé, *Annotationes in Pandectas* (Lyon: Sebastianus Gryphius, 1551). For Budé's own assessment of his indebtedness to Lorenzo Valla see, for example, his "Vallensis laus" in Ibid., 39 (Ex lege De iustitia & iure).

¹⁷⁴ Budé, *Annotationes in Pandectas*, 139-145 ("Ex lege De origine iuris").

close connection in Roman culture between *gentilitas* and the right to possess and publically display the *imagines* of ancestors.

There were these three laws among the ancients: of agnation (*agnationis*), of kindred (*gentilitatis*), of stock (*stirps*) ... But a noble kindred seems to have been, as it appears in the definition of Cicero, that which was able to show images of their ancestors. So says Tranquillus in the life of Vespasian. The *gens* Flavia, he said, was indeed obscure and without any family portraits (*maiorum imaginibus*), but nevertheless was one that the Republic had no reason to be ashamed of. Thus images of kin were often taken for nobility.¹⁷⁵

Budé suggests further that the arrangements of ancestral shield-portraits (*clipeatae imagines*) in Roman villas, as they were connected to one another with painted lines or *stemmata*, may have been precursors to the images painted on shields and inherited as the “signs” of noble families later on; those which were called *armi* as well as *stemmi* in the modern Italian vernacular.

Pedigrees (*Stemmata*) were traced with lines between the painted portraits (*imagines pictas*). The archive rooms were kept filled with books of records and with written memorials of official careers. Outside the houses and around the doorways there were images of those mighty spirits with spoils taken from the enemy fastened to them that were not allowed to be taken down and were displayed even when the house changed ownership. So much is in Pliny. I believe that *insignia gentilia*, which are vulgarly called *arma* (*quae arma vulgo vocantur*), derived from these practices since they too were originally prizes of true virtue and decorations for the accomplishment of great deeds.¹⁷⁶

Budé relies here on the same passage from the *Naturalis Historia* that Biondo had used for his discussion of ornamental shields in Book VI of the *Roma triumphans*.¹⁷⁷ Where Biondo remained

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 142 (Trans. mine): “Tria igitur haec erat iura apud antiquos: agnationis: gentilitatis: stirpis ... Sed nobiliorum fuisse videtur gentilitas, ut ex illa definitione Ciceronis apparet, eorum scilicet qui imagines generis sui proferre poterant. Inde Tranquillus in Vespasian. Flavia gens, inquit, obscura illa quidem, ac sine ullis maiorum imaginibus, sed tamen Reipublicae nequaquam poenitenda. Unde imagines pro nobilitate generis accipi saepe solent.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 144-5 (Trans. mine): “Stemmata vero lineis discurrebant ad imagines pictas. Tablina vero codicibus implebantur & monumentis rerum in magistratu gestarum. Aliae in foribus & circa limina aliorum ingentium imagines erat: affixis hostium spoliis: quae nec emptori refringere liceret, quae etiam dominis mutatis domus ornamenta erant. Hactenus Plinius. Pro iis ut (opinor) posteriora insignia gentilia habuerunt: quae arma vulgo vocantur, quae ipsa quoque primum ut simile est veri virtutis praemia fuerunt, ac rerum praeclare gestarum decora.”

¹⁷⁷ Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV.2 (Trans. Rackham, 264-65, with my emphasis on the sentences that Budé copies from Pliny directly): “aliter apud maiores in atriis haec errant, quae spectarentur; non signa externorum artificium nec aera aut Marmora: expressi cera cultus singulis disponebantur armariis, ut essent imagines, quae comitarentur gentilicia funera, semperque defuncto aliquot totus aderat familiae eius qui umquam fuerat populus. *stemmata vero lineis discurrebant ad imagines pictas. tabulina codicibus implebantur et monumentis rerum in magistratu gestarum. aliae foris et circa limina animorum ingentium imagines errant adfixis hostium spoliis, quae nec emptori refigure liceret, triumphabantque etiam dominis mutatis aeternae domus*” [In the halls of our ancestors it was otherwise; portraits were the objects displayed to be looked at, not statues by foreign artists, nor bronzes nor marbles, but wax models of faces were set out each on a separate side-board, to furnish likenesses to be carried in procession at a funeral in the clan, and always when some member of it passed away the entire company of his house that had ever existed was present. *The pedigrees too were traced in a spread of lines running near the several painted portraits. The archive-rooms were kept filled with books of records and with written memorials of official careers.* Outside the houses and round the doorways there were other presentations of those mighty spirits, with spoils taken from the enemy fastened to them, which even one who bought the house was not permitted to unfasten, and the mansions eternally celebrated a triumph even though they changed their masters]. For more bibliography on this passage see Winkes, “Pliny’s Chapter on Roman Funeral Customs in the Light of *Clipeatae Imagines*,” 481-484.

focused on the ancient custom, however, Budé established a connection between the ancient *imagines* and the *arma*, *armoiries*, and *stemmi* used in his own time. While in the *Roma triumphans*, *insignia* were distinguished from *arma* as two distinct words designating two distinct classes of things in antiquity, now a different distinction emerges between the ancient “signs” and their counterparts in post-classical times.

Different groups of interested parties made more decisive breaks between the classical customs and vocabularies, on the one hand, and the “medieval” ones, on the other, all the while using these tools from the philological and antiquarian traditions. Already from the first decades of the sixteenth century, for example, we have a letter from the Neapolitan humanist, poet, and academician, Iacopo Sannazzaro (1458-1530), affirming that “as far as what one can read of Roman affairs, there is no proof at all by which one could show that the ancient Romans had in their families these *arme*, that is *insegne*, which everyone both noble and plebian typically has now.”¹⁷⁸ Sannazzaro may have known Budé’s successful legal commentary, and was certainly familiar with Biondo’s antiquarian research, which he absorbed.

Because of this, all good men of letters universally hold as a certainty that these very *insegne*, vulgarly called *arme*, by which families are distinguished today are without a doubt modern inventions. One should not deny, however, that the Romans had *insegne* in their armies, like the that of the eagle, which was the principle banner of the Roman troops. They also had the *insegna* of the wolf and other images (*immagini*), and these belonged to the Republic. There existed also *insegne* that were not perpetually used but that captains would choose at their own will, as one can discern in the war between Octavio and Marc Anthony. These were similar to ones we use today as well, and which in the vernacular we call *divise* and *imprese*.¹⁷⁹

“With regards to the family *insegne* that today we call *arme*,” he affirmed with confidence, “everyone of intelligence agrees about this: That the whole matter of these *arme* was an invention of the French.”¹⁸⁰ This document is notable for the precociousness of its articulation of “French” origins for the class of images “by which families are distinguished,” an argument which was elaborated upon for centuries to come. But it was not until the seventeenth century, it seems, that the thesis was supported by the invention of the word *heraldry*, with Romance rather than a Latin roots.¹⁸¹ In the nineteenth century, when “heraldry” became an “auxiliary science” to a self-

¹⁷⁸ Sannazzaro, (“De l’origine e invenzione de l’arme overo insegne”), *Opere volgari*, 392-93 (Trans. mine): “[I]n quanto si legge delle cose romane non ci è probazione alcuna per la quale si potesse mostrare che gli antichi Romani avessero avuto nelle loro famiglie queste arme, cioè insegne, che comunemente avemo tutti, tanto nobili quanto plebei.” The editor of Sannazzaro’s *Opere volgari*, Alfredo Mauro, places this undated letter between 1506 and 1530.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 392-93 (Trans. mine): “[E] per questo universalmente tutt’i buon letterati tengono per cosa certa che queste tale insegne, volgarmente chiamate arme, per le quali si distinguono oggi le famiglie, siano cose moderne senza dubbio alcuno. Non si nega, però che i Romani non avessero avute insegne nelli eserciti, come era l’aquila, che fu il principale stendardo degli eserciti romani; avevano ancora l’insegna del lupo et altre immagini, e queste erano insegne proprie della Republica. Erano poi altre insegne non perpetue, ma che capitani se le facevano a loro arbitrio, siccome si vede nella guerra fra Ottavio e Marc’Antonio, secondo a questi tempi vedemo usare queste tale particolarità, che volgarmente chiamiamo divise et imprese.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 393 (Trans. mine): “Ma quanto spetta all’insegne delle famiglie che oggi chiamiamo arme, tutti uomini d’ingegno concordano in questo, che tutt’il fatto di quest’arme sia d’invenzione francese.”

¹⁸¹ It has emerged recently in Heraldry Studies that the word “heraldry” in the European vernaculars (*héraldique*, *Heraldik*, *heraldiek*, *araldica*) appears to be of seventeenth-century rather than medieval provenance as a designation for a class of images. Hiltmann, “The Emergence of the Word ‘Heraldry’ in the Seventeenth Century: The Roots of a Misconception,” 107-116 suggests that the word was carried over from the older word “herald” when the previously wide-ranging institution became associated with the study and and regulation of “signs” primarily at

consciously positivist mode of history writing, lingering associations between “heraldry” and antiquity were still energetically debunked.¹⁸² Before the “French” invention and the “Italian” *impresa* belonged to entirely separate fields of knowledge, however, a learned discourse specializing precisely in the distinctions between “signs” had been elaborated in Italy; in the treatises of the Cinquecento.

iv. *The Philological Tradition and the Imprese Treatises*

The relationship between the philological tradition and the so-called *impresa* treatises becomes apparent for the first time, arguably, with Girolamo Ruscelli’s 1556 edition of Giovio’s *Dialogo dell’impresa: The Ragionamento di Monsignor Paolo Giovio sopra i motti et disegni d’arme e d’amore che comunemente chiamano imprese. Con un discorso di Girolamo Ruscelli intorno allo stesso soggetto* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1556). As we have discussed in the previous chapter, this early edition of Giovio’s dialogue, combined with Ruscelli’s discussion of the “same subject,” made at least two crucial interventions. It helped to establish Giovio as the “father” of a new genre of writing about “signs”; and it insisted on the necessity of establishing clearer distinctions between “signs” than Giovio himself provided.¹⁸³ This oft-repeated acknowledgement of Giovio’s “paternity” had the effect of obscuring ties between these Cinquecento publications and prior traditions of humanistic scholarship.¹⁸⁴ Ruscelli’s distinctions between “signs,” meanwhile,

this stage. The philological and antiquarian tradition that we have been following suggests that the application of the new word, with its vernacular/Romance rather than classical etymology (*heraldry* rather than *arma* or *stemma*), was likely related to the discovery of Romance philology and of the Middle Ages as well. For an example of how the etymology of the word “heraldry” has been used as proof of the medieval origins of “heraldic” images see Manaresi, “Araldica.”

¹⁸² See for example Seyler and Siebmacher, *Geschichte der Heraldik: Wappenwesen, Wappenkunst, Wappenwissenschaft*, Pref. (Trans. mine): “Noch weniger hat meine Arbeit etwas mit dem sogenannten Wappenwesen des klassischen Alterthums etwas zu thun ... Das Wort “Wappen” ist so ausschliesslich der Terminus technicus zur spezifischen Bezeichnung einer Erscheinung der Culturgeschichte des Mittelalters, dass in der Anwendung desselben auf ein früheres Zeitalter ein, einer burlesken Parodie angehörender Anachronismus liegt” [Sill less does my work with heraldic science have to do with classical Antiquity ... The word “crest” (*Wappen*) is only the technical term for the specific expression of a phenomenon of cultural history of the Middle Ages, which in its application to an earlier age is a burlesque parody proper to anachronism]. On the history of heraldry’s establishment as an “auxiliary science” to Medieval Studies, we may look forward to some insights in a forthcoming study by Peter N. Miller, *Cultural History before Burkhardt: An Essay on the Foundations of Material Culture*, as announced in his book *Peiresc’s History of Provence: Antiquarianism and the Discovery of a Medieval Mediterranean*, 8.

¹⁸³ Ruscelli discusses the importance of “distinctions” openly in the *Ragionamento*, for example at 137 (Trans. mine): “Oggi chiamiamo IMPRESE che sono quasi del tutto diverse da quelle, & per non saper far questa distinzione in quella guisa, che io soggiungerò non molto di sotto, s’ingannano molti nel saper far l’Imprese, & essi veramente in molte ingannato il Giovio, di quelle che egli racconta nel precedente Ragionamento suo col Domenichi” [Today we call *Imprese* things that are completely different from them. And for not knowing how to make the distinction (*distintione*) that I will outline below, many fool themselves into believing that they know how to make *impresa*. Truly they are fooled in many points by Giovio, who spoke about these things in the previous *Ragionamento* with Domenichi]. On the study of the distinctions between words in grammatical and rhetorical traditions before Valla see Brugnoli, *Studi sulle differentiae verborum*.

¹⁸⁴ On Giovio’s “paternity” and the problem of attributing “beginnings” to the *impresa* treatises and other literature on “signs” in the Cinquecento see Manning, *The Emblem*, 37-38 and 73-79.

established his reputation as “perhaps the most acute and without a doubt the most lucid theoretician of the Renaissance on the art of *imprese*.”¹⁸⁵

These distinctions relied crucially on philological evidence and techniques. Ruscelli’s *discorso* is organized into a series of separate treatments of the “signs” he wishes to distinguish from one another and from the *impresa* especially. In each case, Ruscelli begins with an account of the origin of the word or name commonly used for the “sign” he is dealing with. The word *livrea*, he informs readers for example, derives from the Latin phrase “LIBER ERAM,” which became filtered subsequently through the Spanish and Italian vernaculars. This etymology corresponds to the proper usage that Ruscelli then attributes to the *livrea* as “sign” of “noble and amorous servitude.”¹⁸⁶ The word *divisa*, he informs us further, is purely and “properly” Italian and corresponds to a slightly different kind of “sign”:

By now the word *Livrea* has become ours, either from the Spanish or the Latins as we have said; just as from the one and the other language we have many other words. We nevertheless in Italy have another word that is properly ours, and this is DIVISA, and it is made from the verb “divisare” that has come into use, and is very beautiful. To us “DIVISARE” means to put into order in a certain way and by certain means, as when a lord orders his seneschal to prepare something in a particular manner ... And since Lords and Knights put into order and “devise” certain manners of colors, figures, and clothing, these things took on the name of “divise,” which as was said previously, is commonly found in the mouths of all of Italy and used by many good writers.¹⁸⁷

The word “insegna” “is made from the Latin *insignia*, and with it one intends the standards, banners, shields, surcoat, and other things that belong to soldiers, captains, and even to magistrates.”¹⁸⁸ The word “motto” may have derived from Provençal but acquired broader connotations in “our common Italian and Tuscan” tongue.¹⁸⁹ The word “emblem” was used in

¹⁸⁵ Nova, “*Dialogo dell’imprese: La storia editoriale e le immagini*,” 73 (Trans. mine): “... Girolamo Ruscelli, forse il più acuto e senza dubbio il più lucido teorico del rinascimento sull’arte dell’imprese.”

¹⁸⁶ Ruscelli, *Ragionamento*, 153-154: “Et perché tuttavia elle dinotan sempre servitù nobile & amorosa, rimase in piedi il nome di LIVREA, dalla sua prima origine LIBER ERAM, che tanto val quanto a dire, Non son più libero, non son più mio. Et se i nostri non la vogliono pur riconoscere dallo Spagnuolo, ma dal Latino, non è pero, che non possiamo ancor noi riceverla così per V & non per B essendo ancor molto proprio à noi il voltar la B in V.”

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 153 (Trans. mine): “Ora questa voce Livrea è già fatta nostra, o da gli Spagnuoli, o da i Latini che l’abbiamo; si come da gli uni & dagli altri ne abbiamo molte altre. Noi tuttavia in tutta l’Italia ne abbiamo una, che è nostra propria, & questa è DIVISA, & e fatta a noi dal verbo “divisare,” che è posto in uso, & molto bello. Vale à noi DIVISARE, quasi il medesimo che ordinare con certo modo, & con certa maniera, si come quando un padrone ordinerà al siniscalco suo, farai questo, & questo in questa & questa guisa ... Onde si dice il divisamento, cioè l’ordinatione con modi, & maniere particolari. Et per questo perché i Signori & Cavalieri essi medesimi ordinavano & divisavano quei modi & quelle maniere di colori, di figure, & di vestiti, elle si presero il nome di “divise,” la qual voce, come ho detto poco avanti, è commune nelle bocche di tutta Italia, & usata d’altri buoni scrittori.”

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 156: “INSEGNA poi è voce fatta dal Latino *Insignia*, con la qual voce essi intendeano gli stendardi, le bandiere, gli scudi, le sopravvesti, & ogni altra cosa tale de’ soldati & de’ capitani, benché ancor de’ magistrati.”

¹⁸⁹ See *Ibid.*, 168: “La voce MOTTO, credo io che sia veramente venutasi da’ Provenzali, de’ quali si ha ch’ella è propria. Et à noi nella nostra lingua è molto usata. Et habbiamo poi la forma del dir nostro, FAR MOTTO, che val parlar brevemente, & quasi dire due, ò tre parole ... Et habbiamo il verbo MOTTEGGIARE, che vale scherzar con parole piacevoli, o pungenti. È adunque la parola MOTTO, nostra Italiana comune, & Toscana buona, & molto usata. Et quantunque si potesse dir, ch’ella fosse tirata dal verbo Latino Mutire, tuttavia, perché in effetto ella a noi scrive con doppia t, & prende poi molto più larghe significationi, noi non astringendoci severamente all’origine sua, come non s’ha far’ ostinatamente in alcuna voce, diremo, ch’ella à noi importa un detto breve ò da ridere, ò da

several ways by the Greeks and the Latins, and some of these ancient definitions Andrea Alciato had drawn upon to “baptize” his famous book of figures and verses.¹⁹⁰ Lastly, Ruscelli comes to the word *impresa*.

Wishing now to come to discuss *Imprese*, which is the most beautiful, the most ingenious, the most noble, and most perfect of all the other kinds treated so far in this *Discorso*, I will not hesitate as usual to define and declare the word that these things hold as their own proper name. IMPRESA is a word made by our own verb IMPRENDERE, which means to take something upon oneself with a firm and obstinate intention to bring it to an end.¹⁹¹

In summary, this method presupposes that distinctions between words constitute proof of distinctions between things; and that the historical and cultural origins of words constitute windows onto the historical and cultural origins of things. Ruscelli uses and cements his reputation as an authority on language, and on the Italian language particularly, throughout his discussion of “signs.”

If not all the treatises dedicated to *impresa* in the Cinquecento made distinctions and words their organizing principle, Ruscelli nevertheless had a lasting impact on the tradition. The contribution of Luca Contile, for example, which first brought Abd-el-Kader Salza into the “selva selvaggia di questi trattati cinquecenteschi” in the early years of the 1900s, is quite clearly an extension of Ruscelli’s model.¹⁹² This is the *Ragionamento di Luca Contile Sopra le proprietà delle imprese con le particolari de gli accademici affidati e con le interpretationi et croniche* (Pavia: 1574). It too is organized as discussion of nine separate “inventioni, impropriamente chiamate imprese” and a final chapter on the *impresa* “proper,” with each discussion beginning with definitions and commentaries on words.¹⁹³ It offers a much-expanded repertoire of information with respect to Ruscelli’s *Discorso*, by including not only the philological, but also the antiquarian knowledge that had been generated about “signs” up to that point. In Contile’s discussion of “insegne,” for example, a section “on the diadem used by the ancient and modern emperors, and on the difference between the ancient and the modern” directs readers to “see the fifth book of Aulus Gellius and Biondo in the sixth book of the *Roma triomphante*” for information about how “certain leaves and herbs were in ancient times more valued than gold because they represented

pugnare, ò sentenzioso & grave, che verrà ad abbracciar tutto quello, che i Latini dicono *iocos*, dicteria, & in voce Greca *apophthegmata*.”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 174-5: “EMBLEMÌ è voce tutta Greca, & usata molto da i Latini ... Questa voce à loro significava tre cose, i Mosaici, che oggi noi diciamo, cioè quei lavori di pittura fatti di pezzetti di pietre ... L’altra cosa, che ella significa, sono le nostre Tarsie, cioè quei lavori di legnami di più colori contesti insieme ... La terza significazione di tal nome Emblema, era appresso i Latini questa, cioè, che anticamente soleano i nobili usar’alcuni lor vasi di terra cotta, come di porcellana, ò d’altra sorte di creta di più colori ... Ora di queste tre significazioni, che ha la detta voce Emblema in Latino & in Greco, è da credere, che questa ultima non sia stata quella, che abbia mosso l’Alciato à battezar con’essa quel bel libretto suo, con figure & versi. Ma io credo (ne credo che si possa altramente credere) che egli pigliasse quel nome dalle prime significazioni.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 178 (Trans. mine): “Ora volendo venire à ragionar dell’Imprese, che è la più bella, la più ingenuosa, la più nobile, & la più perfetta di tutte l’altre sorti fin qui trattate in questo Discorso, serberò il mio solito di non lasciar di diffinire, & di dichiarar la voce, che elle tengono, come per nome lor proprio in questa parte. IMPRESA è voce à noi fatta dal verbo nostro IMPRENDERE, che val pigliare à far’ una cosa con ferma & ostinata intentione di condurla à fine.”

¹⁹² Salza, “La letteratura delle ‘imprese’ e la fortuna di esse nel ‘500,’” 234.

¹⁹³ Contile, *Ragionamento ... sopra le proprietà delle imprese*, 1v: “Ragionamento di Luca Contile sopra VIII inventioni e loro origini, impropriaente chiamate imprese, e sopra la vera proprietà di esse e loro inventore, da lui recitato nella Academia de gli Affidati in Pavia”

the highest spectacle of perpetual and honorable fame.”¹⁹⁴ A subsequent chapter on “armi” begins by acknowledging Budé’s insight about the “new” uses of the word in post-classical times.

These *armi* are called *insegne* in Latin, which is attributed sometimes to a defect in the Latin language and sometimes to their being (which they are) a new invention, such that for these figures that denote nobility a more appropriate name could not be found. We are informed about this by Budé, who affirms that in some centuries after Roman times this invention became customary as a sign of gentility (*una nota di gentilità*), and to similar figures of much worth and worthy of being discussed fully, justly and not without reason the name ARME was applied.¹⁹⁵

Contile acted as both a philologist of images and as a compiler of philological and antiquarian knowledge about images, in this last and most ambitious work of his career.

Another thread linking the *imprese* treatises of the Cinquecento to the philological tradition that we have traced since Lorenzo Valla’s career is their tendency to make prescriptive as well as descriptive claims. The treatises consistently proposed “conditions” and “rules” about their subject matter, which was both linguistic and visual. Giovio’s “rules” had to do with how *imprese* could be perfectly composed.

But before I come to these details, it is necessary for me to tell you the universal conditions that one looks for in making a perfect *impresa*, which is perhaps the most difficult to be made well by a perspicacious and fertile mind (*ingenio*), and which is born from the knowledge of ancient writings (*la quale nasce dalla notizia delle cose scritte dagli antichi*). Know, therefore, my sir Ludovico [Domenichi], that the invention or *impresa*, if it is to be done well, must meet five conditions. First, just proportion between the soul and the body. Second, that it should not be obscure in such a way that it requires a Sybil as an interpreter to make it understood, nor so clear that every commoner can understand it. Third, that above all it has a beautiful appearance, which can be accomplished well by including stars, suns, moons, fire, water, leafy trees, mechanical instruments, bizarre animals and fantastical birds. Four, that it does not include any kind of human form. Five, it requires a *motto* which is the soul of the body and which should typically be in a language different from the idiom of he who wears the *impresa*, so that the sentiment expressed is more hidden. It also should be brief, but not so much that it becomes unclear, for example three or four words unless it is a whole or partial line of verse.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 7 (Trans. mine): “Del Diadema usato dalli imperatori antichi e moderni e la differentia dello antico el moderno”; “E chi desidera di saperne appieno, vegga Aulogellio al quinto libro, Biondo al sesto di Roma trionfante & il volterrano al vigesimo sesto con tutto cio e’ ben da credere che quelle foglie, quelle frondi & quelle herbe, fussero in quei tempi piu che l’oro e che le gemme apprezzate perche rappresentavano sommo spettacolo di perpetua & honorata fama.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 11 (Trans. mine): “Sono pero queste armi da latini chiamate insegne, ciò si puo dire, o, che sia difetto della lingua latina, o che sia inventione (come è) nuova si che alle stesse figure le quali dinotano nobilita; non si pote trovare un nome più conferente. E questo ci puo far credere il Budeo, il quale afferma ne i tempi dopo i Romani alcuni secoli; tale inventione essersi posta in consuetudine come nota di gentilita, & e’ simil figura di molto pregio, e degna ch’appeino se ne ragioni, e si fara con giuditio vedere che non fuor di proposito e’ stato allo stesso segno applicato il nome ARME.”

¹⁹⁶ Giovio, *Dialogo dell’imprese*, 37-38 (Trans. mine): “Ma prima ch’io venga a questi particolari, è necessario ch’io vi dica le condizioni universali che si ricercano a fare una perfetta impresa, il che forse è la più difficile che possa essere ben colta da un ingegno perspicace e ricco d’invenzioni, la quale nasce dalla notizia delle cose scritte dagli antichi. Sappiate addunque, messer Lodovico [Domenichi] mio, che l’inventione o vero impresa, s’ella debbe avere del buono, bisogna ch’abbia cinque condizioni. Prima, giusa proporzione d’anima e di corpo. Seconda, ch’ella non sia

Later treatises were sometimes more ambitious about their prescriptions by weighing in, for example, on who could compose certain kinds of “signs,” who could display them, and under what kinds of circumstances. Contile, for example, made claims about who could avail themselves of the most noble form of the “impresa” once he had finished elucidating the “true” properties of the form.

Amongst all men, some live under the simple empire of good fortune, and others under the simple dominion of virtue, and others under the one and the other dominion both. To those under the empire of good fortune, which is meant those born with noble blood and a wealth of possessions and noble titles, it is right to publish *imprese*, as long as they or their ancestors are not marked with some infamy. To the others under the dominion of virtue accompanied by a noble and praiseworthy profession, it is equally appropriate to publish *imprese*. To those who are both rich and noble and virtuous, it is even more appropriate to use and to publish a worthy testimony of oneself. Excluded are those blemished by infamy and the professions of the mechanical arts, excepting engineers in the service of princes, excellent painters and famous sculptors.¹⁹⁷

This suggests how humanists had in fact arrogated to themselves cultural “jurisdiction” and authority over this subject, nearly a hundred and fifty years after Valla had begun to do so in his attack of the jurists in 1433. On a rather widespread scale, “laws” around images were now being articulated on the authority of humanistic expertise.

This same remark from Contile tells us that discourses around “signs” were as implicated in socio-political questions, during the Cinquecento, as they had been in the centuries prior. It was a political claim, and not simply a scholarly one after all, that men who were noble by blood possessed the same rights to the “impresa” as the practitioners of “noble and worthwhile professions.” Contile reinforces this point at the end of his *Ragionamento* when he proposes the *imprese* of his own academy-members, the Accademia degli Affidati in Pavia, as examples of the “true properties” of the “sign.”¹⁹⁸ The decision to foreground his own Academy gives the impression that the authority of humanist knowledge to preside over the “signs” that made authority

oscura di sorte ch'abbia mestiero della sibilla per interprete a volerla intendere, né tanto Chiara ch'ogni plebeo l'intenda. Terza, che sopra tutto abbia bella vista, la qual si fa riuscire molto allegra entrandovi stele, soli, lune, fuoco, acqua, arbori verdeggianti, instrumenti meccanici, animali bizzarri e uccelli fantastici. Quarta, non ricerca alcuna forma umana. Quinta, richiede il motto che è l'anima del corpo e vuole essere communemente d'una lingua diversa dall'idioma di colui che fa l'impres perché il sentiment sia alquanto più coperto. Vuole anco essere breve, ma non tanto che si faccia dubioso, di sorte che di due o tre parole quandra benissimo, eccetto se fusse in forma di verso o spezzato.”

¹⁹⁷ Contile, *Ragionamento ... sopra le proprietà delle imprese*, 43r-44v (Trans. mine): “Primamente di tutti gli huomini, altri sono sotto l'imperio semplice della buona fortuna, altri sotto il semplice dominio della virtù, altri sotto l'uno e l'altro dominio. Quei che sono sotto il semplice imperio della buona fortuna s'intendono per coloro che nati sono nobili di sangue e ricchi di robba e di titoli signorili, a questi s'apertiene di publicare l'imprese; pur che non siano macchiati d'infamia o essi o vero prossimi loro antenati. À Quelli però che sono sotto il dominio della virtù accompagnata da nobile e lodevole professione, parimente si conviene di publicare l'imprese. A Coloro ancora che sono ricchi e nobili e vertuosi è cosa molto più convenevole di usare e di publicare si degno testimonio. Si escludono nondimeno li tinti d'infamia, & i professori dell'arti meccaniche, eccettuati gli'ingegneri che stanno a servigi di Principi, i Pittori eccellenti e gli statuarii famosi.”

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41: “Dissi poco fa che gli essempli recitati confermarebbero qual fusse la vera proprietà delle Imprese e 'l maggior conferramento di essa stessa proprietà si potrà leggere in tutte l'Imprese degli Affidati, i quali in vigor delle loro leggi hanno ordinato e comandato non doversi in verun modo publicar fra le loro Imprese veruna se non conintentione vertuosa e magnanima.”

manifest, in the present and in the past, was not *per se* up for much debate in Contile's mind. The still-open question was, perhaps, which humanist communities would be able to compile and deploy their knowledge advantageously.

These fundamentally political issues were forgotten from a distance, however, once the "sign" treatises appeared as a self-contained genre; invested in intuiting an objective grammar of signs; and in exercising a shared set of "chivalric" or "courtly" values typical of their setting and time. The tensions that we have seen playing out around their subject were real nevertheless. This history prepares us to return to our initial question of how the "sign" treatises directly and indirectly shaped the reception of the so-called romance epics of Boiardo and Ariosto. The following chapter seeks to answer this question by studying some of the discussions of "signs" that took place at the Este court where Boiardo and Ariosto were in substantial ways formed and oriented. The humanist community here had distinctive traits and investments, I shall argue, with respect to the humanist traditions that we have been studying here. With much less interest in establishing "distinctions" between words, things, and the populations who used them throughout history, we will see that they articulated a very different grammar – indeed, in some respects it was an anti-grammar - of signs.

III

Humanist Philology and the Genealogies of Images at Guarino's School

Your poets, speaking as they do an altogether different language, I do not attempt to handle at all.
-Cicero, *De Oratore*¹

Guarino Guarini of Verona (1374-1460) was one of the leading humanists of the Quattrocento.² He had studied Greek with Manuel Chrysoloras (1366-1415) on the peninsula and in Constantinople, and built an excellent reputation teaching grammar and rhetoric in Venice, Florence, and Verona. In 1429, he established a “school” in the Este capital at Ferrara and remained there for the rest of his life with generous support from the dynasty; and with Leonello d’Este (1407-1450), the Marquis’ eldest son and heir, as his most illustrious pupil. Guarino trained here the first generation of men formed by the *studia humanitatis* to occupy key administrative roles in the Este states.³ Once Leonello acquired vicegerent powers from his father Nicolò in 1434, and while he held the Marquisate between 1441 and 1450, this community made reforms to the University at Ferrara, the court culture around the Este, and their political administration. These efforts established a unique “political culture of humanist stamp” and influenced cultural production around the dynasty for generations.⁴

This chapter analyzes several textual sources to illuminate how Guarino and some of his students engaged with “signs” called *insignia*, *arma*, and so on. It begins by reading a short report from Lorenzo Valla relaying how Guarino reacted to his epistle against the *De insigniis et armis* in 1433. This suggests that Guarino may have perceived some of the limitations of Valla’s thinking about “signs” in relation to Latin eloquence and about the necessity of clear relations between words and their referents. Secondly, the chapter turns to an oration by Leonello and an epistle by Guarino from that same year, which react to an honorary gift of *insignia* that Leonello received from the Holy Roman Emperor. These documents show how the teacher’s literary interests, personal style, and political allegiances to the Este might have opened new avenues for the

¹ Cicero, *De oratore*, II.61 (Trans. Sutton): “Poetas omnino, quasi alia quadam lingua locutos, non conor attingere.”

² The classic biographies of Guarino are Sabbadini, “Vita di Guarino Veronese”; and Bertoni, *Guarino da Verona: Fra letterati e cortigiani a Ferrara (1429-1460)*; with important revisionary accounts from Garin, “Guarino Veronese e la cultura a Ferrara”; and Grafton and Jardine, “Humanism and the School of Guarino: A Problem of Evaluation.” For a recent biography and bibliography see Pistilli, “Guarini, Guarino.”

³ Guarino’s reputation as the harbinger and catalyst of a cultural revolution in Quattrocento Ferrara was established already within his lifetime. See the funeral oration delivered upon his death in 1460 by Ludovico Carbone, “Oratio habita in funere ... Guarini Veronensis,” in Garin, ed., *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 382-417 (Trans. mine): “Usque adeo bonarum litterarum ruina facta erat. Postea vero quam divinus hic vir dextro sidere Ferrariam ingressus est, secuta est mirabilis quaedam ingeniorum commutatio” [Up until that point the decay of good letters was a fact. But after this divine man arrived in Ferrara, by the fortune of the stars, there followed an amazing change]. For the durability of this interpretation see Tissoni Benvenuti, “Guarino, i suoi libri, e le letture della corte estense,” 63-79; and Tateo, “Guarino Veronese e l’Umanesimo a Ferrara,” 15-58.

⁴ See Folini, *Rinascimento estense*, 214-244. On the reforms to the University see Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 99-106; Garin, “La concezione dell’università in Italia nell’età del Rinascimento,” 169-171; and Castelli, ed., *La Rinascita del sapere: Libri e maestri dello studio ferrarese*. On the administrative reforms see Dean, “Commune and Despot: The Commune of Ferrara under Este Rule, 1300-1450,” 190-191; and *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara*, xi-xii.

humanists around the dynasty to re-interpret the *insignia* and *arma* that had long been essential to their feudal political transactions. An additional source is Angelo Decembrio's (1415-67?) dialogue, the *De politia litteraria*, where *insignia* and *arma* are embedded in a wide-ranging discussion of classical texts, images, and ideas recorded here as characteristic of the learned community around Guarino. Lastly, we study a section of the Latin epic *Borsias*, written by Tito Vespasiano Strozzi (1425-1505) throughout the second half of the Quattrocento. Closely connected to Boiardo's *Inamoramento de Orlando*, this epic also presents Este "signs" through discourses of ekphrasis and prophecy, and together with the history of the dynasty's genealogical origins in ancient Troy.

One of the motivations of this chapter is to better understand the discourses around "signs" in the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso*, as studied in the first chapter of this dissertation. Its findings show that these were indeed expanding on tendencies and models from the local humanist tradition. Another goal is to better understand the disconnect that we observed between the amorphous visual language in the poems, on the one hand, and the grammatical matrices which interpreted them since the Cinquecento, on the other. This chapter's central thesis is that the school of Guarino practiced a distinctive philology and philology of images with respect to that which had been developed by Valla and others through to the *trattatistica sulle imprese*. Philology here was designed from the reading of ancient poetry rather than ancient law.⁵ It permitted flexible relations between words and their referents; disregarded the historical distinctions that Valla and his followers were often invested in; and fed into genealogical discourses supporting the Este's claims to longevity and legitimacy. This philology confounds the category of the Middle Ages, that of "medieval heraldry," and the distinctions between *armi* and *imprese*. It also challenges certain modern assessments of "humanist philology" in at least two ways: by underscoring the diversity of approaches and interests that became subsumed under this label; and by suggesting that the humanists' investments in a dynastic political state nourished in some critical directions, even as it limited in others, their engagements with the ancient world.

i. Intimations: Guarino's "Praise" of Valla

In 1447, Lorenzo Valla wrote the *Antidotum in Facium* to rebut Bernardo Facio's criticisms of his scholarship, polemical persona, and history of Ferdinand of Aragon, which had been disseminated a year prior.⁶ Facio had been close to Valla at the court of Alfonso of Aragon in Naples. He had also been a student of Guarino's. It was perhaps for this reason that Valla chose to use Guarino's support and friendship, as he perceived it, throughout the *Antidotum* as leverage against Facio's claims.⁷

⁵ For the idea that philology, and humanist philology specifically, is shaped by the texts on which it is applied see Grafton, "Humanist Philologies: Texts, Antiquities, and their Scholarly Transformations in the Early Modern West," 176.

⁶ On the polemic see Besomi, "Introduzione" to Valla's *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Araganorum*; Regoliosi, "Introduzione" to Valla's *Antidotum in Facium*; and Regoliosi, "Per la tradizione delle *Invettive in L. Vallam* di Bartolomeo Facio," 389-97.

⁷ See for example Valla, *Antidotum in Facium* IV (Trans. mine): "Nam te mentiri, dixisse me saepe disputasse cum illis, & reliqua, vel hinc coargui potest, quod cum Guarino numquam, nisi semel, contuli, eo biduo quo Ferrariae fui, cum illac contrahendae cum homine doctissimo amicitiae grata transissem" [For you lie having said that I disputed often with him and others. This can be refuted henceforth by the fact that I never met with Guarino except once, over the course of two days in which I was in Ferrara, which I passed together in pleasing friendship with the

One of these passages provides an unexpected clue about how Guarino responded to Valla's 1433 critique of contemporary jurisprudence and of the *De insigniis et armis* by Bartolus of Saxoferrato. In it, Valla characteristically quotes one of Facio's charges. He then responds to the charge by recalling some brief but suggestive words of praise that he apparently received from Guarino upon sending him his epistle against Bartolus.

*You rail against Bartolus, a man held to be most wise assert him to have badly interpreted the civil law; and against him you bring forth an invective. An invective you call it? What is an invective if it doesn't inveigh against one's living enemies? No invective spares a man's customs: Did I say anything against the customs of Bartolus or of his animosity towards me? ... That libellum, when I sent it to Guarino in Ferrara, wrote back to me with elevated words that I remember: "Lorenzo Valla you should be adorned with the laurel crown" [*Laurenti laurea et Valla vallari corona ornandus es*]; and with a Virgilian verse, "This is Mezentius, as fashioned by my hands" [*manibus meis Mezentius hic est*].⁸*

According to this report, Guarino had written a letter praising his younger colleague with a pun associating Valla's name with the laurel crown, and with a citation from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

The *Aeneid* was a favored text of Guarino's. It has been shown that quoted it regularly in his correspondence in ways that reveal his attentive reading of the original and his subtle adaptation of the poem to new contexts.⁹ Here, his citation surprises for its unlikely comparison between Valla, the unfailingly irreverent young humanist, and *pious Aeneas*, Virgil's epic hero. In another sense though, it is remarkably well-suited to the occasion. The line refers to the *tropaeum* Aeneas fashions after he kills one of his most trenchant enemies in Latium, the arrogant and impious Etruscan tyrant Mezentius.

A mighty oak, its branches lopped all round, he plants on a mound, and arrays in the gleaming arms [*arma*] stripped from Mezentius the chief, a trophy [*tropaeum*] to you, great Lord of War. To it he fastens the crests dripping with blood [*rorantis sanguine cristas*], the warrior's broken spears [*tela*], and the breastplate [*thoraca*] smitten and pierced twice six times; to the left hand he binds the bronze shield [*clipeum*], and from the neck hangs the ivory sword [*eburnum*]. Then his triumphant comrades – for the whole band of chieftains thronged close about him – he thus begins to exhort: 'Mighty deeds have we wrought, my men; for the future, away with all fear! These are the spoils [*spolia*] and first fruits [*primitiae*] of a haughty king; and this is Mezentius, as fashioned by my hands [*manibus meis Mezentius hic est*].¹⁰

most learned man]. Guarino's wrote letters in support of Valla to Antonio Beccadelli and Poggio Bracciolini. See Guarino, *Epistolario*, Vol. 2, n.618 and n.622; with Sabbadini's commentary in Vol. 3, 299-302.

⁸ Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, IV.xiii.21-22, 25 (Trans. mine): "*Bartolum virum sapientissimum existimatum incessans et ius civile ab eo male interpretatum asserens; in quem cum invectivam quandam Papie edisses. Invectivam appellas? Quis fere nisi adversus vivos inimicosque invehitur? Nulla invectiva moribus parcat: quid ego in mores Bartoli dixi aut quod illius mihi odium? ... Quem libellum cum Ferrariam ad Guarinum misissem, ille mihi verbis quorum superius memini rescripsit: Laurenti laurea et Valla vallari corona ornandus es et versu vergiliano manibus meis Mezentius hic est.*" We are unfortunately missing the letter from Guarino that would correspond to Valla's report.

⁹ See Shaw, "References to Vergil and Homer in the Letters of Guarino Veronese," 193-200.

¹⁰ Vergil, *Aeneid* XI.5-16 (Trans. Fairclough, 237): "ingentem quercum decisis undique ramis/ constituit tumulo fulgentiaque induit arma./ Mezenti ducis exuvias, tibi magne tropaeum/ bellipotens; aptat rorantis sanguine cristas/ telaque trunca viri, et bis sex thoraca petitum/ perfossumque locis, clipeumque ex aere sinistrae/ subligat atque ensem collo suspendit eburnum/ tum socios (namque omnis eum stipata tegebat/ turba ducum) sic incipiens hortatur

The surrogate body Aeneas fashions for the once-menacing warrior becomes a support for the *arma*, which have now become *spolia*; an offering to Mars; and an encouragement to Aeneas' companions exiled from Troy. Intriguingly, the “trophy” captures some of the central aspects of Valla's polemic, as discussed in the previous chapter: The boldness of Valla's challenge to a towering authority; and the ways in which he sought to deactivate the *arma* and *insignia* of his opponents to propose alternative “signs” for a new and revolutionary humanist community. The prominent role given to Mezentius' various pieces of armature in Virgil's scene – the “crests dripping with blood,” the bronze shield, the broken pieces of armor, etc. – suggests that Guarino fully grasped the importance of the subject matter of the *De insigniis et armis* for the battle that Valla had waged.

However, the same comment suggests that Guarino may have grasped some of the limitations of Valla's position as well. When Mezentius' *arma* become *spolia*, after all, they become decorations for Aeneas as well as *signa* to the Trojan soldiers of the gods' favorable disposition towards their cause. They are part of a world in which weapons (*arma*), preeminently alongside other divinely- and humanly-crafted objects, convey layered meanings and are referred to by multiple names; as they indicate the future of Roman history to the Trojans, Rome's illustrious past to Virgil's readers, and participate in this history's unfolding. Virgil's illustrious poem, in other words, does not make the kinds of clear distinctions between “signs” and words that Valla had called for in his epistle of 1433. This consideration confers a certain irony onto Guarino's “praise,” which Valla seems not to have noticed.¹¹

Scholars recently have discussed how Valla's ideas about language could be incompatible with the language of ancient poetry, often characterized by semantic “license” and deliberate anachronism.¹² Thus Mariangela Regoliosi in her study of Valla's conception of poetry:

The distrust in the prophetic capacities of the word, combined with the exaltation of historical writing as the highest form of knowledge – connected to the general and exclusive attention Valla pays to clear and univocal speech, that is to *elegantia* – produces ultimately a kind of non-poetic poetry, which concedes nothing to allusion, the fantastic, or the marvelous, and which aims prosaically towards certainty and historical truth.¹³

Valla's assumption that relations of *proprietas* should link words and their referents could exclude self-consciously allusive, archaizing, and/or prophetic speech. This could arguably threaten the vitality of Latin by seeking to pin down the meaning of words with only certain examples of usage, and from only some contexts to the exclusion of others. Lodi Nauta has suggested in addition that a whole range of Valla's positions “may have rendered him less sympathetic to the faculty of the imagination” *tout court*:

ovantis:/ “Maxima res effecta, viri; timor omnis abesto/ quod superest; haec sunt spolia de rege superbo/ primitiae manibus meis Mezentius hic est.”

¹¹ For another example of Guarino's “damning praise” see Looney, “The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento,” 169.

¹² On poetic language in Latin and some of the ancient debates around its distinctive “license” and characteristics see Ferri, “The Language of Latin Epic and Lyric Poetry,” 344-366.

¹³ Regoliosi, “Le ‘virtutes loquentes’ di Lorenzo Valla,” 121 (Trans. mine): “La sfiducia nelle capacità profetiche della parola, combinata con l'esaltazione della scrittura storica come forma superiore di conoscenza – e connessa, occorre dirlo, alla generale ed esclusiva attenzione da parte del Valla per la parola Chiara, univoca, per la *elegantia*, insomma – produce alla fine una poesia-non-poesia, che non concede nulla all'allusione, all'fantastico, al meraviglioso e punta invece, prosaicamente, sul certo e sul vero storico.”

his aversion to abstract terms and entities; his criticism of Aristotelian psychology; the association of imagination with feigning and faking; and his emphasis on the social and cultural role of language in society rather than on the creative, imaginative use of it by individual speakers. In addition, Valla did not profess to teach eloquence or to write about the precepts of rhetoric, but wanted to study the finer semantic and formal distinctions of words in Latin. His aim was not to teach how to summon up arresting pictures, arising from the power of imagination, and how to employ the tropes of simile and metaphor in order to convey these pictures to an audience. His interests focused on the intricacies of the Latin language and vocabulary, on semantic precision, on *elegantia* rather than eloquence.¹⁴

In our histories of humanist philology, however, where both Guarino and Valla figure prominently and often side-by-side, the latter has consistently been represented as the more advanced reader of ancient texts. For example, in W. Keith Percival's surveys of Renaissance grammar, Valla marks a later stage of a single revolution that in the older man's scholarship and pedagogy was only partially achieved.¹⁵ In Anthony Grafton's *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (1997), an extended comparison between the reading practices of Valla and Guarino (and his students) concludes that the former "became emblematic of the humanists' new world of the book" while Guarino's "school" remained an "intellectual if not a physical *hortus conclusus*."¹⁶ Gaps in ancient texts were filled-in rather than acknowledged at the Este court, Grafton argues; and appropriate interpretations, frequently flattering to the Este, were determined in advance. In Christopher S. Celenza's study of reading and canon formation at the school of Guarino, "Creating Canons in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara: Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria* 1.10" (2004), this group's literary and philological arguments are studied "precisely because they are not in the front rank of humanist achievements."¹⁷ A shared assumption has been that the humanists' around the Este were limited by their political ties to the dynasty, whereas the "front rank" humanists either did not face the same kind of political pressure or else overcame it more successfully in their scholarship.

There is a growing body of work reassessing the history and manifestations of philology across cultures, however, which shows that philology has been less univocal as a historical achievement than it has been a context-specific and continually-negotiated set of practices.¹⁸ This perspective may be helpful for reassessing the nature and value of the scholarly activities of Guarino and his students. By studying this group's continued engagements with *insignia* and *arma*, I make the case here that ancient poetry, the examples of Virgil and of Herodotus, and the nature of the political agendas and practices pursued by the Este and their administrators, contributed to their development of a philology that diverged in some positive ways from Valla's lesson. This

¹⁴ Nauta, "Lorenzo Valla and the Limits of Imagination," 93-94.

¹⁵ See Percival, "Renaissance Grammar: Rebellion or Evolution?" 73-74: "The second stage, represented by the *Regulae grammaticales* of Guarino Veronese (composed shortly before 1418), was marked by limited innovation but no explicit criticism of the medieval system of grammatical description. The third and final stage was reached when antagonism towards medieval grammar was openly expressed. This took place for the first time in the writings of Lorenzo Valla in midcentury."

¹⁶ See Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*, 11-52, here 46-49.

¹⁷ Celenza, "Creating Canons in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara," 43. Baxandall makes a similar assessment of the "mediocrity" of humanist scholarship at the Este court with regards to the criticism of art specifically, in "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este," esp. 304. We will return to Baxandall's article below.

¹⁸ See Pollock, "Introduction" to *World Philology*, 1-24; and Zetzel, "The Bride of Mercury: Confessions of a Pataphilologist," 45-62.

was a philology that nourished poetic allusion and allusiveness; fantastical and marvelous contents; a historiography steeped in poetry and myth; and a sense of the connections and connectivity between people and things across barriers of language, culture, and time.

ii. *Leonello d'Este and Guarino on equestrian insignia from the Emperor in 1433*

In September of 1433, Guarino da Verona, Lorenzo Valla, and the Holy Roman Emperor were present in Ferrara at the same time, in a convergence of events that affords a glimpse into the different contexts in which the two humanists encountered *insignia*, *arma*, and *signa*; and the different ways in which Guarino interpreted these objects as both a scholar and a supporter of the Este.

Valla's short visit to the Este capital took place only a few months after the scandal at Pavia that had resulted in the loss of his university position.¹⁹ The ostensible purpose of the visit was to meet Guarino personally. He also brought with him the latest version of his dialogue, first *De voluptate* and renamed *De vero bono*, in which Guarino now figured as one of the interlocutors.²⁰ It was seemingly the only personal encounter between Valla and Guarino during their lifetimes, although the two were in touch through letters and intermediaries both before and afterwards. As Sabbadini has pointed out, Valla may also have been incited to visit Ferrara at this time to seize the occasion of the Holy Roman Emperor's contemporaneous presence there.²¹

The Emperor Sigismondo (1368-1437) was in Ferrara between the 9th and the 17th of September 1433 by most accounts, while making his way back across the Alps after receiving the imperial crowns in Milan and Rome.²² He was celebrating a difficult peace treaty between Milan, Florence, and Venice that the Marquis Nicolò III d'Este had recently contracted. He took the

¹⁹ See Guarino, *Epistolario*, Vol.3, 299-302; Barrozzi and Sabbadini, *Studi sul Panormita e sul Valla*, 58-68; and Valla, *Antidotum in Facium* IV.

²⁰ Guarino's character substituted that of Antoino Beccadelli ('il Panormita'), Valla's erstwhile friend who had since become a rival. See Lorch, "Introduction" to Valla's *De voluptate (On Pleasure)*, esp. 16-26; and Garin, "Motivi della cultura filosofica ferrarese nel Rinascimento," 613-14.

²¹ See Sabbadini, *Guarino Veronese e il suo epistolario*, 72.

²² A useful source for the visit is Giovanbattista Pigna, *storiografo di corte* for the Este in the mid sixteenth century, who reviews Sigismondo's affairs in Italy between 1432-1433 from the Este perspective. See Pigna, *Historia de Principi di Este*, 456-460, here 460 (Trans. mine): "Poi nel volere passare in Alemagna, ancora che mostrasse mal'animo verso gran parte de Potentati Italiani; non fu però che non si rendesse molto gratioso à Nicolò, col quale nel suo ritorno da Roma volle alloggiare per alcuni dì, & honorarlo al partir suo, che fu à dicesette di Settembre, di'un amplissima investitura, che inheriva à quella di Carlo Quarto: & d'una libera donazione di venticinque castelli de primi, posti ne territorii di Modena & di Reggio" [While passing through onto Germany, he still showed ill-will towards a large part of the Italia princes. This is not to say that he didn't show himself to be very gracious towards Nicolò, with whom he wished to lodge for some days upon his return from Rome, and to honor him upon departing, on the seventeenth of September, with a very large investiture, extending that of Charles IV. He also made a free donation of twenty-five castles in the territories of Modena and Reggio]. See also Muratori, *Antichità Estensi*, Vol.2, 196 (Trans. mine): "Credò Cavalieri cinque Figliuoli del medesimo Principe, cioè Leonello, Borso, e Folco non legittimi, ed Ercole, e Sigismondo fanciulli legittimi; l'ultimo de' quali fu anche tenuto da lui al sacro fonte. Poscia adì 17 con suo Imperiale Diploma, da me pubblicato nella Piena Esposizione, confermò al Marchese Niccolò tutti gli Stati dipendenti dal S.R. Imperio" [He created knights of five sons of the Prince: the illegitimate Leonello, Borso, and Folco; as well as Ercole and Sigismondo, the last of whom he also baptized. Afterwards, on the 17th, with his Imperial diploma published in the *Piena Esposizione*, he confirmed to the Marquis Niccolò all of the States dependent on the Holy Roman Empire]. The diploma of investiture is indeed published in Muratori, *Piena Esposizione*, 385-87, with commentary on 222.

occasion to confirm the investitures that his predecessors had conceded to the Este over the Imperial feuds of and around Modena and Reggio.²³ In addition, he conferred the rank and *insignia* of knighthood onto five of Nicolò's sons. In the *Diario Ferrarese*, the anonymous chronicle compiled in the Este chancery in those years, this honorary ceremony is the only event remembered in association with the Imperial visit, suggesting how it became a matter of pride for the court.

1433. On the 9th day of September, the Emperor Sigismondo came to Ferrara and entered through the south gate on a Wednesday evening at the hour of XXIII. He was dressed in carmine, and he lodged at the court with Messer Brunoro della Scala. And on the 13th the said Emperor made knights of five sons of the Illustrious Marquis Nicolò, that is Messer Leonello, Messer Borso, Messer Hercole, Messer Folco, and Messer Sigismondo; and the latter he baptized. On the 16th day of the said month the Emperor left Ferrara and went to Mantova, where he was honored.²⁴

The occasion may have been a proud moment for Guarino as well, since his pedagogy was put on display by the twenty-six-year-old Leonello. Only three years after Guarino's arrival in Ferrara, the prince delivered a Latin oration to the Emperor on this occasion, which he had purportedly composed himself.²⁵ Guarino developed a more idiosyncratic perspective on the Emperor's gift, however, which he expressed in an epistle to Leonello shortly afterwards.²⁶

In the written form that Leonello's oration has survived, it conveys a message of humility and appreciation to one of the Este's most decisive overlords. It opens by declaring Leonello's admiration for the august figure, and by comparing him positively to some of the most famed leaders of the ancient world.

Alexander from Macedonia brought war and waste to Darius and the Kings of Persia, as he overran all of Asia. But you, as you bring peace and tranquility, what lands do not submit to you? Julius Caesar, with the blood of the Gauls, Germans, and Britains, attacked Galia with massacres and took away the liberty of others. But you, Greatest Caesar, you are able to bring to rest the discords of Italy, as you wander through her gates, provinces, and nations; as you look out for the well-being of Christian peoples and eradicate internal discords. This day will be remembered

²³ The Este's territories were famously mixed from a legal point of view. See Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 50-56 (La formazione del dominio).

²⁴ *Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti*, in Muratori, ed., *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* XXIV, 186-187 (Trans. mine): MCCCCXXXIII. Adì IX. di Settembre Venne a Ferrara lo Imperadore Sigismondo, & intrò dentro per la Porta di sotto uno Mercori di sera a hore XXIII., & era vestito di carmesino, e alloggiò in Corte con Messer Brunoro de la Scala. Et adì XIII, il dicto Imperadore fece cinque Figlioli dello Illustrissimo Marchese Nicolò Cavalieri, cioè Messer Leonello, Messer Borso, Messer Hercole, Messer Folco, Messer Sigismondo: & quello lui lo tenette a baptesimo: & adì XVI del dicto Mese si parti da Ferrara il predicto Imperatore, & andò a Mantova, & li fu facto grande honore." On the *Diario ferrarese* as a part of the annalistic tradition of court historiography from Ferrara see Folin, *Rinascimento estense*, 32-36.

²⁵ Leonello d'Este, "Ad Sigimundum Caesarem Augustum oratio acta per Leonellum Estensum," in Mittarelli, ed., *Bibliotheca codicum mss. monasterii Michaelis Venetiarum*, 665-667. There is a manuscript copy at the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea II.151, f. 27v, which I have not however consulted. Another oration was delivered for Sigismondo on this occasion by Francesco Barbaro, who had been Guarino's student while he was teaching Greek in Venice, and which has also been edited recently. See Barbaro, *Orazione di Francesco Barbaro patrizio Veneto a Sigismondo Imperatore detta in Ferrara l'anno 1443*.

²⁶ Guarino, *Epistolario*, Vol.2, n.620. The relationship between Guarino's letter and Leonello's oration is discussed in Sabbadini's commentary to this epistle; and in Pardi, *Leonello d'Este, Marchese di Ferrara*, 34-36.

as the most happy of our life and, as they say, will be marked off with a precious stone.²⁷

Leonello thus acknowledges the importance of the Emperor's person, office, visit, and gift. He continues by praising Sigismondo's personal virtues, and by expressing his own and his family's gratitude.

You are celebrated and known not only amongst all peoples but also by fame for the loftiness, prudence, equanimity, and clemency of your soul. And it is not a secret to you, Invincible Caesar, that this humble house is so honorably decorated by you that for such kindness the sons of its sons and those born to them will be perpetually devoted to you.²⁸

In conclusion, Leonello remembers the act of subjection that his father, the Marquis Nicolò III, would have rehearsed before Sigismondo on this very occasion.

As my parent, the humble servant of your illustrious majesty, previously said, to bear witness to his observance, subjection, and obedience towards your *imperium*, he offers to your majesty, here into your hands, the keys not only to his possessions but also to his heart and soul [*cordis et animi clave*].²⁹

The document bears witness to a form of political feudalism in which the Este were continually engaged on multiple fronts. In the words of Marco Folin, an underlying principle of this politics was that "power was not administered with force or with laws, primarily, but rather by distributing privileges, feuds, commissions, and offices amongst subjects in such a way as to win over loyalty and the spontaneous willingness to obey."³⁰ Trevor Dean, Folin and other political historians have shown us in recent decades how essential these kinds of relationships were from the very beginning and all throughout the Este's tenure in northern Italy; and also how the Este, by necessity, occupied different positions within them.³¹ On the one hand, they gave gifts and privileges and expected "love" in return; from the local nobility, for example, and from foreigners whom they attracted into their orbit and administration. On the other hand, they received gifts and privileges from others and had to offer their "affections" in return; from powerful foreign powers,

²⁷ Leonello d'Este, "*Ad Sigismundum Caesarem Augustum oratio*" (Ed. Mittarelli; Trans. mine): "Alexander Macedo, ut Regi Persarum Dario bellum ac vastitatem importaret, totam pervagatus est Asiam; Tu vero, ut populis pacem ac tranquillitatem parares, quas non adiisti terras? Iulius Caesar, quando Gallorum, Germanorum ac Britanorum cruore, caedibusque Gallias incuravit, & maria, dum libertatem impugnat alienam. Tu autem, Fortissime Caesar, tot per portus, tot provincias, tot nationes discurrens infractus, ut Italicas seditiones sedare possis, Christiani populi commodis consulas & intestinas omnium discordias eradices. Haec igitur dies inter nostrae vitae felicissimas locanda erit, & ut ferunt, meliori numeranda lapillo."

²⁸ Ibid. (Trans. mine): "Tu enim pro animi tui altitudine, prudentia, aequitate atque mansuetudine non solums apud omnes gentes, sed etiam fama super cetera cognitus & celebrates es. & fore, clam te non est, Invictissime Caesar, cum haec humilis domus tanto honore abs te honesta sit, ut pro tanto beneficio natorum natos, & qui nascentur ab illis, perpetuo devinctos habiturus sis."

²⁹ Ibid. (Trans. mine): "Ut autem praefatus genitor meus illustris Tuae Maestatis servitor humilis, suam erga Imperium Tuam observantiam, subjectionem, obedientiamque testatur, ecce Tuae Serenitati non modo rerum suarum, verum etiam cordis & animi clave suppliciter offert, & in manibus collocat tuis" [And just like my father, as a humble servant of your majesty, in observance, subjection and obedience of your majesty already testified, here is offered into the hands of your greatness the keys not only to his possessions but also to his heart and soul].

³⁰ Folin, *Rinascimento Estense*, 234: "[I]l potere non si amministrava con le armi, non con le leggi, bensì distribuendo fra i sudditi privilegi, feudi, provvigioni e uffici, in modo da guadagnarsene la fedeltà la spontanea disponibilità ad obbedire." On the same page, Folin quotes Borso d'Este expressing this sentiment in a 1453 letter to Alfonso of Aragon: "Le forteze deli Stati consisteno, sequondo nui, principalmente in lo amore deli subditi."

³¹ See for example Dean, *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara*; and Trombetti Budriesi, *Vassalli e feudi a Ferrara e nel Ferrarese dall'età precomunale alla signoria estense (secoli XI – XIII)*.

for example, and above all the Popes and Emperors, the ultimate legal overlords of their territorial dominions. Dean has described how the distinction of knighthood was one kind of gift that the Este both gave and received, as they created knights amongst their own allies, and entered the orders of knighthood founded by others, in this case the Emperor Sigismondo.³²

Guarino's epistolary response to his pupil's knighting and oration in 1433 presents a different discourse with which to interpret the Emperor's visit.³³ Focusing on the *insignia* specifically that had been granted to the young prince, the letter opens by congratulating Leonello and by interpreting the distinction in relation to his personal virtues and education.

Today, my king and lord Leonello, because your citizens learned that the *insignia* of the equestrian order had been honorably granted, or rather restored, to you, great happiness was set into motion both in public and in private, and especially in the holy temple where they celebrated for their sake the honor in you and your illustrious parent with piety and observances. For since they perceive that your many gifts of both body and mind, which you inherited from nature, have been polished with your industry and augmented by your studies, these ornaments are to be vaunted which have come as a kind of consummation of your honor, excellence, and dignity.³⁴

Further down in the epistle, Guarino reinforces this idea that the *insignia* should be interpreted as a mirror (*speculum*) of Leonello's dignity, rather than the dignity of their donor.

We perceive that the gold with which you are distinguished [*insignitum*] today you will regard attentively as a mirror [*speculum*] placed before you of your past life; and indeed the value of the gold surpasses in its immortal splendor the metal that is left behind, such that with your purity of living, excellence of virtue, and constancy of soul, you stand out amongst other mortals and contend to surpass the gods.³⁵

Meanwhile, he remembers the majesty of the Emperor's office; and also historical evidence of the power of decorations (*decora*) to awe both commoners and elites. He stresses throughout, however, that the *insignia* would be meaningless were it not for the inner qualities that Leonello in this case already possessed.

Decorations [*decora*] of this kind bring the great estimation and commendation of men and raise your authority, especially among those who are considered honored and of sound judgement themselves. It is for this reason that the ancient kings of Persia rubbed themselves with various colors, extended their hair, and adorned their unusual clothing with much gold and many precious gems, as is testified by Xenophon, so that in this way they would be venerated more among their people.

³² Dean, *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara*, 146-149.

³³ Guarino, *Epistolario*, 620. On Guarino's letters to Leonello within his epistolary see Corfiati, "Absens praesens fore videor: Guarino Veronese a Leonello d'Este," 30-77; and Pistilli, "Guarino Guarini."

³⁴ Guarino, *Epistolario*, 620.1-10 (Trans. mine): "Hodierno die, mi rex et dive Leonelle, cives tui quia ordinis equestris insignia tibi tam honorifice addita seu potius reddita fuisse cognoscunt, privatim ac publice magnam egere laetitiam et praecipuum divinis in templis honorem pro sua in te illustremque genitorem tuum pietate et observantia celebrarunt. Nam cum tantas tibi et animi et corporis dotes ab natura ingenitas tuaque industria expolitas et studio adauctas esse cernant, ista ipsa ornamenta ad decus ad excellentiam ad dignitatem quasi consummationem quandam amplitudinis advenisse gloriantur."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 620.73-78 (Trans. mine): "Aurum quo te insignitum esse hodie cernimus tibi ad vitae degendae speculum propositum esse considerabis; etenim eum aurum splendore pretio immortalitate metallis reliquis antecellat, sic et tu vivendi puritate, virtutum excellentia, honesti animi constantia sicut inter ceteros mortales emines, ita te ipsum in dies superare contendes."

Still, privately, in my mind, such honors and *insignia* are not to be considered the witnesses of virtue [*virtuti testimonium*], or the heralds best able to inscribe it in the mind [*bene institutae mentis praeconia*].³⁶

I shall not believe that a king is one who merely possesses the greatest estates [*praedia*] or who imposes a jeweled crown on his head in purple robes. “A king”, as the tragedian said, is “one who sets aside fear and ill omens from his breast”; and, as it is said by Bias, one “who brings himself with himself.” Otherwise, the masked actor on stage would be allowed to address Agamemnon or Priam, while he is in fact most lowly and perhaps even a slave.³⁷

Many of these statements recall the ethical concerns that are often posited as central to Renaissance humanist pedagogy. Chapter One of this dissertation remembered Jo Ann Cavallo’s interpretation of Boiardo’s *Inamoramento*, for example, where it is held that “the aim of education [for Guarino] was ethical and civic-political, so that one learned to act virtuously and prudently, i.e. to make the right choices for the benefit of society.”³⁸ James Hankins has expanded this thesis in recent years to affirm “virtue politics” as the defining characteristic of humanism; “a politics emphasizing the character and wisdom of the ruling class above questions of legitimacy of origins or the form of the regime and its laws.”³⁹ Already Eugenio Garin pointed out that Guarino would have had direct contact with Plato’s ideas supporting such an ideology of education for rulers and the ruling classes.⁴⁰ Hans Belting has argued, moreover, that the humanists’ concerns with ethics helped determine their “[advancement of] principles inimical to heraldic thinking,” and their stance against the “rigid hierarchical structure of the social body.”⁴¹ According to this thesis, the humanists’ emphasis on internal virtue over external decorations - the self over its “signs” - was inherently anti-heraldic and anti-feudal.

These perspectives seem ill-suited on their own to explain Guarino’s letter to his pupil and prince in this instance, however. The document does not diminish the value of the *insignia* in the

³⁶ Ibid., 620.12-20 (Trans. mine): “Non enim sum ignarus huius generis decora magnam tibi hominum extimationem commendationemque vindicare et egregiam apud eos, quorum commodis honori et saluti consulturus es, auctoritatem comparare. Hac ratione antiquos Persarum reges varios sibi colores intrivisse, caesariem auxisse, inusitatos vulgo habitus multo auro multisque geminis induisse testis est Xenophone, ut vel sic inter suos amplioris venerationis essent. Praeterea clam me non est illos honores et insignia virtuti testimonium adduci et bene institutae mentis praeconia.”

³⁷ Ibid., 620.49-55 (Trans. mine): “Neque regem illum esse crediderim qui maiora possideat praedia aut purpurea in veste gemmatam fronti coronam imposuit; ‘rex est, ut inquit tragieus, qui posuit metus et diri mala pectoris’ [Sen. *Thyestes*, 348-49] et, ut a Biante dictum est, ‘qui sua secum portat’: alioquin larvatum in scaena histrionem Agamemnonem liceret appellare vel Priamum, cum is vilissimum fortasse sit mancipium.”

³⁸ Cavallo, *Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato: An Ethics of Desire*, 4.

³⁹ Hankins, “Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue,” 98-109. On this issue see also Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists*; Donati, *La nobiltà in Italia*; and Vallone, *Cortesia e nobiltà nel rinascimento*.

³⁹ Hankins, “Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue,” 100.

⁴⁰ See Garin, “Motivi della cultura filosofica ferrarese nel Rinascimento,” 622.

⁴¹ Belting, “The Coat of Arms and the Portrait: Two Media of the Body,” in *An Anthropology of Images*, 76-77: “Humanism was instrumental in in this process, advancing principles inimical to heraldic thinking and taking a stand against the rigid hierarchical structure of the social body. In addition, the humanists’ reflections on individual death, the meaning of which no genealogical privilege could mitigate, place life within new horizons where it acquired a deeper meaning through the exploration of fate and man’s ability to overcome fate through his personal ethos. The process of wresting the concept of the ‘subject’ from what Arlette Jouana called the *ordre social* of medieval feudal society was a long one, and it has left its mark in the history of pictorial media ... Humanism, for its part, used body-description to create a description of an individual, a notion that was antithetical to past ideas of personhood.”

name of virtue; instead it uses a discourse of virtue to alter their significance. In Guarino's reading, the *insignia* ultimately refer to the dignity of the Este prince instead of his subordinate relation to the Emperor. "I have come to judgement that the equestrian *insignia* are adorned by you considerably more than you are adorned by the equestrian *insignia*," Guarino affirms, "and by merit as much as by law; for many without virtue usurp the ornaments of knighthood."⁴² A shift in power relations is at stake in the teacher's privileging of Leonello's "merit" over Sigismondo's "law." This is suggested also at the letter's conclusion, which Guarino prepares with a statement about how monuments of letters (*litterarum monumenta*) can alone provide a bulwark against the oblivion of time - as if correcting Leonello's statement that Sigismondo's arrival in Ferrara would be marked off "with a precious stone" in his memory. Guarino's conclusion follows this admonition with a verbal remembrance of the Imperial visit and gift:

Sigismondo Caesar Augustus, when the Venetian war against the Ligurian leader had come to an end, decorated with the golden crown from Eugenio the Pope, and heading towards the council of Basil, visited Ferrara from Rome in the age of the illustrious marquis Nicolò, he granted to the illustrious twenty-six year old Leonello d'Este the *insignia* of the excellent equestrian order, which he left behind as a sign of present and future hospitality [*et praesentibus et venturis signum hospitii*] and as a memorial and pledge of love [*monumentum ac pignus amoris*].⁴³

Whereas Leonello had pledged the "keys to my heart and soul" to the Emperor, this account makes the *insignia* into a "memorial and pledge of love" from the Emperor to the young Este prince. The letter testifies to the potency of the humanist's rhetoric and classical scholarship to discursively alter the meaning - in the Este's favor - of what had been an essentially feudal, and initially clear, exchange between the Emperor and his Italian vassals.

Guarino's concluding formulation is striking in its borrowing of yet another phrase from the *Aeneid*: "*monumentum ac pignus amoris*" [a memorial and pledge of love]. This appears twice in the epic poem to describe two gifts with two very different meanings and outcomes.⁴⁴ The first is an artfully embossed bowl Aeneas inherits from his father, Anchises. In the scene that uses the phrase, Aeneas gives the bowl to Acestes, a Sicilian king of Trojan origin, after an arrow the latter shoots into the sky unexpectedly bursts into flames like a shooting star.

In amazement, the Trinacrians and Trojans stood rooted, praying to the powers above. Nor did great Aeneas reject the *omen*, but, embracing glad Acestes, loaded him with noble gifts [*muneribus*] and spoke thus: "Take them, father, for the great king of Olympus has willed by these auspices that you are to receive honors, though not sharing in the lot. You shall have this gift, once the aged Anchises' own, a bowl embossed with figures [*cratera impressum signis*], that in days gone by, as a

⁴² Ibid., 620.46-49 (Trans. mine): "Per haec atque alia in te ornamenta in eam venio sententiam ut longe magis ab te equestria decorentur insignia quam tu equestribus decoris insignibus; idque iure quidem ac merito, nam plurimi sine virtute equitum gestamina usurpant" [For these as well as other ornaments within you, I have come to judgement that the equestrian *insignia* are adorned by you considerably more than you are adorned by the equestrian insignia; and by merit as much as by law, for many without virtue usurp the ornaments of knighthood].

⁴³ Ibid., 620.94-100 (Trans. mine): "Sigismundus Caesar Augustus cum sedato adversus Ligurum ducem bello Veneto, ab Eugenio pontifice maximo corona insignitus aurea et Basileense concilium petens, Ferrariam e Roma in illustris marchionis Nicolae aedes divertisset, illustrem Leonellum Estensem sextum et vigesimum agentem aetatis annum equestri excellentiae donavit insignibus, quod et praesentibus et venturis signum hospitii et monumentum ac pignus amoris relinqueret."

⁴⁴ In the corpus of Guarino's letters the phrase "*monumentum et pignus amoris*" appears several times to describe gifts of various kinds. See Guarino, *Epistolario*, n.541, 577, 621, 688, 733, 794.

princely prize [*in magno munere*], Cisseus of Trace gave to my father Anchises, as a memorial of himself and a pledge of his love” [*monumentum et pignus amoris*].⁴⁵

In this scene, Aeneas correctly interprets the flaming arrow as a propitious *omen*, and chooses therefore to reward Acestes with such a precious gift; one that contains within its history and handiwork the history of an alliance and friendship between kings (Cisseus and Anchises), as well as the memory of Aeneas’ own devotion towards his father. The bowl then becomes one of many gifts in the *Aeneid*, Elizabeth Henry writes, which are “gladly accepted and the intention of the giver fulfilled:” “Its transference now to Acestes marks the founding of Acesta (Segesta) by Trojan settlers, and Acestes will soon after this assume the role of a willing partner (*socium volentem*) in receiving those Trojans who do not choose to go on to Italy.”⁴⁶

The second gift that receives the epithet appears later in the epic’s fifth book and is a horse that Dido had given to Aeneas’ son, Ascanius/Iulus. Readers learn of the gift after her suicide, as the boy parades around with other Trojan boys on the joyful occasion of the *lusus Troiae*, the Trojan Games: “Last, and in beauty exceeding all, Iulus rode on a Sidonian horse, that fairest Dido had given in remembrance of herself and as a pledge of love [*esse sui dederat monumentum et pignus amoris*].”⁴⁷ Like other gifts associated with Dido’s person in this poem, it is loaded with irony and pathos because its purpose is never fulfilled. As Henry explains,

Instead, the horse ... is part of a ceremonial which identifies Aeneas’ Trojan past with the future life of Rome, in which the wishes of a Carthaginian queen can have no place. If the horse is to be recognized as Dido’s gift, the implication is that Carthaginian wealth and power is not to be used by the conquering Trojans/Romans. Ascanius, who had played an unconscious part in furthering the love between Dido and his father, never thinks of her again after leaving Carthage.⁴⁸

Both scenarios record an exchange of gifts, in short, and both may be brought to bear on Sigismondo’s gift to Leonello through Guarino’s citation. The first scenario would seem to position the Emperor as Aeneas’s successor, as Leonello had portrayed him in the first place. This would leave Leonello in the place of Acestes, which could suggest a more equal relationship between donor and recipient than Sigismondo would have likely had in mind. The second scenario, meanwhile, would position Leonello as Ascanius, as the young recipient of the gift; and it would position the Emperor, unflatteringly, as Dido. It seems likely that the possibility of both interpretations made the citation attractive to Guarino in this instance.

The far more important point is that Guarino uses a line from Virgil, in the first place, to describe the *insignia* of a knightly order transferred from a 15th century Emperor to his vassal’s sons. This is striking because the lexical, historical, and political specificity of “signs” are so fluid in Virgil’s epic already, as we have seen. In above passage, Acestes’ arrow is an *omen* to Aeneas and to Virgil’s readers, while the gift that responds to it, the *cratera impressum signis*, has also

⁴⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid* V.529-538 (Trans. Fairclough): “attonitis haesere animis, superosque precati/ Trinacrii Teucrique viri; nec maximus omen/ abnuat Aeneas, sed laetum amplexus Acesten/ muneribus cumulat magnis ac talia fatur:/ “sume, pater: nam te voluit rex magnus Olympi/ talibus auspiciis exsortem ducere honores./ ipsius Anchisae longaevi hoc munus habebis./ cratera impressum signis, quem Tracius olim/ Anchisae genitori in magno munere Cisseus./ ferre sui dederat monumentum et pignus amoris.”

⁴⁶ Henry, *The Vigour of Prophecy*, 32-33. Virgil’s readers would understand this alliance between Aeneas and Acestes as a foreshadowing of the alliance between Rome and Segesta over course of the First Punic War.

⁴⁷ Vergil, *Aeneid* V. 570-572 (Trans. Fairclough): “extremus formaque ante omnis pulcher Iulus/ Sidonio est invectus equo, quem candida Dido/ esse sui dederat monumentum et pignus amoris.”

⁴⁸ Henry, *The Vigour of Prophecy*, 34.

been a *monumentum ac pinguis amoris* on multiple occasions. As Guarino describes and “memorializes” the Emperor’s *equestris insignia* with words from this poem – alongside other classical references throughout the letter – he implicitly denies the necessity of “proper” relations between words and the “signs” that were part of the political life around him and his patrons. This insight sets Guarino’s position apart from the views expressed by Lorenzo Valla in 1433. It also shows the *equestris insignia* themselves in a different light with respect to many of our extant histories of “heraldic” and other signs associated with feudalism, where they are often characterized as stable signifiers and guarantors of hierarchical relations.⁴⁹ Guarino shows that “signs” could be described in multiple ways; and that descriptions could alter their meanings, potentially, as well as the human relationships that they were used to sustain and/or create.

In this respect, Guarino’s descriptive here recall his current reputation as an early and key figure in the history of Renaissance ekphrasis.⁵⁰ This is associated with his Greek studies with Manuel Chrysoloras, from whom he received several major sources on the technique. Guarino thoroughly studied the *Progymnasmata*, for example, the late-antique textbook on rhetoric and composition, which was widely used in Constantinople, and which contains the earliest known definition of *ekphrasis* (“descriptive language bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight”) alongside practice exercises for students.⁵¹ Guarino also translated Lucian’s description of the Calumny of Apelles, one of the most famous Greek ekphrases, and disseminated it amongst his students and other humanists.⁵² Chrysoloras for his part had written several letters during his time in Italy in the 1410s, showcasing his mastery of ekphrasis, and had shared these with Guarino, who subsequently included them in his teaching curriculum.⁵³ Guarino’s role in mediating these sources for new humanistic audiences in the Quattrocento was considered by Michael Baxandall in a series of famous studies dedicated to the question of how the humanists at the Este court engaged with works of art.⁵⁴

The humanist’s 1433 epistle suggests that there were other ways in which he might have conceived and practiced the rhetorical technique as well; in relation to Virgil’s poetics, for

⁴⁹ I am thinking of the extant scholarship on “heraldry” in the context of feudalism that has characterized it as “a differential system of signs guaranteeing the propriety (discreteness) of the family in relation to similar groups” and as an advertisement of “vassalic dependence.” See Tucci, “Araldica: Un linguaggio feudale,” 811-873; Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, esp. 77; and Dean, *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara*, 4. See also *ibid.*, 146-149 on “signs” of knighthood in the Este context.

⁵⁰ See Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras,” 183-204; and *Giotto and the Orators*, 78-96 (“Manuel Chrysoloras, Guarino, and the Description of Pisanello”). See also de Armas, “Simple Magic: Ekphrasis from Antiquity to the Age of Cervantes,” 15.

⁵¹ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, 45 and 86. The most thorough study of the treatment and meaning of ekphrasis in this handbook and in ancient rhetorical theory is Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*.

⁵² See Förster, “Die Verleumdung des Apelles in der Renaissance,” 29-56 and 89-113; Altrocchi, “The Calumny of Apelles in the Literature of the Quattrocento,” 454-491; and Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras” 183-204.

⁵³ Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras,” 198-200; and Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 79-84. See also Chrysoloras, *Roma parte del cielo: Confronto tra l’Antica e la Nuova Roma*; and Cortassa, “*Imago Urbis*. L’arte come immagine della storia della *Comparatio* tra le due Rome e nella lettera a Giovanni Crisolora di Maneule Crisolora,” 133-146.

⁵⁴ Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras,” 183-204; and Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 78-96. These studies conclude that Guarino’s familiarity with predominantly Greek ekphrastic traditions caused him to value certain qualities in painting like variety, physiognomic expressiveness, and the ability to convey the *ethos* and *pathos* of the artist. Baxandall argued that these values influenced the praise that Guarino and his pupils offered to painters at the Este court and, in turn, the artworks themselves that came to be produced there.

example; and closer to how Jaś Elsner has described ekphrasis in his article, “Art History as Ekphrasis” (2010). In this formulation, ekphrasis is a practice of “[making] the reader or the listener ‘see’ more than they saw before, when they encounter the object next.”⁵⁵

That search for words to make us ‘see’ is at the heart of the creative struggle against the ways in which what we have learnt can go stale, and it is an attempt to open to the new.⁵⁶

It is a creative act – a “making new” - as well as a rhetorical act that generates arguments about objects. It succeeds by creating new groupings of things in which new patterns emerge.⁵⁷ And it relies on the “resistance” inherent in objects to being fully embraced by language:

This brings us back up against the object – its glorious resistance to being fully verbalized, its uncanny ability to be verbalized in a myriad of ways, equally valid and sometimes mutually exclusive. As description knocks against the object’s objecthood, the important thing is the chance that is offered to see it afresh in the creative gap between the visual and our traditions of verbal tropes.⁵⁸

All of these points seem apt for explaining why Guarino focused on the *insignia* to create an interpretation of Sigismund’s visit to Ferrara that stresses Leonello’s autonomy and dignity with respect to one of the Este’s feudal overlords. Elsner’s formulation of ekphrasis as the capacity to make things “visible” in new ways, in other words, helps to draw out the potential political value of Guarino’s choice to inflect the fundamental unit of political engagement for the Este – the exchange of privileges and “signs” for fidelity and love – with language and ideas from classical rhetoric, poetry, and historiography.⁵⁹ It should be remembered in this regard that the Quattrocento saw the Este becoming more “legitimate” with the strengthening of their feudal ties to the Emperor

⁵⁵ Elsner, “Art History as Ekphrasis,” 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13: “For one aspect of ekphrastic interpretation is to make the particularity of a work of art more general, by becoming discursively like other objects with which we may want it to be comparable, than its pre-verbal form actually is.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 26. In an expanded version of this study, it would be possible to study the relationships between the verbal discussions around *insignia* and *arma* included here and some of the visual representations of *insignia* and *arma* produced contemporaneously in some of the innovative commissions from humanistic circles at the Este court, for example in Pisanello’s sketches, the Sala dei mesi frescos of Palazzo Schifanoia, and the illuminated Bible of Borso.

⁵⁹ With regards to what I am calling the “political value” of ekphrasis in Guarino’s hands, a word of caution should be made; since later literary ekphrases to come from Guarino’s school have been widely recognized for their “encomiastic” designs and have been treated, for this reason, as a somewhat marginal sub-category in the history of Renaissance ekphrasis. Two articles in Venturi, ed., *Ecfraresi modelli ed esempi fra Medioevo e Rinascimento* illustrate this tendency well, the one on the ekphrastic experiments of Angelo Poliziano, and the other on the “encomiastic ekphrases” from the romance-epic tradition in which Este culture excelled. See Cicuto, “*Spirantia signa: cultura ecfraistica di Agnolo Poliziano*,” 131-132: “Insomma, è qui per Poliziano argomento di una *enargeia*/ecfresi che, dando vita alle immagini, viene a dimostrare il potere sovrumano se non divino dell’arte poetica ... è la forza rappresentativa del codice ecfraistico, che dà vita in conto proprio alle figure, a porsi dunque a segnale forte di autonomia dell’intellettuale moderno” [In summary, here for Poliziano is the goal of an *enargeia* / ekphrasis, which, giving life to images, comes to demonstrate the supernatural if not the divine power of poetic art ... [I]t is the representative force of the ekphrastic mode, which transmits life precisely on account of its objects, to assert itself therefore as a strong signal of the autonomy of the modern intellectual]; and Bruscaagli, “L’ecfresi dinastica nel poema eroico del Rinascimento,” 270: “L’invenzione di una nuova genealogia estense si lega infatti nel Boiardo con l’individuazione anche di nuove modalità laudatorie della dinastia ... principalmente, alla risorsa dell’ecfresi” [The invention of a new Este genealogy is tied, in fact, in Boiardo to the individuation also of new laudatory modes ... principally, to the resources of ekphrasis]. As in the assessments of Valla and Guarino’s scholarship, we can see here how the attribution of political ends also to the ekphrastic traditions of the Ferrarese school has compromised the sense of its modernity, while in other contexts the humanists’ political attachments have often gone unrecognized.

and the Papacy; at the same time as it saw them pursuing a range of strategies to salvage their relative independence from these foreign and always potentially hostile powers.⁶⁰ We will see in the remainder of this chapter that Guarino's lessons were ones that his students also seem to have absorbed; and that the problem of Este legitimacy and sovereignty was one that they continued to respond to, as they elaborated discursive strategies around "signs" in multiple forms of writing throughout the following decades.

iii. *Modeling a Philology of Images: Angelo Decembrio's De politia litteraria*

The *De politia litteraria* is a lengthy series of dialogues divided into seven books and 103 chapters or "*pars*." It is known as one of our richest sources about the learned discussions that took place at Guarino's school.⁶¹ The author was a pupil of Guarino's and a familiar figure at the Este court in the 1430s and 40s. He was also the younger brother of a more famous humanist, Pier Candido Decembrio, who served for decades as the secretary of Filippo Maria Visconti, the Duke of Milan, and whom we have already encountered as the dedicatee of Valla's letter against Bartolus.⁶² Uberto Decembrio, their father, had been one of the first Italians to translate Plato's *Republic* from the Greek and was, as the *De politia* proudly remembers, "the first of the Milanese to have really learned Greek from Chrysoloras" (a teacher he shared with Guarino).⁶³ In short, Angelo was a well-connected member of both Guarino's circle and of the larger humanist networks of the peninsula. He wrote the *De politia* between 1440 and 1462, seemingly as both a pedagogical text and as an idealized representation of the humanist community at Ferrara. The interlocutors include Leonello, Guarino, several of Guarino's most politically prominent students, and other insiders at the court during the 1440s, when Leonello – following the death of his father Nicolò in 1441 – was Marquis at the head of the Este house and states.

⁶⁰ Two decisive achievements of the Este's politics of legitimacy were the concessions of Ducal status from the Emperor and Pope, respectively in 1452 and 1471/2, which we have already mentioned. The strategies of independence they pursued have been described in different venues. See Mario Ascheri, "Il processo civile tra diritto comune e diritto locale: da questioni preliminari al caso della giustizia estense," 373 (Trans. mine) on the *Consiglio di giustizia* that Borso created after his investiture in 1452, which implied that Este authority derived directly from God; "un palese e fondamentale obliterazione di quell'imperatore che lo aveva fatto principe dell'Impero e che era, nella teoria medievale, la fonte naturale della giustizia e quindi di ogni ultima istanza processuale" [a clear and decisive obliteration of the Emperor who had made him a prince and who, according to medieval theory, was the natural source of justice and therefore of last legal recourse]. Folin discusses the Este ceremonies of succession and the discourses about their "popular election," as attempts to suggest that "la sovranità estense non si sarebbe retta tanto sulla delega di autorità da parte del papa, quanto su una libera scelta dei sudditi" [Este sovereignty would depend not so much on the authority of the Pope as much as on the free choice of their subjects]: *Rinascimento estense*, 338. In this dissertation, the "strategy of autonomy" that we encounter directly is the Trojan genealogy, deriving the dynasty's origins – and thus their legitimacy and dignity – before even the founding of Rome.

⁶¹ See especially Witten, "Einführung," to Decembrio's *De politia litteraria*, 7-130; Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics*, 19-35; and Celenza, "Creating Canons in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara," 43-44, 53-98. These studies offer bibliographic references on several aspects of this text, which I do not repeat here in full.

⁶² On Angelo Decembrio and his career at the Este court see Sabbadini, *Classici e umanisti da codici Ambrosiani*, 94-103; Della Guardia, *La politia litteraria di Angelo Decembrio e l'umanesimo a Ferrara nella prima metà del sec. XV*; and Viti, "Decembrio, Angelo Camillo" and "Decembrio, Pier Candido."

⁶³ See Viti, "Decembrio, Uberto"; and Hankins, "A Manuscript of Plato's *Republic* in the Translation of Chrysoloras and Uberto Decembrio with Annotations of Guarino Veronese," 149-188.

The dialogue remains understudied for several reasons, not least of which is its famously difficult and idiosyncratic Latin style.⁶⁴ It lacks a modern-language translation and received a critical edition only in 2002.⁶⁵ However, thanks to Baxandall's 1963 article, "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este: Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria* Pars LXVIII," it has captured the attention of a wide audience in Renaissance Studies, as a record of the discussions about art held at the Este court in the Quattrocento.⁶⁶ Other parts of the dialogue have been studied since then from various points of view. Among these, an article by Charles Stanley Ross has returned to the 68th *pars*, which Baxandall had also focused on, for insights into the origins of a "marvelous" poetics that "might have influenced the fantasy of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*."⁶⁷ Ross' hypothesis of a traceable connection between the two texts is one that the present chapter and dissertation supports. However, our first task is to read this *pars* on the basis of a premise that has yet to be explored; that its subject is the reading and remaking of old "signs" and pictorial figures - "*de veterum signis, statuis, figuris et arte pictoria*," in Decembrio's words - including the kinds of *insignia* and *arma* that we have been discussing.

It is admittedly surprising that our subject is involved in this section of Decembrio's text at all. The brief rubric that introduces the *pars* makes no indication of it.

Whether popular fables (*fabulae vulgares*) that tell of griffins hoarding jewels in their dens are to be believed. How it is to be wondered at that, when Virgil, Ovid, and the Greek authors speak of griffins and vampires, Pliny altogether denies their existence. On ancient signs, statues, figures and the art of pictorial representation by no means alien to that of poetry (*de veterum signis statuis figuris et arte pictoria non abhorrente a poetica*).⁶⁸

The dialogue opens with a scenario in which the interlocutors observe a collection of precious objects or "gems" belonging to Leonello, tellingly called by several different names.

Many different kinds of engraved stones and rings had been brought to Leonello from Venice - *corniole* as they are called in the vernacular of the Latins, *murrinos* in that of the Spanish - as well as splendid gems and great pearls; for Leonello had it in mind to have a ring made for himself, and a necklace for his consort, King Alfonso's daughter.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ See Baxandall, "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este," 304; and Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics*, 20.

⁶⁵ I rely on Witten's edition here. A new edition and English translation may be forthcoming from Grafton and Celenza, as announced on the webpage of the Princeton Firestone Library in July 2007. The original exists in two recensions today: One represented by a manuscript in the Vatican (Vat.lat.1794), possibly the dedication copy offered to Pope Pius II in 1462; and the other represented by two printed editions, from Ausburg 1540 and Basil 1562, which are probably based on a now-lost manuscript. On the textual history see Piacentini, "Angelo Decembrio e la sua scrittura," 247-77; Fumagalli, *Matteo Maria Boiardo volgarizzatore dell'Asino d'Oro*, 15-16 n.24; and Witten, "Einführung," 10-26.

⁶⁶ See Witten, "Einführung," 107-110 ("Dichtung und darstellende Kunst").

⁶⁷ Ross, "Poetics at the Court of Leonello d'Este: Virgil, the Marvelous, and Feltrino Boiardo in the Competing Discourses of Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria*," 55-69, here 55.

⁶⁸ Decembrio, *De politia*, 6.68 (Ed. Witten; Trans. mine): "Quod fabulae vulgares sunt credi gryphes gemmas pretiosas suis locis custodientes; mirum tamen videri a Plinio gryphes et striges omnino negante, cum a Virgilio et Ovidio Graecisque auctoribus nominentur. Ibidem de veterum signis, statuis, figuris et arte pictorial non abhorrente a poetica. Pars sexagesima octava."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.68.1 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 310): "Multorum generum excisos lapillus anulosque, quos Latini vernaculo sermone *corniolas*, Hispani *minios* appellant, gemmasque conspicuas et uniones ad Leonellum ex Venetiis attulerant, sibi ipsi anulum, uxori, filiae regiae, ad collum monile facturum." Leonello's consort and King

It turns out that objects that might reasonably be called *insignia* and *arma* are part of this collection; and that the discussions the collection give rise to extend some of Guarino's lessons about how to describe and account for "signs" associated with the dignity of the Este house. These discussions also reveal how inseparable Guarino's lessons became from his students' approaches to the "signs" of the past broadly speaking, which might be transmitted visually through images and materials or verbally through poetry and prose.

The first response to Leonello's collection is the memory of an anecdote from Herodotus, which nevertheless goes unattributed. The anecdote is from the fourth book of the *Histories* (remembered in detail below), which relates how griffins were supposedly hoarders of precious gems and pearls.

Someone soon raised the subject of the griffins, said to hold their precious pearls like the dragons in the poets' tales that guard the golden apples of the Hesperides; but while some claimed they existed in the mountains of the North, others insisted it was in Upper India, where the pygmies live.⁷⁰

Decembrio's speaker here, Tommaso Morroni da Rieti, continues by expressing doubts about whether ancient reports about seemingly incredible creatures like this were really to be believed, noting discrepancies in the ancient sources.⁷¹ Virgil's eighth eclogue implies that griffins were hostile to horses, and thus that griffins existed.⁷² Servius' commentary on these lines adds more information about the griffins' composite appearance and customs.⁷³ Ovid also describes unbelievable creatures like vampires, it is remembered, in the *Fasti*. On the other hand, Pliny denies vehemently that griffins existed in a passage dedicated to debunking "fabulous" creatures in the tenth book of his *Natural History*, on birds.⁷⁴ The Plinian passage describes griffins – along

Alfonso's daughter is Eleonora d'Aragona. On the making and collection of gems from classical times through to the Renaissance see Brown, ed., *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.68.1 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 310): "protinusque de gryphibus mentio orta. Quos nonnulli, sed diversim, aiebant in hyperboreis montibus, alii in India superiore, ubi Pygmaei forent, baccas pretiosas custodire instar draconum, ut poetae canunt, mala Hesperidum aurea servantium." The Herodotean passage, *Histories*, IV.13, is discussed below.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.68.2 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 310): "Tum Reatinus eques: 'Quin etiam ego de gryphibus interdum dubitare soleo, quem admodum tu, Guarine, pridem de Romana pyramide disputabas. Quippe cum a Virgilio pro equorum ponatur inimicis – ita enim communis fert opinio – et Servius eodem loco ipsorum animalium biformem effigiem plane commemoret, a Plinio tamen ita denegari solent, ut levissimos ac phreneticos appellet, qui in rerum natura gryphes arbitrantur'" (Virgil, like most people, says they are hostile to horses; and Servius clearly records at that point in his Commentary their composite appearance. But Pliny denies their existence altogether, and even accuses those who believe they really do exist of being light-headed and delirious).

⁷² In Virgil's eighth eclogue, the spurned and grieving lover Damon imagines that he has come to inhabit a topsy-turvy world in which previously impossible couplings according to the order of nature are now becoming probable: "the timid deer shall come with hounds to drink" and "griffins now shall mate with mares." The pastoral speaker thus implies that griffins are "normally" hostile to horses. See Virgil, *Eclogue VIII* .26-28 (Trans. Fairclough): "Mopso Nysa datur: quid non speremus amantes? iugentur iam grypes equis, aevoque sequenti cum canibus timidi venient ad pocula dammae" [To Mopsus is Nysa given! For what may we lovers not look? Griffins now shall mate with mares, and in the age to come the timid deer shall come with hounds to drink]

⁷³ Servius, *Servii Grammatici Qui Feruntur in Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, *Eclogue VIII*.27: "Gryphes idest animal in Hyperboreis locis nascitur semper adfectans equos, quod rostrum habet et pennas et quattuor pedes: imago leonis, caput aquilinum et unguis ut iunoni."

⁷⁴ Pliny, *Natural History* X.LXX.130-38 (Trans. Rackham): "The Pegasus bird with a horse's head and the griffin with ears and a terrible hooked beak – the former said to be found in Scythia and the latter in Ethiopia – I judge to be fabulous (*fabulosos*); and for my own part I think the same about the bearded eagle ... Nor should the sirens obtain credit, although Dinon the father of the celebrated authority Clitarchus declares that they exist in India and that they charm people with their song and then when they are sunk into a heavy sleep tear them in pieces. Anybody who

with the Pegasus, bearded and colorful eagles, the “scops” described by Homer, and more - as things that can neither be grasped easily in the mind nor witnessed in contemporary times. Pliny accuses of delirium those who believe in such creatures, and promises to confine his own discussion to “admitted facts” alone.

This question of credibility remains profoundly tied to Herodotus. Herodotus not only reported that griffins were hoarders, but he also framed this information within his ongoing analysis and questioning of what constituted legitimate historical testimony. When news about the griffins’ hoarding appears in the fourth book of the *Histories*, it is part of the unverified and unverifiable testimony of the “possessed” poet Aristeas. It deserves to be recorded, Herodotus explains, not because it is likely to be accurate but because it was reported; that is, it was part of the cultural lore that surrounded a mysterious poet from a region he was studying, and because this lore expanded the boundaries of what could or might be known.

Aristeas, the son of Caÿstobius, a man from Proconnesus, claimed in one of his poems that he had visited the Issedonians while possessed by Apollo. Beyond them, he said, there lived the Arimaspians, a race of one-eyed men, and beyond them the griffins who stand guard over gold, and beyond them, extending right the way to the sea, the Hyperboreans ... About what might lie beyond the land that this account has been side-tracked into discussing, ignorance is universal. Certainly, there is no one from whom I have been able to obtain information who has any claim to accurate knowledge. Not even Aristeas himself, the poet whom I was just recalling, claimed in his verses to have gone beyond the land of the Issedonians; as he acknowledged, his reports on the regions to the north were pure hearsay, and based on what the Issedonians had told him. Nevertheless, granting hearsay can only be taken so far, it is my intention to take it to that limit, and to say all that can accurately be said.⁷⁵

Herodotus was an important author to Guarino, as we know above all from a series of studies that Dennis Looney has dedicated to his reception by Guarino and his circle.⁷⁶ His Renaissance reception has traditionally been better known in connection to Valla, however, who began translating the *Histories* into Latin in the early 1450s for Pope Niccolò V, immediately after translating Thucydides. There is a longstanding hypothesis, summarized by Adam Foley recently, that “Herodotus remained of relatively marginal importance to humanist historians until the 16th century”:

would believe that sort of thing would also assuredly not deny that snakes by licking the ears of the augur Melampus gave him the power to understand the language of birds, or the story handed down by Democritus, who mentions birds form a mixture of whose blood a snake is born, whoever eats which will understand the conversation of birds, and the things that he records about one crested lark in particular, as even without these stories life is involved in enormous uncertainty with respect to auguries. Homer mentions a kind of bird called the scops; many people speak of its comic dancing movements when it is watching for its prey, but I cannot easily grasp these in my mind, nor are the bird themselves now known [*plerisque memoratos facile conceperim mente, neque ipsae iam aves noscuntur*]. Consequently, a discussion of admitted facts will be more profitable [*quamobrem de confessis disseruisse*].”

⁷⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.13 (Trans. Holland). On the passage and some of its legacies see Bolton, J.D.P., *Aristeas of Proconnesus*; and Phillips, E.D., “Fact and Fancy in Early Greek Notions of East Russia, Siberia, and Inner Asia,” 161-177.

⁷⁶ See Looney, “Herodotus in Narrative Art in Renaissance Ferrara,” 232-253; “The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento,” 167-193; “Fragil arte: tradurre e governare nei volgarizzamenti boiardi ad Ercole I d’Este,” 123-136; and “Erodoto dalle *Storie* al romanzo,” 429-441. As Looney highlights, a crucial moment in the reception of Herodotus at Ferrara is the *volgarizzamento* of Matteo Maria Boiardo produced between 1474 and 1491, contemporaneously with the composition of the *Inamoramento de Orlando*.

Before Valla's translation (1455) Herodotus was known largely, though certainly not exclusively, through Latin authors, and after 1455 he was generally read in Valla's Latin translation. In both cases Herodotus remained yoked to the standards of Latin prose rather than to those of ancient historiography.⁷⁷

This hypothesis notwithstanding, we know that Guarino engaged with the *Histories* more than a decade before his arrival at Ferrara in 1429. It was in his library when he arrived in the Este capital and he used substantial parts of it in his pedagogy.⁷⁸ In Decembrio's dialogue, furthermore, Looney has shown that Herodotus is mentioned several times.⁷⁹ The allusions to him here in *pars* 68, in connection to fantastical animals and questions of credibility, have not yet been noticed, however, probably because Herodotus is not explicitly named. If added to the list of passages that we know to engage Herodotus in the *De politia*, they will support Looney's thesis that "the apparent incredibility of the Herodotean narrative may reflect an important point of discussion in conversations led by Guarino concerning the text of Herodotus."⁸⁰ We will see that they also bear upon Decembrio's treatment of images and "signs" in this *pars*.

At the close of the previous section of the *De politia*, *pars* 67, the status of Herodotus' reports of magic and marvels had already arisen. Guarino's character had defended such reports on account of the historian's eloquence, and his status as an "interpreter" (*interpretes*) of cultures and traditions.⁸¹ Additional resources are mobilized towards the defense now. The character of Nicolò Strozzi, first, takes a negative approach by attacking Pliny and noting that the usual problem with Pliny is not that he denies wonders but that he affirms them. Strozzi also expresses skepticism about the reliability of the Plinian text, which is in his view "frequently obscured by the ignorance of copyists."⁸² The character of Feltrino Boiardo (grandfather and educator of Matteo Maria Boiardo) thereafter offers positive support for Herodotus' and the poets' (Virgil/Servius, and Ovid) occasionally fantastical claims. What he does is turn to the unlikely animals portrayed on the "gems" immediately at hand, in Leonello's collection.

It seems to me, said Feltrino, that the license [*lascivia*] of painters has an origin similar to the one you have described, Nicolò, for griffins and vampires. For a painter may surely venture as freely in his pictures as a poet does in his songs [*Nam ut poetae canere audent, sic pictoribus licet effingere*], and paint a gelded

⁷⁷ Foley, "Valla's Herodotean Labours: Towards a New View of Herodotus in the Italian Renaissance," 230. A classic essay on the matter is Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography," 1-13.

⁷⁸ Looney, "Herodotus in Narrative Art in Renaissance Ferrara," 235-36.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 237-38.

⁸⁰ Looney, "The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento," 173. There are several reasons to suppose that the Herodotean passage about griffins and "incredible" historiographical testimony may be an important one for understanding further developments at Guarino's "school": Boiardo's translation of the *Histories*; the "marvelous" poetics of the *Inamoramento* and *Furioso*; the crucial figure of hippogryph in the second poem; and the "incredible" genealogical claims that are intertwined with those poems and with the Este images and "signs." On the figure of the hippogryph in the *Orlando furioso* see Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 246-257.

⁸¹ Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, 6.67.25 (Ed. Witten; Trans. mine): "quis non apud Herodotum multo plura deprehenderit, ac magis, quam in hoc autore reprehendenda, hoc est minime credenda, quemadmodum historice referuntur? Quid ais, Guarine? At ille ita esse consentiens iandudum Leonelli subtilitatem iugemque memoriam, ut saepe alias, extollebat; adiecitque huius auctoris stilum inter caeteros interpretes perpolitum eminere ac eloquentiae cuiusdam separate sic inter historicos, uti Plinii minoris esset in oratoribus" [For who would not condemn many more things in the work of Herodotus – and many things in this author are not to be believed – even though these things are referred to as history. Now what do you say, Guarino?]. This passage is noted by Ross, "Poetics at the Court of Leonello d'Este," 58-59.

⁸² Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, 6.68.2 (Ed. Witten; Trans. mine): "libraiorum inscita frequentissime confusum."

ram flying with wings, say, or a she-goat draped in a woman's veil. See on this gem here, for instance, an erect lion holding a sword in its front paws [*leonem erectum pedibus minibus ensem continere*]. When painters or gem-cutters paint and represent the popular tales of the moment their representations last a long time; a later generation following afterwards may then give new currency to the things made by the painters long before, pictures of animals above all.⁸³

Feltrino's defense of the marvelous in this passage proceeds on two tracks. One relies on the insight that "marvels become part of the cultural memory," as Charles Ross has pointed out.⁸⁴ This follows Herodotus' attitude towards reporting on Aristeas; and, with it, Rieti's hypothesis, about the "incredible" ancient reports being intended "perhaps ... on a poetical plane and in accordance with popular beliefs."⁸⁵ The other direction Feltrino takes his defense, which has not yet been commented upon, relies on the fact that unlikely creatures actually exist in pictorial form, inscribed in material objects, before the interlocutors' very eyes. Their concrete existence allows Feltrino to draw the debate away from issues of credibility and historiography, and towards the domains of poetics and the visual arts. Here, Feltrino reframes "incredible" imagery as an expression not only of popular belief but also of the powers of *ingenium* and license that poets and artists were supposed to share.

This second line of support for marvels relies on at least two further sets of ancient conversations regarding poetics and visual criticism, which Decembrio could assume his readers to know. One has to do with the analogous natures of poetry and pictorial art, which is elaborated upon further down in the dialogue when Guarino notes "how almost the same principle underlay the *ingenium* of both poets and pictorial artists."⁸⁶ Another ancient conversation that Feltrino is drawing upon has to do with the *decorum* of representing fantastical forms, and hybrid beings specifically.⁸⁷ Especially relevant to this discussion are Horace and Vitruvius' positions *against* the representation of "incredible" and hybrid figures on the basis that they transgress the bounds of nature, and are therefore symptomatic of the decay and decadence of Roman artistic values and rules.⁸⁸ Feltrino's character implicitly disagrees with their positions by invoking the principle of

⁸³ Ibid., 6.68.4 (Trans. Baxandall, 311): "Tum Feltrinus excipiens inquit: 'Arbitror pictorum lascivia fieri, uti modo de gryphibus et strygybus, Nicolae, referebas. Nam ut poetae canere audent, sic pictoribus licet effingere, uti castratum arietem cum alis volentem facere, capram muliebri velo redimitam. Quemadmodum et in hac nunc gemma conspicitis leonem erectum pedibus minibus ensem continere. Quippe cum pictores vel lapidariae ea, quae vulgo feruntur, e vestigio pingant effingantque in tempus non breve perdurantia, rursus alia popularis multitudo superveniens a pictoribus antike facta concelebrat, animalium opera praecipue."

⁸⁴ Ross, "Poetics at the Court of Leonello d'Este" 54-69.

⁸⁵ Decembrio, *De politia* 6.68.2 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall): "nisi poetice forte ed ad vulgarem opinionem locutos arbitremur".

⁸⁶ Ibid., 6.68.20 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 324): "Ast alii sunt, inquit, 'utroque politiae genere freti, cum tamen ad unum intendant eruditionis et cognoscendi cupiditatis incitamentum pictura scripturaque, quam idcirco Craeci Latinique partier uno saepe vocabulo scripturam appellavere, uti copiose modo Leonello memorante cognovimus, cum de poetarum et pictorum ingeniis eandem fere rationem demonstraret" [Some people may well make use of both kinds of *politia*. For both picturing (*pictura*) and writing (*scriptura*) tend to one end: the encouragement of learning and the desire for knowledge. It was for this reason that the Greeks and Romans often referred to both as *scriptura*. As Leonello will remember, we covered this point thoroughly when he was showing how almost the same principle underlay the *ingenium* of both poets and pictorial artists].

⁸⁷ On this debate and its afterlives see Summers, "The Archaeology of the Modern Grotesque," 20-62.

⁸⁸ See Horace, *Ars poetica*, 1-13 (Trans. Fairclough): "Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam/ iungere si velit, et varias inducer plumas/ undique collatis membris, ut turpiter altrum/ desinat in piscem mulier Formosa superne./ spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?/ credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum/ persimilem, cuius, velut aegri

poetic license, or “right to dare” (*audendi potestas*), and by the analogy between poetry and painting that Horace himself was famous for articulating.⁸⁹ In the following paragraphs, Leonello’s character then manages to harmonize the representation of fantastical and hybrid forms with ideas about naturalism in ancient art that were associated with Horatian and Vitruvian principles.

‘To resume: neither on the heads carve on gems – some of them are bald, as of elderly emperors, but most are not – nor on the full-length portraits does one see any covering. And this was surely for the reason that they felt that the excellent works [*insignia opera*] of those artists and of that time would best be judged in this state of nakedness ... For it is not every fashion of clothing that pleases every subsequent generation and race: some kinds of shoes and cloaks and belts and even armor become ridiculous even in paintings. But the artifice of Nature is supreme, no period fashions change it. Lions, eagles, dragons and various favorite animals; woods, rivers, mountains, trees, birds, oceans, billowing seas, fish, sea-coasts, clouds in the air, tower, and other things of this sort – it is these that the most skillful painters more commonly depict [*peritissimis pictoribus effingi solent*], and nothing outside the natural order of appearances is more suited to them. So that if you saw an eagle crowned [*coronatam aquilam*], or two-headed and looking out on both sides, or an elephant carrying a castle, or an unusually beautiful stag with gold collar and garlanded antlers, or leopards and tigers bridled and harnessed to a chariot with the triumphant Bacchus, and him half-naked, you would pay more attention to the subtlety of the features of the face and bare body than to the clothes

somnia, vanae/ fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni/ reddatur formae. ‘pictoribus atque poetis/ quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas’/ scimus, et hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim;/ sed non ut placidis coeant immitia, non ut/ serpents avibus geminentur, tigris agni” [If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feather of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friend, if favored with a private view, refrain from laughing? Believe me, dear Pisos, quite like such pictures would be a book, whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man’s dreams, so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape. “Painters and poets,” you say, “have always had an equal right in hazarding anything.” We know it: this license we poets claim in our turn we grant the like; but not so far that savage should mate with tame, or serpents couple with birds, lambs with tigers]; and Vitruvius, *De architectura*, VII.5.2-6 (Trans. Granger): “Sed haec, quae ex veris rebus exempla sumebantur, nunc iniquis moribus inprobantur. Nam pinguntur tecotiis monstra potius quam ex rebus finitis imagines certae; pro columnis enim struuntur calami striati, pro fastigiis appagineculi cum crispis foliis et volutis, item candelabra aedicularum sustinentia figuras, supra fastigial eorum surgentes ex radicibus cum volutis teneri plures habentes in se sine ratione sedentia sigilla, non minus colliculi dimidiate habentes sigilla alia humanis, alia bestiarum capitibus. Haec autem nec sunt nec fieri possunt nec fuerunt ... Si ergo, quae non possunt in veritate rationem habere facti, in picturis probaverimus, accedimus et nos his civitatibus, quae propter haec vitia insipientes sunt iudicatae” [But these which were imitations based on reality are now disdained by the improper taste of the present. On the stucco are monsters rather than definite representations taken from definite things. Instead of columns there rise up stalks; instead of gables, striped panels with curled leaves and volutes. Candelabra uphold pictured shrines and above the summits of those, clusters of thin stalks rise from their roots in tendrils with little figures seated upon them at random. Again, slender stalks with heads of men and of animals attached to half the body. Such things neither are, nor can be, nor have been ... If therefore we approve in pictures what cannot justify itself in reality, we are added to those cities which, because of such faults, are esteemed slow-witted].

⁸⁹ Decembrio, *De politia*, 6.68.11 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 318): “*Quod si pictoribus atque poetis / quodlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas*, ita tamen audendum effingendumque docet Horatius, ut quam aptissime alia aliis respondentia non rerum vel fabularum ordinem excedant” [Painters and poets have always had equal license to audacity; yet Horace, so that things may be as consistent with each other as possible, does insist that neither this audacity nor representation should go beyond the proper bounds of reality or fiction]. The Horatian argument referenced here is from the *Ars poetica*, 9-13.

and trappings. You would study the way in which sinews or muscles fit together, the circuits and tensions of the veins, the representation of skin, hair or plumage.⁹⁰ Even “incredible” forms, Leonello’s character insists, can and should be represented according to the pictorial canons of anatomy, detail, and proportion that lay behind the most honored ancient traditions of nude statuary and portraiture. An “eagle crowned, or two-headed and looking out on both sides” could and should be depicted in a such a way that is sensitive to nature, to how the “sinews or muscles fit together, the circuits and tension of the veins, the representation of skin, hair or plumage.”

It becomes apparent now that some of the images under discussion, from Leonello’s collection, are medieval in provenance and gothic in style. According to modern sensibilities, several may be “coats of arms”; for example, the “erect lion holding a sword in its front paws” and the “crowned eagle, or two headed, and looking out on both sides.” Baxandall noticed this and attributed their presence in this discussion to the fact that the humanists at the Este court in the Quattrocento were unable to clearly distinguish between the medieval and classical objects in their purview:

Leonello was, after Martin V, one of the earliest collectors of ancient gems, but it is unlikely that all the gems mentioned in the discussion were in fact classical. The distinction between ancient and medieval or modern gems was not a very clear one in the fifteenth century ... Certainly the lion rampant with sword is not a motif found on ancient gems, and this, like the *rex in solio sedens* and *domorum insignia* mentioned later, is most probably a late medieval signet or talisman.⁹¹

He is right that the images in Leonello’s collection are not marked off according to their historical contexts of origin. However, his assessment misses all that has been done so far to resist the application of such a classificatory system to images and “signs” generally, and to Leonello’s collection particularly.

Indeed, the interlocutors have blurred distinctions between the “medieval” and “ancient” objects and images before them in several ways. They have pointed out that some images in antiquity already flouted the “laws” of natural decorum in the strictest sense. This idea implicitly functions to equate the “grotesque” with the “gothic” style, and to obliterate the distinction between these (not yet even fully articulated) categories.⁹² The same interlocutors have also connected “incredible” visual representations (from any historical provenance) to Herodotus’ “incredible” historiographical claims, and have used the one to defend the other. The character of

⁹⁰ Decembrio, *De politia*, 6.68.7-9 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 314-316): “Igitur in ipsis gemmarum capitibus, quorum nonnulla calva, ut seniorum imperatorum, plurima capillata, integris etiam effigibus non tegumenta cernuntur: eo profecto consilio, ut artificium et temporum illorum insignia opera censerentur; quae ipsa praesertim nuditate iudicantur ... At quot naturae praecipuum est artificium, nulla temporum novitiate mutatur. Quamobrem leones, aquilae, dracones et multorum generum animantes vulgo gratiores, tum sylvae, flumina, montes, arbores, volucres, maria, fulcus, pisces, littoral, aeriae nubest et turres et id genus frequentius a peritissimis pictoribus effingi solent, quibus praeter natural vestigium nihil est magis accomodatum, ut, si forte coronatam aquilam videris vel gemino utriusque vertice despectantem, seu elephantem castelliferum aut araestanti forma cervum cum aureo monili cornibusque florigeris, aut pardos tigresque frenatos currum cum triumphante Baccho trahentes, ipsoque seminudo: non tantum vestis et ornatus quam lineamentorum oris nudi vel corporis subtilitatem contempleris, cuiusmodi nervi thorive constant, quales nervarum ambitus vel intensiones, quae cutis, pilorum plumarumque significatio. In quibus saepe pictores ipsi minus sciunt ineptiusque committunt quam popularis varie censendo multitudo, qui coloribus, limbis et fimbriis duntaxat intenti membrorum proportiones non advertere.”

⁹¹ Baxandall, “A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d’Este,” 313, n.30.

⁹² For a further suggestion about the connections between grotesque and gothic see Summers, “The Archeology of the Modern Grotesque,” 23.

Leonello, furthermore, has openly critiqued objects that betray their historical provenance and has elaborated a “natural” principle by which the artistic *ingenium* should be able to transcend “fashion” and the historical moment of the creative act. In summary, Decembrio’s interlocutors do not distinguish classical and medieval “signs” and styles from one another so much as they read both together. Like Guarino’s discussion of the *equestris insignia* in his epistle to Leonello of 1433, Decembrio’s characters use classical vocabularies and sources to comment on and transform the “signs” before their eyes; the latter, in turn, influence the ways in which the classics are called upon to speak.

A new idea that seems to emerge from Decembrio’s dialogue, with respect to Guarino’s epistle studied previously, is the close connection between historical scholarship, on the one hand, and creative endeavor, on the other.⁹³ Leonello’s gem collection is introduced at the beginning of the 68th *pars*, for example, as a bank of models for new commissions that the prince is considering for himself and his consort, Eleonora d’Aragona.⁹⁴ The objects are not only collected and discussed, but also used to create new exemplars. Another suggestion to this effect is made at the conclusion to *pars* 68. Leonello has just reinforced the shared principles underlying poetic and pictorial arts (both were called forms of “*scriptura*” by the Greeks and Romans, he remembers); and the interlocutors have listed different kinds of images, besides the gems in the prince’s collection, that are “worthwhile and pleasant” to observe. A concluding statement for the *pars* is made by the character of Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, whose elder brother Nicolò we have already encountered, and whose historical counterpart was in fact a leading poet in Guarino’s circle in the 1440s.⁹⁵

Then Titus, elegantly concluding the discussion, said: “I, for my part, keep framed in this small *pyxis* the portrait (*insignibus vultum*) of a golden-haired maiden, no ancient Roman monument but a modern virgin amongst our Ferrarese girls, for whose death not long ago I fashioned (*excudissem*) a tearful elegy. And now I treasure this testimony of sweet and perpetual remembrance (*perpetuae dulcisque memoriae testimonium*), in which nothing it seems is missing except her voice. As he said this he opened the *pyxis* with the countenance (*effigies*) of the virgin, a sight sweet to all.”⁹⁶

As the poet reads his own composition to the group, which remembers the death of a local girl, Decembrio seems to highlight again that creative work and the (re)vision of contemporary life was an outcome and goal of classical scholarship under Guarino’s purview.

⁹³ This could arguably be interpreted as an extension of Guarino’s model of ekphrasis as an act of “making new.”

⁹⁴ Decembrio, *De politia*, 6.68.1 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 310): “Multorum generum excisos lapillus anulosque, quos Latini vernaculo sermone *corniolas*, Hispani *minios* appellant, gemmasque conspicuas et uniones ad Leonellum ex Venetiis attulerant, sibi ipsi anulum, uxori, filiae regiae, ad collum monile facturum” [Many different kinds of engraved stones and rings had been brought to Leonello from Venice – *corniole* as they are called in the vernacular of the Latins, *murrinos* in that of the Spanish – as well as splendid gems and great pearls; for Leonello had it in mind to have a ring made for himself, and a necklace for his consort, King Alfonso’s daughter].

⁹⁵ For Strozzi’s biography see Albrecht, *Tito Vespasiano Strozzi: Ein Beitrage zur Geschichte des Humanismus in Ferrara*; Della Guardia, *Tito Vespasiano Strozzi: Poesie latine tratta dall’Aldina e confrontate coi codici*; Ludwig, *Die Borsias des Tito Strozzi: Ein lateinisches Epos der Renaissance*, 11-59; and Fabri, “Da Firenze a Ferrara. Gli Strozzi tra Casa d’Este e antichi legami di sangue,” 91-108.

⁹⁶ Decembrio, *De politia*, 6.68.22 (Ed. Witten; Trans. Baxandall, 326): “At Titus facete concludens adiecit: ‘Et ego non ex Romanorum antiquis monumentis, sed ex Ferrariensium puellarum novis insignibus vultum habeo virginis, minima compactum in pyxide, aurea coma, pro cuius nuper interitu cum lacrymabile carmen excudissem. Hoc quoque teneo perpetuae dulcisque memoriae testimonium, in quo nihil videtur praeter vocem deesse’. Simul haec dicens pyxidem virginei vultus aperuit omnibus dulce spectaculum.”

Several additional strategies and assumptions in these concluding remarks we have seen from both Guarino and Decembrio already. The close relation between the elegy and the girl's portrait, for example, brings us back to the ekphrastic traditions in which visual, poetic, and natural artifice are closely intertwined. Strozzi's comparison between ancient "monuments" and "our Ferrarese girls" implies a certain sense of emulation that these humanists felt with respect to ancients, as well as a sense of continuity and connectivity between them.⁹⁷ His use of the word *insignia* (*insignibus vultum*) to describe the outlines of the girl's face relies on the porous boundaries between several different words for images and "signs" that have been used throughout the dialogue: *effigies*, *insignia*, *pyxis*, *signa*, *insignia*, etc. Curiously, his description of her portrait ("*perpetuae dulcisque memoriae testimonium*") even echoes Guarino's description of the *equestris insignia* awarded to Leonello in 1433 ("*monumentum ac pignus amoris*"). Between the two examples, one can see that multiple contaminations are taking place in this community: words and "signs" from antiquity and the present are purposefully becoming indistinguishable from one another; and the "signs" of love and honor, pathos and politics, are being mixed. This resonates with the *Inamoramento de Orlando* and *Orlando Furioso* where, as we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, the "signs" of desire and dynasty are very often inseparable, and their storylines are developed across language barriers, cultural distinctions, and vast stretches of historical time.

iv. *Signa reliquerunt Troes: Ekphrasis, the Trojan Genealogy, and the Este Signa between Tito Strozzi and Matteo Maria Boiardo*

The real Tito Vespasiano Strozzi was a living connection between Guarino's "school" as it existed in the 1440s, ostensibly represented in the *De politia*, and the vernacular romance epic of Matteo Maria Boiardo. The son of a Florentine whose family had quickly assimilated into the inner circle of the Este aristocracy through the first half of the Quattrocento, Tito had studied with Guarino directly and became one of his most prized students.⁹⁸ His relations with the Boiardi were very much the result of his and his family's success: between 1440 and 1441, Tito's sister Lucia Strozzi married Giovanni Boiardo, the son of Feltrino Boiardo and the count of Scandiano; and Matteo Maria was their first-born son. By the 1460s, as Marco Santagata has pointed out, the Boiardi, Strozzi, and their mutual allies the Calcagnini, possessed between them all the feuds along the foothills of the Apennines at the south-western border of the Este states.⁹⁹ This kind of geographical and political proximity, Santagata continues, in all likelihood facilitated the intellectual collaboration that took place between Tito and his nephew around the study of the classics and the concomitant revisions of local history, which their poetry both attempted. Strozzi is widely believed today to have played a significant role in Matteo Maria's education alongside Feltrino, in Latin and the rudiments of Greek, in the 1450s; and to have been a poetic model for Boiardo in his earliest compositions in neo-Latin as well as in the *Inamoramento*.

Strozzi's most ambitious work, and his most important from the perspective of Boiardo's career, is the *Borsias*.¹⁰⁰ The Latin epic recounts the history of the Este and of Ferrara on the model

⁹⁷ Looney discusses the continuities that Guarino and his students often assumed between the cultural traditions of Greece and Rome in "Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento," 174.

⁹⁸ See Fabri, "Da Firenze a Ferrara. Gli Strozzi tra Casa d'Este e antichi legami di sangue," 93-97.

⁹⁹ Santagata, *Pastorale modenese: Boiardo, i poeti e la lotta politica*, 19-24.

¹⁰⁰ I have relied on the critical edition and detailed commentary by Ludwig, *Die Borsias des Tito Strozzi*. Additional studies of Strozzi's epic include Hofmann, "Von Africa über Bethlehem nach America: Epos in der neulateinischen

of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It was begun in the 1460s, and was continued after Borso's death in 1471 through to the death of the author in 1505, undergoing significant revisions meanwhile as political circumstances changed. The final (unfinished) product, broadly speaking, deals with the biography and virtues of Borso (Books 1-4), the history of the city of Ferrara and the genealogy of the Este dynasty (Books 4-7), and Ercole's rise to power (Books 8-10). The most obvious connection between it and the *Inamoramento* - besides the essentially contemporaneous composition of the two poems and the close personal relationship between the authors - is the story of the Este's genealogical roots in ancient Troy; and the character of Ruggiero who acts as a connector between these Trojan origins and the Este's Italian line.¹⁰¹ Because these elements are developed in both works, the two compositions have together been credited with making a groundbreaking innovation in the Este's genealogical discourse by drawing their bloodline to antiquity, seemingly for the first time in a compelling manner; and by using the resources of the *studia humanitatis* to do so. This final section of our chapter is dedicated to exploring what Strozzi's "new" genealogy had to do with the articulation of *insignia* and *arma*; how it built on practices of reading and description that we have studied already from Guarino and Decembrio; and how it helps us to understand the image-stories of the *Inamoramento de Orlando*.

It should be remembered first that the "new" genealogy followed upon earlier ones that pre-dated the humanist cultural revolution at Ferrara. A noteworthy example is the genealogy whose earliest written source known to date was discovered by Pio Rajna. This is a fourteenth-century historiographical manuscript titled *Liber de generatione aliquorum civium Urbis Paduae tam nobilium quam ignobilium*.¹⁰² Written by a Paduan judge and historian, Giovanni da Nono (1306-46), it describes struggles between vying families (the Este, da Romano, Camposampiero, and others) and their clients for control of the city of Padua over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁰³ It is organized as a series of histories of "noble and ignoble" families who had shaped the history of Padua, with each family history ending with a description and interpretation of the images associated with it. Thus for the Este:

It is commonly held that these noble marquises were the progeny of the traitor Heuganus. On their shields before the color azure there shines a white eagle which truly should be a falcon but painters made it into the form of an eagle, as it is commonly said.¹⁰⁴

Literatur," 130-182; Ludwig, "Strozzi und Giraladi: Panyrik am Hofe der Este," 486-507; Lippencott, "The Neo-Latin historical epics of the northern Italian courts," 415-428; and Macioce, "La *Borsiate* di Tito Vespasiano Strozzi e la *Sala dei Mesi* di Palazzo Schifanoia," 3-13.

¹⁰¹ The connections between Strozzi's and Boiardo's Trojan genealogies are discussed in greatest detail by Ludwig, *Die Borsias des Tito Strozzi*, 318-335. See also Tissoni Benvenuti, "Introduzione," to Boiardo's *Inamoramento de Orlando*, xv-xvi. There are many more discussions of the Trojan genealogy with regards to its development in the *Inamoramento* and the *Furioso*. See Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*; Dorigatti, "La favola e la corte: Intrecci narrative e genealogie estensi dal Boiardo all'Ariosto." 31-54; Bruscaagli, "Ruggiero's story: the making of a dynastic hero," 151-167; Venturi, "*Magnificentia* e cultura alla corte estense: una genealogia fantastica tra Boiardo e Ariosto," 9-22; Honnacker, "L'origine troiana della casa d'Este: fornita nell'*Orlando Furioso* di Ludovico Ariosto nelle edizioni del 1516 e dal 1521: una genealogia fra leggenda e storia," 125-134; and Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando furioso*, 134-140.

¹⁰² Rajna, "Le origini delle famiglie padovane e gli eroi dei romanzi cavallereschi," 161-181.

¹⁰³ On the *Liber de generatione* see Fabris, *Cronache e cronisti padovani*, 35-168; Hyde, *Literacy and its Uses: Studies on Late Medieval Italy*, 21-41; and Zabbia, "Giovanni da Nono." The manuscript has not been edited and I have not yet been able to consult it directly.

¹⁰⁴ Rajna, "Le origini delle famiglie padovane e gli eroi dei romanzi cavallereschi," 169 (Trans. mine): "Fertur communiter quod hii nobiles marchioness fuerunt de progenie Heuganei proditoris, et fulget in clipeis suis aquila

According to this text, the Este were descended from Gano di Maganza, the legendary traitor of Carolingian legend responsible for the death of Orlando at Roncesvaux. And their white eagle image on a field of blue, the “*aquila alba in colore lazuro*,” had been distorted from the image of the falcon that “chivalric” tradition had long attached to Gano’s character and progeny.

Several scholars have pointed out how unappealing this genealogy might have been from the perspective of the Este and their supporters.¹⁰⁵ By casting the archetypal traitor of the Carolingian cycle as the Este’s progenitor, it arguably undermined the family’s legitimacy; as this was based principally on the exchange of love and *fides* between the Marquises, their overlords, and their allies. Scholars have also recognized that Strozzi and Boiardo debunked the “Maganza” story with their ambitious new poems in the second half of the Quattrocento. Tissoni Benvenuti notes that the *Inamoramento* did so particularly ingeniously “from within the same context in which [the legend] was born”; that is, from within the context of the biographies of Orlando and his peers.¹⁰⁶

Closer to our immediate interests here is the fact that both Strozzi and Boiardo’s Trojan genealogies offered new accounts of the family’s “signs” along with their bloodlines, with the image of the white eagle receiving especially memorable attention in their works. Instead of originating with Gano, indeed, in both poems this image bears witness to the dynasty’s genealogical connection to Troy, by means of the ancient myth of Zeus’ metamorphosis into an eagle to rape or abduct the Trojan boy, Ganymede. In Chapter One of this dissertation we studied the elaboration of this image-story in connection to the character of Rugiero in the *Inamoramento*. As we address now how Strozzi accounted for and described the image in a single passage of the *Borsias*, our contribution to the extant scholarship lies in the following claim: that Strozzi, like Boiardo, not only attributed new origins to the Este’s *insignia* or *arma*, but also he reconceived the essence and meaning of these images by drawing on the Virgilian models that were at the

alba in colore lazuro, que revera deberet esse unus falchion, sed pictores reduxerunt ipsum in formam unius aquile, ut fertur.”

¹⁰⁵ Tissoni Benvenuti has shown that the “Maganza” genealogy was nevertheless accepted in one of the central pedagogical texts (the *Dittamondo*) prepared by Guglielmo Capello, the teacher of Leonello and Borso at the Este court prior to the arrival of Guarino. See Tissoni Benvenuti, “Ruggiero o la fabbrica dell’*Inamoramento* de Orlando,” 74-75. We can still find the genealogy remembered in a critical vein by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, in the chapter of his *Commentaries* dedicated to the “origins of the sordid family of the Este.” See Piccolomini, *Commentaries*, II.39 (Trans. Meserve and Simonetta, 358-59): “Ii marchioness Francorum sese genus esse dicunt, neque Franciae reges id negant, a quibus insigne liliorum acceperunt. Non nulli ex Maguntia profectos asserunt, et sanguinem esse Gayni, quem prodidisse Francos in bello adversus Saracenos infeliciter gesto fama est. Veri periculum in medio relinquimus, quamvis et Gaynum Francum fuisse tradunt” [The marquises of Este say they are of Frankish origin, and the kings of France, who granted the family their sign of lilies (*insigne liliorum*), do not deny the claim. Some say they came from Mainz and are descended from that Ganelon who, as the story goes, betrayed the Franks in their disastrous war against the Saracens. The truth of the matter we leave to braver souls, but Ganelon too is said to have been French].

¹⁰⁶ Tissoni Benvenuti, “Ruggiero o la fabbrica dell’*Inamoramento* de Orlando,” 75 (Trans. mine): “Quella genealogia infiamante veniva così ad essere autorevolmente smentita nel medesimo contesto leggendario in cui era nata.” The image of the falcon belonging to the Maganza family is remembered in the *Inamoramento* at I.ii.56 in connection to one of the family’s members, Grifone (who tellingly shares his first name with several “good” characters in the poem): “Era costui di casa de Maganza, / Che porta in scudo azuro un falcon bianco.” It is noteworthy that the Maganza image includes the same colors as the Este’s *aquila bianca* (in both cases the white bird is depicted on a field of blue). As Tissoni Benvenuti points out at *Inamoramento* I.ii.51n and 56n, the white and blue Maganza falcon had also been present in at least one of Boiardo’s sure sources, the *Spagna ferrarese*, at II.6: “un falcon bianco nel campo cilestro.”

foundation of his poetic project, and on the reading practices that had already been cultivated within his local humanist tradition.

Strozzi's genealogy of the Este and his description of their "signs" is developed in one discrete section of the *Borsias* comprising the second half of its sixth book.¹⁰⁷ The speaker of the "series" is Girolamo Castelli according to the epic fiction, a character whose real counterpart was another student of Guarino's as well a medical doctor at the Este court between the 1440s and 1470s.¹⁰⁸ The context is a tour of the Este castle of Belriguardo that Castelli provides to the poet and humanist Giovanni Pontano upon the latter's visit to Ferrara, on behalf of Ferdinand of Naples. In the fiction, the "origin of the Este" is inserted as a digressive interruption of the tour out of Castelli's concern that the dynasty's history might otherwise remain unknown to his guest.¹⁰⁹

The genealogy begins with Francus, the son of Hector of Troy. Castelli narrates how Francus was saved from death in Troy and sent to France, to found the dynasty that produced Charlemagne and Pippin.¹¹⁰ He then introduces Ruggiero – recognizably the same figure who appears in the *Inamoramento* – as a descendant of Charlemagne. As in the *Inamoramento*, Ruggiero's father is said to have been murdered in an act of betrayal; and Ruggiero himself is said to have been saved as a baby by his mother and furtively transported to Africa.¹¹¹ In notable detail, Castelli tells of Ruggiero's education in Africa under the tutelage of Atlas, a descendent of the god by the same name and, as it turns out, a distinctly humanistic educator in the mold of the Guarino da Verona; for example, Atlas emphasizes the "principles of right living," the arts of peace over those of war, and the need to balance study with leisure and physical activity, while maintaining a profound emotional relationship with his pupil.¹¹² As in the *Inamoramento*, moreover, Atlas is a prophet in Strozzi's poem, who conveys crucial genealogical information to Ruggiero about the connection between his predecessors and the Este of Ferrara.¹¹³ This discloses Ruggiero's unfortunate individual future and glorious genealogical one, a mixed fate which he again shares with his counterpart in the *Inamoramento*: while Ruggiero himself will be betrayed and murdered before his natural death, his progeny will achieve great renown over many generations, especially on the Italian peninsula.¹¹⁴

Atlas communicates his prophetic visions to Ruggiero in a manner that directly impacts how the Este "signs" are construed in Strozzi's text. In brief, Atlas seeks to inscribe his message

¹⁰⁷ The genealogical section that we are about to read from the *Borsias* appears to have been transmitted both together with the rest of the epic and separately. A manuscript of the separate excerpt is extant in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena as Cod. Lat. Estense 679 (a.T.9,16), under the title "Ad divum Herculem Origo Estensium ex Titi Strozae Borsiae excerpta," which I have not however consulted. According to Della Guardia, *Tito Strozzi. Poesie latine dall'Aldina*, xxii, the manuscript is illuminated with the "signs" of both the Este the Strozzi houses.

¹⁰⁸ See Palma, "Castell, Girolamo."

¹⁰⁹ Strozzi, *Borsias*, VI.240-242 (Trans. mine): "ne, Pontane, tibi prima ignoretur origo / stirpis Atestinae, seriem decet altius omnem/ discutere ac veterum monumenta referre parentum" [Lest the origin of the Este clan be unknown to you, Pontano, it is becoming to discuss the entire series and to call to mind monuments of the old fathers]. The Neapolitan humanist is one of three visitors to Ferrara in the poem, alongside Pope Pius II and the Emperor Frederick III, who allow Strozzi to represent the Este court in the act of displaying itself to outsiders.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VI.246-272.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, VI.273-290.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, VI.287-300, here 291-291 (Trans. mine): "Hic leges morum egregias atque optima recte vivendi praecepta dedit" [He taught the best rules of conduct and the principles of right living].

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, VI.342-446. The character of Atlas, being a proto-humanist educator and a prophet, seems to make an implicit claim about the importance of humanistic education to the transmission and construction of genealogical knowledge.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VI.346-411.

into his pupil's heart and mind by vividly describing and physically giving to Ruggiero a series of objects.¹¹⁵ The first appears strange and marvelous to Ruggiero's imagination, but would have been familiar enough to Strozzi's contemporaries: it is the equestrian statue of Nicolò III d'Este, supported by a magnificent *all'antica* column, first planned under the initiative of Leonello and erected near the façade of the palazzo Estense in Ferrara in the summer of 1451.¹¹⁶

Here the grateful *patria* will erect a huge column, and the happy industry of noble artificers will draw from the marble breathing forms and the faces of men, and fashion bodies vying with the living bodies; and having set down such trophies they will carve the renowned acts of magnanimous princes. Above this I see that they shall erect an equestrian statue, surpassing it with bright figures of Corinthian bronze, and testifying to the Herculean praises throughout the long centuries.¹¹⁷

The passage offers a distinctively Virgilian example of poetic description, as Strozzi vies with different kinds of artificers to render the vividness of the column and its life-like reliefs in words.¹¹⁸ It also pays homage to the different kinds of artistic contributions to the monument's construction, which is now configured as one of the "results" of the prophecy and of Ruggiero's genealogical future.¹¹⁹

The next object that Atlas presents to Ruggiero, indebted to Virgilian ekphrastic tradition once again, is a finely-wrought suit of armor complete with golden spurs, full body armor, a cloak, and a shield decorated with life-like pictorial figures.¹²⁰ The last gift is a horse with an illustrious genealogy of its own. Descended from the horse of the Trojan warrior Diomedes, Atlas discloses, the animal had passed into the care of Atlantis (Atlas' forefather) and had received in turn the "sign" of this clan of demi-gods.

Having crossed the Thracian sea, and given birth nearby, [the horse] was handed to Atlantis as a gift; and from this time forward the progeny of his seed was famous

¹¹⁵ Ibid., VI.341-345.

¹¹⁶ On the planning, building, and interpretation of this monument see Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara*, 50-82 and 204-225; and Folin, "La committenza estense, l'Alberti e il palazzo di corte di Ferrara," 260-277.

¹¹⁷ Strozzi, *Borsias* VI.434-442 (Trans. mine): "Hunc patria ingentem venti grata columnam / eriget, ac rerum varias industria felix / nobelium artificium deducet marmore formas / spirantesque hominum vultus atque aemula vivis / corpora corporibus finget positisque trophaeis / inclyta magnanimi caelabit principis acta. / Iam super haec video statuam se tollere equestrem / clara Corinthiaci superantem signa metalli / et longa Herculeas testantem in saecula laudes."

¹¹⁸ Strozzi highlights his mastery of the techniques of ekphrasis throughout the epic in a series of virtuoso descriptions of such objects as the façade of Cathedral of Ferrara, the Este's hunting lodge in Cusago, and a set of tapestries inside the latter decorated with multiple scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. On the innovations involved in these descriptions see Ludwig, *Die Borsias des Tito Strozzi*, 362-368; and Hofmann, "Von Africa über Bethlehem nach America," 149-150.

¹¹⁹ Strozzi authored an epigram that was inscribed in the next major Este monument erected in the central piazza of Ferrara, the column in honor of Borso. It was disseminated in manuscript and print through one of Strozzi's most important poetic collections, the *Eroticon*. See Strozzi, "In columna venti Borsio erecta incisum epigrammata" in *Strozzi poetae pater et filius*, 146: "Hanc tibi venti Ferraria grata columnam / Ob merita in Patriam, Princeps iustissime Borsi / Dedicat, Estensi qui Dux a sanguine primus / Excipis imperium, et placida regis omnia pace / Verum ingens quando sibi vendicat omnia virtus / Et long humanam superat tua plurima sorte / Gloria, divinos si tu patiaris honores / Ultro ipsi dabimus, meritasque sacrabimus aras."

¹²⁰ Strozzi, *Borsias*, VI.447-481.

and he and his sons have been marked by the sign of the moon [*lunae signasse nota*], which the great Atlas had used as an expert of the stars and the heavens.¹²¹

The “sign” of the moon that marks the horse’s front, according to the fiction, is a reference to the expertise possessed by Atlas and his mythical forbearers in the astral motions; but the crescent moon was also one of the most recognizable figural elements of the Strozzi family *insignia* and *arma*.¹²² Thus the “sign” becomes yet another way in which Strozzi inserts his own identity, and that of his family, into his history of the Este’s genealogical unfolding.

The whole genealogical *excursus* ends with a description and explanation of the “signs” belonging to the Este house. It is articulated by Castelli’s character once again, who takes over from Atlas to explain how Ruggiero left Africa and how his progeny indeed produced the renowned Italian dynasty, as Atlas had foreseen. Thus Castelli:

Perhaps you wonder from whence this clan assumes the avian minister of great Jove, who is armed with beak and hooked claws and expands his huge wings. The Phrygians bore it, having given Ganymede to heavens; wearing it themselves, the Trojans left the sign (*signa reliquerunt Troes*) to their great successors, who mixed with it the golden lilies (*aurea lilia*) in remembrance of a related noble clan. The new offices from Emperor Sigismondo add the black eagles (*nigrantes aquilas*). Before that the great Aglantes had handed down the golden lion (*fulvum leonem*) that from its right foot bears Phoenician words in the letters of the Latins, which exhort to march forth towards opposition with undaunted step.¹²³

The passage considers several images tied to the Este house in different ways.

First is the white eagle, with which Strozzi associates Ganymede, as we have already said. Tellingly, he describes the image “naturalistically” here, as a living animal perpetually expanding his wings. This recalls the recommendations in Decembrio’s dialogue about representing even “incredible” animals in a life-like manner. It also recalls a Virgilian technique that Michael Putnam has pointed out in his studies of ekphrasis in the *Aeneid*; the rendering of inert images as if they were in motion and “miraculously alive.”¹²⁴ Next in Strozzi’s passage, we hear of the two images that were conceded in relatively recent memory to the Este princes: the golden lilies from Charles VII of France in 1431; and the black eagles from the Emperor Frederick III in 1452. Strozzi is attentive to the different meanings of the two different concessions, remembering the first as the sign of a genealogical bond to the French royal house (“*cognate monumentum nobile gentis*”), and the second as the sign of “offices” or “favors” (*munera*) conceded by the Emperor. The last image remembered above is an element of the Este repertoire whose origins are unknown today, but

¹²¹ Ibid., VI. 500-504 (Trans. mine): “Threicium quae passa marem, vicinaque partu / traditur Atlanti dono; dehinc sanguinis huius / progeniem fama est ipsos aluisse nepotes / ac lunae signasse nota, qua maximus Atlas / usus erat quondam astrorum caelique peritus.”

¹²² Ludwig, *Die Borsias des Tito Strozzi*, 333.

¹²³ Strozzi, *Borsias*, VI.539-550 (Trans. mine): “Forsitan et quarens, magni Iovis unde ministram / gens ea portet avem, quae rostro armatur et uncis / unguibus atque alas ingentes candida pandit. / Hanc Phryges illato superis Ganymede ferebant; / haec quoque magnanimis gestanda nepotibus ipsi / signa reliquerunt Troes, quibus aurea miscent / lilia, cognate monumentum nobile gentis. / Nec non Sismundi nova munera Caesaris addunt / nigrantes aquilas. Fulvum namque ante leonem / maximus Aglantes dederat, Phoenicia dextro / qui pede verba notis gestat signata Latinis, / quae contra impavido suadent procedere passu.”

¹²⁴ See Putnam, *Virgil’s Epic Designs: Ekphrasis in the Aeneid*, 18: “The still artifact is in motion, and the stoppage of time for the depiction of work of art is paradoxically challenged by the continuance of the action which the ekphrasis portrays. However distant temporally or topographically remains the myth to which it alludes, the shield shows the event as still occurring.”

which were famously displayed and indeed are still visible on a set of marble relief sculptures on the tower of the Este castle in Ferrara. These represent a pair of lions bearing the enigmatic letters *WORBAS* on scrolls unfurled at their feet.¹²⁵ By giving the phrase a Phoenician origin, Strozzi once again uses the image as an opportunity to visualize and “prove” his genealogical story connected with the *translatio imperii* between Troy and Italy.

Strozzi’s description of the Este *signa* has been commented on so far to ascertain the date of his composition of the genealogical sequence. Tissoni Benevenuti has noticed that the description is missing the “sign” of the keys, first conceded to Borso in 1471, and then to Ercole I in 1472.¹²⁶ She identifies the image described here (excluding the final image of the lions) as the composite *stemma* or coat of arms belonging to Borso d’Este, therefore, as the head of the Este states between 1452 and 1471. In doing so, she relies on a long historiographical tradition of using heraldry to answer questions of chronology.¹²⁷

What this approach misses, on its own, are the ways in which the Este images are meant to be interpreted as well as identified here. Strozzi’s epic ecosystem, so to speak, has invested these images with many of the qualities of the other *monumenta* presented immediately prior: the memory of affective acts of exchange; the ability to act as agents of remembrance; and the ability to enfold within themselves multiple historical moments.¹²⁸ According to the poem’s internal discourse, for example, the armor and horse given to Ruggiero above foreshadow the monumental construction of the equestrian statue in Ferrara’s *piazza* that Ruggiero himself can only imagine in his lifetime. The statue, in turn, is enabled to elicit the “remembrances” of Strozzi’s contemporaries onto this previously unknown past, reconfiguring the present as the outcome of a long historical unfolding. When the Este “signs” follow upon these objects in his poem, finally, they become additional vessels of the entire genealogy’s memory and meaning; the lilies “remembrances”; the

¹²⁵ Spaggiari and Trenti, *Stemmi estensi ed Austro-estensi*, 10 and 39-41.

¹²⁶ Tissoni Benvenuti, “Ruggiero o la fabbrica dell’Inamoramento de Orlando,” 80 (Trans. mine): “È però importante notare che lo stemma Estense descritto dallo Strozzi nei versi finali di entrambi le redazioni è quello che fu in uso soltanto nel periodo dal 1452 alla primavera del 1471: prima, cioè del viaggio a Roma che Borso fece per essere creato dal Papa Duca di Ferrara. In quell’occasione egli ottenne infatti, con il titolo, il privilegio di porre in capo allo stemma le chiavi pontificie. Lo stemma descritto dallo Strozzi ci riporta quindi a prima del 1471: non è stato aggiornato” [It is important to note that the Este *stemma* described by Strozzi in the final verses of both redactions is that which was in use only in the period between 1452 and 1471; that is, before the visit to Rome that Borso made to be created Duke of Ferrara by the Pope. On that occasion he obtained in fact, with the title, the privilege to place on the head of the stemma the pontifical keys. The *stemma* described by Strozzi brings us therefore to a date prior to 1471; it was never updated].

¹²⁷ Dating is a traditional function of “heraldic science” but the history of how it acquired this function has not yet been told. See Pastoureau, *Armorial des chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, 10-11 (Trans. mine): “C’est en matière de datation que l’apport de l’héraldique apparaît comme le plus précieux, car les dates du port d’un personnage forment en général une fourchette de dates plus réduite que ses dates de vie et de mort. Dans le cas d’un objet, d’une œuvre d’art ou d’un monument orné de plusieurs écus appartenant à plusieurs personnages, il est possible de parvenir à une grande précision, en établissant une date résultante à partir des dates de naissance, de mariage, de début de ‘règne’, d’entrée en titulaire ou en fonction, et de décès de chacun d’eux ... Cet aspect ‘archéologique’ des études héraldiques appartient à ce que l’on pourrait appeler l’héraldique traditionnelle” [In matters of dating, the value of heraldry appears particularly precious, since the dates in which a person bears certain arms can in general offer a more precise range than the dates of birth and death. In the case of an object, a work or art, or a monument decorated with shields belonging to various persons, it is possible to arrive with great precision at a date, departing from the dates of birth, marriage, the beginning of a reign, and the acquisition of titles or functions etc. ... This ‘archaeological’ aspect of heraldry studies belongs to what one can call traditional heraldry].

¹²⁸ On the Virgilian precedents for this kind of treatment of objects as “remembrances” see Henry, *The Vigor of Prophecy: A Study of Virgil’s Aeneid*, 18-23 (Spoils, Gifts, Memorials).

lions “inheritances” and “exhortations,” and so on. In this sense, Strozzi’s description resists the impulse to fix the Este *signa* to a precise historical point or event. I would argue that this resistance is intertwined with the very premise of the *Borsias* as a literary undertaking and innovation, in its transposition of local history and contemporary subjects into a classical genre and language.¹²⁹ It also seems to speak to the close relationship between the poem and the local humanist tradition as we have been studying it in this chapter. Guarino in 1433 glossed with an array of classical texts, and with a citation from the *Aeneid*, one *insignia* and event in the life of the court. Now the whole history of the dynasty, the city of Ferrara, and the life of the court, were being reimagined in an ancient epic language and form.

Strozzi’s ekphrasis of the Este *signa* will be our last opportunity in this dissertation to return once again to Boiardo’s *Inamoramento* and to reconsider its discourses around images, the Este images particularly, in the light of this local humanistic tradition. The passage of the vernacular poem that stands out in relation to Strozzi’s passage above is the scene in which the origins of the Este eagle – in ancient Troy, and before that in Ganymede’s mythical abduction – is revealed. As we saw in Chapter One, this occurs when Hector’s “original” shield is discovered accidentally in the woods by the character of Mandricardo, the young and aloof King of Tartary. The precious relic is surrounded by elaborate and life-like frescos, which reveal its history.

Posto è il bel scudo in meglio ala gran piazza:
 A ricontarvi el come non dimoro
 Avea la corte intorno ad ogni faza
 Logie dipinte con sotil lavoro.
 Gran gente era ritracta ad una caza
 E un gentil damigello era tra loro;
 Più bel di lui tra tutti non si vede,
 Ed avia scripto al capo: ‘Ganimede’
 Tutta la istoria sua vi era ritracta
 Di ponto in ponto, che nulla vi manca
 Come caciando alla selva disfatta,
 Lo portò sino al cel l’aquila bianca,
 Qual poi sempre fo insegna di sua schiatta,
 Sino al giorno che Hectòr, l’anima franca,
 Occiso fu nel campo a tradimento.
 L’aquila prima avia bianche le piume,
 Che candida dal cielo era mandata;

¹²⁹ On Strozzi’s innovations with the neo-Latin epic see Lippencott, “The neo-Latin Historical Epics of the North Italian Courts: An Examination of ‘Courtly Culture’ in the Fifteenth Century,” 417: “Shortly after 1450, for reasons still not altogether clear to me, a number of humanist poets began to write Latin epics. This in itself was nothing new. Petrarch had creditably rejuvenated the form with his poem *Africa*, begun in 1338 or 1339 and provisionally finished in 1343. But whereas Petrarch had respected traditional decorum by basing his neoclassical poem on the classical figure of Scipio Africanus, the later humanists constructed their efforts around protagonists and events taken from contemporary local history.” See also Hofmann, “Von Africa über Bethlehem nach America,” 146-172. Hofmann’s position is that the *Aeneid* was an ill-chosen model for Strozzi because its “comprehensive myth-historical synthesis ... complicated plot structure, and the epic conflict that was settled on the typological and allegorical levels, and on the level of prophecy” was too complicated to apply coherently to contemporary history, wherein the “outcome” (i.e. the present) is by necessity constantly changing and unstable (150). My alternative suggestion would be that Strozzi wished to transfer precisely the complicated and “folded” temporal textures of the *Aeneid* to his own context, even if the result would be a possibly incomplete and/or not altogether homogeneous work of epic poetry.

Ma poi che Troia fiè de pianti un fiume,
 Ne la crudele e misera giornata
 Quando fu morto Hectòr, el suo gran lume,
 La lieta insegna alhor fu tramutata:
 Per semigliarse a sua scura fortuna,
 L'aquila bianca travestirno a bruna. (III.ii.5-7)

Among the many differences between the two passages, one is the added detail Boiardo provides about Ganymede's story, remembering its context and the eagle's abduction of the beautiful boy ("Come cacciando alla selva disfatta / lo portò sino al cel l'aquila bianca"). We have already seen how the erotic metamorphosis alluded to at the heart of the ancient myth – Giovio's transformation into an eagle – is woven into Boiardo's plot, motifs, and characters; beginning with Orlando's metamorphosis under the all-consuming power of his desire for Angelica. This is not the case in Strozzi's epic, where the Este *signa* are ultimately separable, just as the genealogical passage is separable (and indeed was separated), from the epic as whole.

There are other differences between the ways in which the Este "signs" are embedded into the two poems' respective narratives. Boiardo is less direct, less pedantic even, than Strozzi about the history of the eagle especially; since instead of "telling" the reader the history of the image (as Strozzi does, through the figure of the court insider, Castelli), the *Inamoramento* manages to "show" it to us, through the eyes of Mandricardo, as if without mediation. In addition, whereas Strozzi concentrates his history of the Este dynasty and their "signs" into a single passage, Boiardo disperses the images, their stories, and the Este genealogy throughout his poem. The double image of the Este Eagle with the French lilies, for instance, is revealed to Rugiero - within his tutor's prophecy - in a separate scene from Mandricardo's discovery of Hector's shield and the white eagle.¹³⁰ On the other hand, the Imperial (and, later, the Papal) concessions, together with the image of the lions, are not mentioned at all in the *Inamoramento*, even though the dates of its composition would have allowed them easily to be included. Perhaps, for Boiardo, the priority was less to elaborate a complete history of the Este "signs" than it was to elaborate on those parts of their repertoire which especially communicated the Este's dignity and autonomy, as well as the central thematic motifs and operations of his poem. Perhaps the omissions were meant to allow for readers to connect the dots; to complete the narrative themselves where the poem had left gaps, and in this way to participate somewhat in the history of the genealogy's telling and discovery.

These points should bring our attention back to what Strozzi and Boiardo's discourses of "signs" shared with one another; and how they both absorbed some of the humanistic lessons that have been the subject of this chapter. It is illuminating to remember Giovanni da Nono in this regard, with his claim that *pictores* had altered or reshaped (*reducerunt*) the image of the Maganza falcon to make the Este eagle: "On their shields before the color azure there shines a white eagle which truly should be a falcon but painters made it into the form of an eagle, as it is commonly said" [*fulget in clipeis suis aquila alba in colore lazuro, que revera deberet esse unus falchion, sed pictores reducerunt ipsum in formam unius aquile, ut fertur*].¹³¹ The accusation reveals that da Nono saw in the materiality of "signs" – their need to be remade and reproduced, both literally and discursively – vulnerabilities as well as opportunities to negotiate their history and meaning. But ultimately here the manipulations of the *pictores* are sources of fraud. In Strozzi and Boiardo's

¹³⁰ *Inamoramento*, II.xxi.58.

¹³¹ Rajna, "Le origini delle famiglie padovane e gli eroi dei romanzi cavallereschi," 169 (Trans. mine).

works, what stands out in comparison is the fact that artists' work on the "signs" is openly *celebrated*.

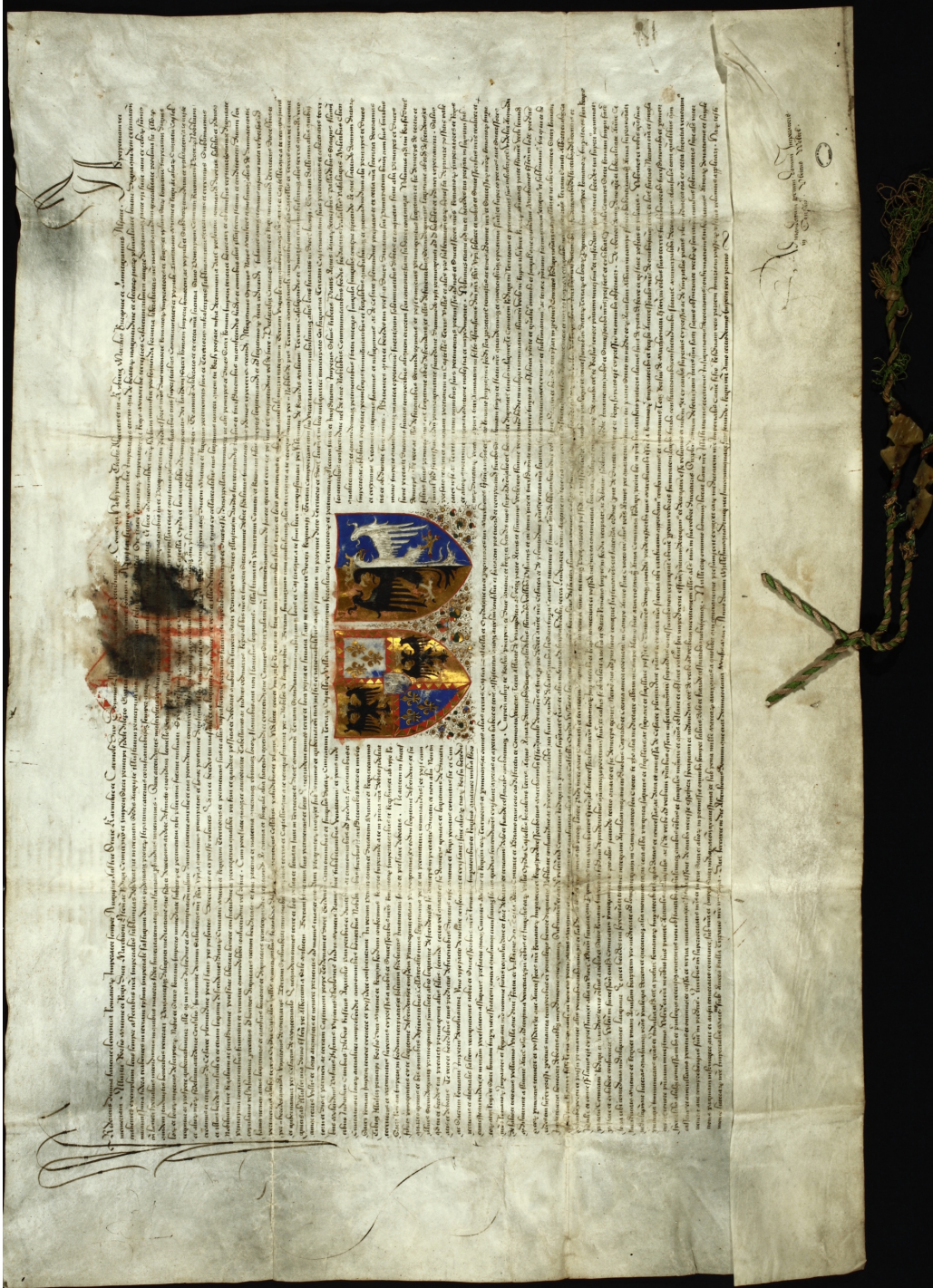
Across both of their epic poems, the Este *signa* appear as finely-wrought material constructions and as *loci* for the display of poetic skill; in short, they appear as products of *ars* and *ingenium*, whose license transcended – as the ancients testified – the obligations of reproduction. The signs' descriptions in this respect clearly diverge from modern definitions of heraldic description, or *blazon*, in which the herald/heraldist is meant to disappear in order to render an "indifferent" and accurate passage between the description and its object, as the image travels through time and space.¹³² At the same time, these poetic ekphrases neither make claims about "the divine power" of poetry, nor anticipate the "autonomy of the modern intellectual," as Marcello Ciccutto has alternatively described the ekphrastic experiments of Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494), the Florentine poet, humanist, and contemporary of Strozzi and Boiardo.¹³³ These two poets from the Este states did, however, claim powers and liberties of several other kinds: the Este's liberty with respect to their overlords; their own liberty to make their marks on a political and cultural tradition which they had, after all, helped to build and sustain; and the power that the *studia humanitatis* affords its students in front of certainty's terrible sobriety. There was a daring, or *potestas audendi* as Decembrio might have called it, in these images; a display of wantonness, or *lascivia*, before manifest laws. Theirs was a Renaissance heraldry.

¹³² Pastoureau, "L'image héraldique," 119: "En fait, grâce à ces formulations fortement technicisées, l'héraldiste est aujourd'hui capable de reconstituer, voire de redessiner et de peindre n'importe quelle armoirie médiévale ainsi décrite. Bien plus, grâce à ces formulations 'blasonnées', il sait exactement comment se lisaient et s'énonçaient les armoiries au Moyen Age. A plusieurs siècles de distance, il est ainsi possible de passer indifféremment du texte à l'image et de l'image au texte ... Elle semble même constituer un cas limite dans l'analyse et la description des images" [In fact, thanks to these highly technical formulas, the heraldist is capable today of reconstituting, even redrawing or painting, any medieval arms already described. What's more, thanks to these blasoned formulas, he knows exactly how coats of arms were read and announced in the Middle Ages. With centuries of distance, it is possible indeed to pass indifferently from text to image and image to text ... It seems to constitute a limit case in the analysis and description of images]. One useful model for articulating the difference between Strozzi and Boiardo's *signa* and heraldic images, according to the standard modern definition, is Nelson Goodman's distinction between *autographic* and *allographic* images. For Goodman, artworks in the former category (like the ekphrases) are "unfakeable," since all their qualities are constitutive of their identity. Artworks in the latter category (like Pastoureau's "heraldic image") are comprised of a "definition notation" that can be fully and completely reproduced without any loss (or gain) deriving from the process of transmission. See Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 112-132. Another perspective on heraldry's standard definition, and its use in pre-modern legal contexts, is offered by new work on scientific or "technical" images. See for example Werner, "Discourses about Pictures: Considerations on the Particular Challenges Natural-Scientific Pictures Pose for the Theory of the Picture," 8-12.

¹³³ Ciccutto, "*Spirantia signa*. Cultura efrastica di Angelo Poliziano," 131-132: "Insomma, è qui per Poliziano argomento di una *enargeia*/ecfrasi che, dando vita alle immagini, viene a dimostrare il potere sovrumano se non divino dell'arte poetica. Le qualità di *nitor* e di illusione vitale che l'ecfrasi conferisce alla parola poetica per via di strumentazione retorica sono quelle che possono addirittura elidere la trascendenza, la dipendenza dal soprannaturale all'umanista: è la forza rappresentativa del codice efrastico, che dà vita in conto proprio alle figure, a porsi dunque a segnale forte di autonomia dell'intellettuale moderno" [In summary, here for Poliziano is the goal of an *enargeia* / ekphrasis, which, giving life to images, comes to demonstrate the supernatural if not the divine power of poetic art. The quality of brightness and of life-like illusion that ekphrasis confers onto the poetic word, by means of its rhetorical instrumentalization, are the same that can even remove transcendence, or the humanist's dependence on the supernatural; it is the representative force of the ekphrastic mode, which transmits life precisely on account of its objects, asserting itself as a strong signal of the autonomy of the modern intellectual].

Figures

1.



Diploma of Frederick III, 1452



Diploma of Sixtus IV, 147

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