The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-century Italian Impresa*

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Il ragionare appunto di questo soggetto è proprio un entrare in un gran pelago e da non poterne così tosto riuscire.

Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose*

One great benefit from the recent spate of studies of the Renaissance emblem is the recognition that, despite their repeated attempts, Renaissance theorists failed to formulate a standard definition for the term 'emblem'. Earlier modern historians had tended to approach the difficult problem of emblem-literature by forming definitions first, and then trying to arrange examples which best supported their arguments. The results were either deceptively neat or hopelessly muddled.[1] Recent research, however, has shown not only how much the concept of 'the emblem' has changed since its controversial origins in the pirate publication of Alciati's *Emblematum liber* in 1531,[2] but how this rubric actually meant differ-

[1] L. Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance. Hieroglyphik und Emblematik in ihren Beziehungen und Fortwirkungen*, Leipzig 1923; W.S. Heckscher, 'Renaissance Emblems: Observations suggested by some Emblem-Books in the Princeton University Library', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, XV, no. 2, 1954, pp. 55–68; W.S. Heckscher and K.-A. Wirth, 'Emblem, Emblembuch', *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1959, V (fasc. 49, 50), cols. 85–228; A. Schöne, 'Emblemata: Versuch einer Einführung', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, XXXVII, 1963, pp. 197–231 (reprinted in Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock*, Munich 1964, pp. 17–63); A. Henkel and A. Schöne, *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1967; M. Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, London [Studies of the Warburg Institute. III] 1939.

[2] *Viri clariisimi D. Andreae Alciati Iurisconsultiss. Mediol. ad D. Chonradum Peutingeru[m] Augustanam, Iurisconsultum Emblematum liber*, Augsburg: Heinrich Steyner, 28 February 1531. As Miedema has convincingly argued, for Alciati, the emblem was a variant form of

ent things to the humanists and academics working concurrently in Italy, Germany, France, England and the Low Countries.[3] These studies have demonstrated that the Renaissance emblem was not a static and inalterable form, as had been argued earlier this century. Instead, it was a malleable format, whose definition lay almost entirely in its function – as needs changed, so the 'emblem' changed. From a historical perspective, the structure of the emblem is important only in so far as it provides the medium through which certain sorts of ideas can be expressed. It is less a language, than a sort of grammar, a means toward significance. Studying the emblem *per se* could tell you how a series of interconnected thoughts might be arranged, but the structure of an emblem is not its 'subject'.

This re-evaluation of the emblem is important for two reasons. First, it highlights the limited gain of studying 'the emblem' as a defining intellectual constant. Second, it suggests that the meaning of any particular emblem can be fully appreciated only if one understands both the pictorial and literary content of the emblem and the particular theoretical construct according to which the disparate parts of the emblem were composed – again, stressing the notion that each emblem book, if not each emblem, is an individual product requiring individual attention.

These realizations raise a series of awkward questions, however, when one comes to deal with the series of pictographs commonly presumed to be the forebearers of the emblem – the device, the *blason*, the badge and the *impresa*. None of these configurations generated or received contemporary definitions. Theoretical discussions of the *impresa*, for example, post-date its inception by more than a century, when, for the most part, it was no longer a vital medium.[4] This fact leaves one with the misleading

the epigram and, therefore, an exclusively literary invention. The inclusion of a pictorial figure in the emblem was neither essential nor, apparently, desired. The illustrations in the *Emblematum liber* were the invention of the publishers. See H. Miedema, 'The term *emblema* in Alciati,' *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXI, 1968, pp. 234–50 and C. Balavoine, 'Archéologie d'emblème littéraire: la dédicace à Conrad Peutinger des *Emblemata* d'André Alciat', *Emblèmes et devises au temps de la Renaissance*, ed M.T. Jones-Davies, Paris 1981, pp. 9–21.

[3]   See, for example, R.J. Clements, *Picta Poesis. Literary and Humanistic Theory in Renaissance Emblem Books*, Rome 1960; D. Russell, 'The term *emblème* in sixteenth-century France,' *Neophilologus*, LXIX, 1975, pp. 337–51; D. Russell, 'Alciati's emblems in Renaissance France,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXXIV, 1981, pp. 534–54; A. Stegmann, 'Les théories de l'emblème et de la devise en France et en Italie (1520–1620)', *L'emblème a la Renaissance. Actes de la journée d'études du 10 mai 1980*, ed. Y. Giraud, Paris 1982, pp. 61–77; D. Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, Lexington KY 1985; K.J. Hoeltgen, *Aspects of the Emblem. Studies in the English Emblem Tradition and the European Context*, Kassel 1986; A. Saunders, 'Picta poesis. The relationship between figure and text in the sixteenth-century French Emblem Book', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, XLVIII, 1986, pp. 621–52; I. Höpel, *Emblem und Sinnbild. Vom Kunstbuch zum Erbauungsbuch*, Frankfurt am Main 1987; A. Saunders, *The sixteenth-century French Emblem Book. A decorative and useful Genre*, Geneva [Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance. CCXXIV] 1988.

[4]   See, for example, the warnings against using sixteenth-century debates to clarify

impression that the *impresa*, for example, was a much more stable format than the emblem, since its textbook definition does not evolve much after the second half of the sixteenth century. The problems involved in studying the device or the *impresa* are essentially the exact opposite of those of the emblem. The emblem was regularly redefined as it developed and changed, hence the extremely relative value of each individual definition. The device and *impresa* were defined only in their most 'mature' form, and often only as they related to contemporary developments of the emblem. Indeed, both 'device' and '*impresa*' are usually discussed as if they were merely some a kind of stable sub-set of the emblem, its conceptual bedrock. But is this a valid interpretation? It may be one way to approach a very complex topic, but by concentrating on the emblematic heritage of the device and *impresa*, one obscures – and perhaps even misrepresents – the original, one might say motive, intent of these genres.

The least fruitful way to begin an examination of the early Renaissance device and *impresa* is with the assumption that either late Renaissance or modern terminology is going to get us very far. One only need skim through a selection of handbooks and scholarly articles to emerge completely confused. The 'device' is variously categorized as the image portrayed on the surface of a shield;[5] a motto-like signature;[6] a fore-runner of the *impresa*;[7] a badge;[8] and '*un emblème personnel*'.[9] Robert Estienne defines '*les devises de quelque peinture*' as the '*argumentum picturae*'.[10] The

fifteenth-century imagery in R. Klein, 'La théorie de l'expression figurée dans les traités italiens sur les *imprese*, 1555–1612,' *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, XIX, 1957, pp. 320–42, esp. p. 321 (reprinted in R. Klein, *La forme et l'intelligible. Écrits sur la Renaissance et l'art moderne*, ed A. Chastel, Paris 1970, pp. 125–150); F. Ames-Lewis, 'Early Medicean Devices' *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLII, 1979, pp. 122–43, esp. p. 124; M. Pastoureau, 'La naissance de la médaille: Le problème emblématique', *Revue numismatique*, vi sér., XXIV, 1982, pp. 206–21, esp. p. 210; and Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 29.

5   W. Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, II, ii, 19: 'The device he beares upon his shield Is a blacke Ethyope, reaching at the sunne. The word, *Lux tua vita mihi*'.

6   See Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 34 citing the entries in the *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le seizième siècle*, Paris 1951, s.v. 'devise'.

7   Heckscher and Wirth, 'Emblem, Emblembuch', *Reallexikon*, cols 98–101.

8   C. Beaune, 'Costume et pouvoir en France à la fin du Moyen Âge: les devises royales vers 1400', *Revue des sciences humaines*, LV, no. 183, 1981, pp. 125–46, esp. p. 125.

9   M. Pastoureau, 'Aux origines de l'emblème: La crise de l'héraldique européenne aux XVe et XVIe siècles', *Emblèmes et Devises au Temps de la Renaissance*, ed. M. T. Jones-Davies, Paris 1981, pp. 129–36, esp. p 131. See also Pastoureau's somewhat curious list of definitions (p. 135, n. 15): '*Pour ma part, j'appelle* badge *la figure emblématique employée isolément;* devise *l'ensemble figure + sentence;* emblème *l'image allégorique d'un texte plus ou moins long généralement en vers, telle qu'on la recontre dans les recueils des XVIe et XVIIe siècles. En outre, le pluriel* emblèmes, *terme collectif, désigne toutes les catégories de signes (chiffres, monogrammes, armoiries, devises, drapeaux, etc.) ayant pour fonction d'évoquer une personne ou un groupe de personnes de manière iconique*'. The definition is repeated in Pastoureau, 'La naissance de la médaille', p. 212, n. 27.

10   R. Estienne, *Dictionnaire françois-latin*, Paris 1549, s.v. 'devise'. pp. 35–6.

'*impresa*' is alternately defined as synonymous with the device, the badge (*scutum*) and the printer's mark (*insigne*);[11] as 'nothing else than a symbolical representaion of a purpose, a wish, a line of conduct . . . by means of a motto and a picture which reciprocally interpret each other';[12] as '*una significazion della mente nostra sotto un nodo di parole e di cose . . . una filosofia del cavaliere, come la poesia de una filosofia del filosofo*';[13] and as 'an instrument of our intellect, composed of figures and of words, which represent metaphorically the interior *concetto* of the academic'.[14] Taegio goes so far as to claim that '*le parole & le figure [of the* impresa] *le quali separate non hanno significato alcuno, ma accompagnate insieme manifestano il segreto dell'animo nostro*';[15] whereas Pietro Aretino sees the 'motto-less *impresa*' as an useful tool to develop one's sense of invention: '*Io non m'intendo diversi, ma dice che chi n'ha practica che l'uno componeva sopra una mosca, sopra una lettera, sopra una maniglia e sopra ogni impresa ebbe facilità ad invenzione*'.[16]

The lesson to be learned from this mêlée of definitions is not that either the device or the *impresa* was so abstruse as to be indefinable, but that, like the emblem, they were a flexible medium. None of the aforementioned definitions are incorrect. They simply reflect the device and *impresa* in differing circumstances. The mistake would lie in assuming that any one of these definitions could claim historical precedence.

One intriguing aspect of all these definitions is how priority shifts amongst the parts of the device or *impresa*. Some authors see primacy in the word, while others assign it to the image or to the process of melding these two parts together. There seem to be three alternatives: significance as a literary form, as a pictorial form or as an intellectual conceit. Whereas one might think this tri-polarity is a late development, a typical product of self-conscious sixteenth-century over-intellectualizing, the source of this ambiguity actually can be traced back to the High Middle Ages. This should not surprise us, since it is generally agreed that the device and the *impresa*, along with their sister-forms of the badge, insignia and *blason*, developed out of the pictorial vocabulary of medieval heraldry.[17] But few have acknowledged or understood the impact of the literary vocabulary of heraldry on the intellectual premises of these later forms.

[11] Miedema, 'The term *emblema*', p. 238.

[12] Praz, *Studies in seventeenth-century Imagery*, p. 50.

[13] Scipione Ammirato, *Il Rota ovvero dell'Imprese*, Naples 1562, pp. 10–14.

[14] A. Chiocco, *Discorso delle imprese e del vero modo di formarle*, Verona 1601. Cited by Klein, 'L'expression figurée', p. 322.

[15] Bartolomeo Taegio, *Il Liceo dove si ragiona dell'arte di fabricare le imprese . . . libro secondo*, Milan 1571, fol. 6r. See also Henri Estienne's attribution of similar sentiments to Scipione Bargagli, cited in Clements, *Picta Poesis*, pp. 24–5.

[16] P. Aretino, *Ragionamento delle corti* in *Opere di Pietro Aretino e di Anton Francesco Doni*, ed. C. Cordié, Milan and Naples 1976, p. 454. I thank François Quiviger for this reference.

[17] See for example, the arguments presented by Pastoureau, 'Aux origines de l'emblème', pp. 129–31 and Russell, *The emblem and device in France*, pp. 32–3.

In his study of twelfth and thirteenth-century heraldic terminology, Brault pointed out that the verb '*deviser*' appears in early sources with three distinct meaning:[18]

(1) to represent symbolically by means of a coat-of-arms[19]
(2) to invent a coat of arms
(3) to denote the action of describing a coat of arms.[20]

In essence, then, one verb was used to refer to an object, to a description of that object and to the process of inventing that object. A similar development of the term '*blason*' occurs slightly later. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, '*blason*' was used exclusively to denote the shield and/or the figures on the shield. By the fifteenth century, however, the verb '*blasen*' is used in the sense of 'to inscribe with armorial bearings, and to describe in heraldic terms'.[21] '*Blason*' was also used to indicate an explication or interpretation of a coat of arms. For example, one series of manuscripts claiming to contain '*les noms et blasons*' of the Knights of the Round Table offers a physical description of each Knight, his arms and an historical explanation for the figures in his coat of arms. King Arthur's '*armes dasur a treize couronnes dor*' signify the '*xiii^c royaulmes quil conquesta*' and Seguran's '*armes dor a ung dragon de sable arme langue de sinople*' refer to when '*il tua ung ydeulx et terrible dragon quant il fut fait nouveau chevalier premierement.*'[22] These descriptive *blasons* form the basis for the sixteenth-century *blason poétique*, an exclusively literary form, not unlike Alciati's emblem, related to a picture only through circumstance. Therefore, again, one has a tri-partite concept involving words, images, and meaning, from which, at various stages in its development, one or more parts are taken to form a new artistic concept.

But the ambiguities of the term 'device' extend well beyond this play between image and description. Its Latin root (*divido, -ere*) provided an additional paradox in the linguistic fact that the act of 'distinguishing' is conceptually linked to those of 'separating' and 'distributing'.[23] So, for example, in Old French:

[18] G.J. Brault, *Early Blazon. Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Literature*, Oxford 1972, esp. pp. 169–70.

[19] Such as '. . . *einsi comme la portreture que vos veez ici le devise*' (*La Mort le roi Artu, roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. J. Frappier, 2nd edn, Geneva and Lille 1956, p. 63). Cited Brault, *Early Blazon*, p. 170.

[20] Brault cites '*Et cil lor armes lor devisent/ Des chevaliers que il plus prisent*' and '*Ensi devisent et deboissent/ Les armes de ces qu'il conoissent*' from Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charette*, vv. 5771–2 and 5823–24, as well as '*Se tu veus mes armes aprendre/ A deviser, eles sont d'or,/ Et se tu vues sonner ce cor,/ Le surplus t'en deviserai*' from *Le Roman du Hem*, vv. 1068–71 (*Ibid.*, p. 169).

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 130. Note also Brault's definition of '*dire le devis*'. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

[22] See A. Saunders, *The sixteenth-century Blason poétique*, Bern 1981, pp. 17–18 citing Paris, BN, fr. 1435, fols 2v and 4v.

[23] Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 24. Indeed, Brault lists '*devision*' as a synonym for '*devis*'. Brault, *Early Blazon*, p. 170.

A *devis* was a separation, postponement, wish, description or manner, while *devise* indicated a separation, a division, a distribution, difference, description, custom; fashion, intention, will or even identifying mark. Through semantic contamination or combination, a *devise* could also be a plan, design, a prescription, a formula or a testament by which one expressed his last will and provided for the division of his worldly goods upon his death. . . . Somewhat later, it would appear, the verb [*deviser*] also came to mean 'speak'. . . .[24]

From this list, one begins to appreciate yet another aspect of the problems involved in trying to understand the early Renaissance device. As a sort of 'indicator' or 'signifier', what one might call 'an agent of clarification', the duty of the device is to indicate simultaneously what something is, as well as what it is not – definition as separation.

In practice this process is actually much simpler than it sounds. This is because as 'signifiers' the most basic function of the device, *blason, impresa* and even the emblem, must be communication. A completely indecipherable device or emblem would be an absurd and useless invention. At the same time, however, we know that one cachet of the sixteenth-century *impresa* was a deliberate veiling of its meaning. To quote Paolo Giovio, '. . . ch'ella non sia oscura di sorte ch'abbia mestiero della sibilla per interprete a volerla intendere, né tanto chiara ch'ogni plebeo/intenda'.[25] But was this flirtation with esoterism an original part of the emblematic framework? And if not, how did it develop and for what reasons?

Since both the visual and literary traditions of medieval heraldry played an important role in the development of the device and *impresa*, it seems appropriate to consider the 'purpose' of heraldic imagery. Pastoureau has offered the convincing suggestion that the appearance of heraldry in the West reflects contemporary changes in armour design.[26]

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[24] Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 24. See also his citation of C.-F. Menestrier's opinion (*La Science et l'art des devises* . . ., Paris 1686, p. 13): '*Par ces usages du mot Devise, il me paroist que l'on s'en est toujours servi pour exprimer ce qui pouvoit faire connoître & distinguer les choses, ou les personnes. Ce qui montre évidemment que ce mot vient du Latin Dividere, qui exprime les deux fonctions des signes, dont le propre est de représenter & en même temps de distinguer*' (*Ibid.*, p. 186, n. 8).

[25] P. Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari e amorose*, ed. M.L. Doglio, Rome 1978, p. 37. For a further discussion of this tension between clarity and obscurity in the emblematic tradition, see Clements, *Picta poesis*, pp. 192–98. In brief: 'On the issue of clarity and obscurity, the emblematists, in common with all humanists, were subject to two contrary traditions. Their pedantry and exclusivism induced them to express themselves obscurely . . . Their instincts for didacticism and their self-consciousness as representatives of a popular or *völkisch* as well as learned tradition made them acknowledge that they should write with clarity and simplicity (p. 192).

[26] See M. Pastoureau, *Les armoiries*, Turnhout (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, fasc. 20) 1976, p. 25. These arguments are expanded in M. Pastoureau, 'L'apparition des armoiries en Occident: état du problème', *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des chartres*, CXXXIV, 1976, pp. 281–300 (reprinted in Pastoureau, *L'Hermine et le Sinople. Études*

During the final years of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth
century, the invention of the coat of mail and alterations to the shape of
the helmet, which included an extension of the nasal bridge and the
addition of lateral plaques to protect the ears, made the task of identifying
soldier's on the battlefield – one's comrades as well as one's enemies –
extraordinarily difficult. One only need consider an image such as the pen
drawing of fighting warriors in the Lugt Collection in Paris [PLATE 1] or
the possibly related drawing in the British Museum, both of which have
been attributed with various qualifications to either the circle of Pisanello
or Altichiero, to appreciate the urgency of this problem.[27] It is very
difficult to tell exactly who is fighting whom in these pictures or even, for
that matter, if the Lugt sketch represents a battle, since the two sides
have not been demarcated clearly. It may represent men in the same
regiment exercising. But the point remains fundamentally unchanged:
that one needs some system of demarcation in order to understand the
events of a battle fought by soldiers wearing armour. Hence the appear-
ance of armorial markings or, as Pastoureau terms them, *'signes de recon-
naissance'* on the shield, the helmet and the cloth tunic which covered a
soldier's torso.

Of course, in accepting this line of argumentation, one should concede
that our agreement lies not in an intimate knowledge of the historical
facts, but as a projection from our own interpretation of illustrations of
knight's wearing distinctive coats of arms. We have learned to follow the
pictorial narrative laid out in a painting, manuscript or sculpted object by
following certain visual indicators. In manuscript illuminations, the re-
peated use of heraldic arms or attributes allows us to identify certain
characters when they re-appear in different postures, roles and situations.
Essentially, we have learned to accept the artistic convention which uses
an heraldic image as a means of identification; therefore, the idea that
heraldry evolved out of a military need to identify troops seems a plausible
conclusion to make. There is, however, no proof behind this assumption.
Interpretation of the past by means of pictorial relics tends to reflect our
assumptions about how pictures are meant to be read. Whether or not
artists developed these apparent pictorial conventions from the visual
habits of contemporary life must remain in the realm of conjecture.

Having accepted the notion that heraldry functions primarily as a
means of identification, however, it is interesting to note the limitations
of this role. If one studies the illustrations in a chivalric text, ac-
companying a text of the *Tristana Riccardiana* for example, one sees a

d'héraldique médiévale, Paris 1982) and M. Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, Paris 1979, pp.
26–39. Also see M. Keen, *Chivalry*, New Haven and London 1984, pp. 125–26.
[27] See M. Fossi Todorow, *I disegni del Pisanello e della sua cerchia*, Florence 1966, pp. 177
(no. 362) and 170–71 (no. 327t) and J. Byam Shaw, *The Italian Drawings in the Frits Lugt
Collection*, Paris 1983, I, pp. 207–08 (as School of Verona), and III, pl. 233.

young knight battling a series of dragons and other knights [PLATE 2].[28]
Since we know that dragons are usually evil things, we assume that the
young knight must be the hero of the tale. But if we completely lacked
the text or if we were illiterate, we could not identify this knight as
Perceval, nor would we know why he wears leonine elements as part of
his armour or if this fact matters. Nor could we be certain that the knights
with whom he battles are, indeed, 'bad knights'. This point is made more
clearly by a miniature in the *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* [PLATE 3].[29]
In the scene on folio 5[r], we see two men fighting, the same two men
embracing, and then one man being killed by an arrow. If we were unable
to read the text or rubrics included in the miniature, the identity of the
murdered man would completely escape us. There is no pictorial link
between the king, dressed in a blue tunic, and either of the knights of the
previous scenes, who are dressed in raven-emblazoned and green tunics
respectively. It is necessary to know the story of Canute's treacherous
betrayal of Edmund Ironside's generosity in order to make any sense out of
the series of images. Even then, it would be unclear whether the king
being killed was Edmund or Canute. It would also be impossible to de-
cipher the lesson apparently offered by these events. The moral might as
well be not to sit with your back towards fighting and embracing knights.
The point being that visual imagery is always limited in what it can
convey on its own. These examples prove one aspect of what Gombrich
called 'the dictionary fallacy' – the mistaken belief that pictorial symbols
are 'some kind of code with a one-to-one relation between sign and
significance'.[30] There is no universal key with which one can unlock the
meaning of pictorial symbols. Or to quote Cesare Ripa '. . . *senza la
cognitione del nome non si può penetrare alla cognitione del la cosa significata,
se non sono Imagini triviali, che per l'uso alla prima vista da tutti ordina-
riamente si riconoscono*'.[31] One needs an interpreter. Hence the lucky fact
of the simultaneous invention of heraldry with that of the herald; and the
invention of the explanatory legend or label in pictures.

[28] Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Palatino 556, fol. 141v. See E.G. Gardner,
The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature, London and New York 1930 (for reproductions);
N. Rasmo, 'Il codice palatino 556 e le sue illustrazioni', *Rivista d'arte*, XXI, 1939, pp.
245–81; R.S. Loomis and L. Hibbard Loomis, *The Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*,
London and New York 1938, p. 121; P. Breillat, 'Le manuscrit Florence Palatin 556, la
Tavola Ritonda et la liturgie du Graal', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française
de Rome*, LV, 1938, pp. 340–72; D. Branca, *I romanzi italiani di Tristano e la Tavola Ritonda*,
Florence 1968, *ad. cit.*, esp. p. 33; and *Pisanello alla Corte dei Gonzaga. [Catalogo della
Mostra]*, ed. G. Paccagnini, Milan 1972, p. 55.
[29] Cambridge, University Library, Ee. 3. 59, fol. 5r. The manuscript has been reproduced
in near-facsimile by M.R. James, *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, Oxford 1920. I thank
Martin Kaufmann for bringing this illustration to my attention.
[30] E.H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, II, London 1972,
pp. 11–12.
[31] C. Ripa, *Iconologia overo descrittione dell'imagini universali cavate dall'antichita et da altri
luoghi*, Rome 1593, (author's preface). Cited by Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p. 13.

In this context, one might also cite Pisanello's unfinished Arthurian cycle in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.[32] The *sinopie* show that each knight was not only labelled, but was also numbered. For example, number 3 is identified as '*Arfassart li Gros*'; number 5 as '*Malies de l'Espine*'; number 8 as '*Meldons le Envoissiez*'. The inclusion of the numbers is curious, though it seems possible that they refer to some list of stipulations in the original contract and would have been omitted in the final painting. The labels, however, probably would have remained; for without these labels, not only would the identity of the individual figures have been lost, but it would have been virtually imposible to trace the specific literary context for the cycle. For example, one isolated figure has been identified rather ambitiously as 'Lancelot, stopping by the banks of the River Marcoise'.[33] But, without a label of some sort, this figure, for all practical purposes, remains unidentifiable.[34] Seen from another perspective, however, despite the inclusion of labels, it is very difficult to understand what all these knights are meant to be doing. Could the 'subject' of the painting have been simply 'Arthur's knights on their adventures'? Granted, the painting is unfinished; one is dealing with fragments. Perhaps the cycle would have been accompanied by text describing the very special nature of each knight's wandering thereby giving some intellectual shape to these otherwise random images. But, in their present state at least, the frescoes represent nothing short of chaos. Why they remained unfinished at Pisanello's death in 1455 is unknown. Why they were quickly covered over subsequently seems self-evident as there is nothing discernable in these fragments that could have been considered even remotely worthy of military or courtly emulation.

But artists had other means towards identifying the characters in their compositions. Returning to the idea that it was the development of a new kind of helmet which prompted the invention of heraldic markings, it is interesting to note how, in the pre-heraldic *Bayeux Tapestries*, the artist employs three different methods to clarify the meaning of the pictorially difficult scene in which the Duke William dispels the rumor he has fallen in battle: the Duke lifts his helmet to expose his face; the explanatory legend '*Hic est dux Wilel[mus]*' is added above the Duke's head; and a second soldier, grasping the legend '*Hic Franci pugnant . . .*', points directly at the Duke [PLATE 4].[35] This combination of an opened visor and explanatory label to identify the leader of a military troop is also used in

[32] See G. Paccagnini, *Pisanello e il ciclo cavalleresco di Mantova*, Milan 1972; *Pisanello alla corte dei Gonzaga*; and J. Woods-Marsden, 'French Chivalric Myth and Mantuan Political Reality in the *Sala del Pisanello*', *Art History*, VIII, no. 4, 1985, pp. 397–412.

[33] See Paccagnini, *Pisanello e il ciclo*, pl. 54.

[34] It does seem that Pisanello intended to differentiate at least some of the knights by incorporating heraldic colours and devices in their *giornea*. See for example, *Ibid.*, pl. XII.

[35] See *The Bayeux Tapestry. A Comprehensive Survey*, by Sir F. Stenton *et. al.*, London 1957, pls 68 and 69.

the mid-fifteenth-century frescoes from the Castel Romano near Trent and currently in the Museo Diocesano.[36] From amongst a sea of anonymous mounted soldiers, the King is singled out as the only soldier who is labelled as well as the only one exposing his face. The pictorial premise in both cases seems to be that whereas the King's troops – those people locked within the visual narrative – can recognize him by his facial features; the viewer, placed beyond the immediate context of the image, needs an explanatory legend in order to understand the significance of the events being depicted. In this way, the legend and labels help to specify the image. The Duke and the King are separated from historical anonymity by means of words.

One significant aspect of the heraldic symbol was its potential as an allegorical medium. Different types of animals, birds, colours and materials all bore associative meaning and these elements were combined in order to form different kinds of messages.[37] A rampant lion on one's shield could allude to any number of the kingly virtues associated with the lion or could proclaim the bearer as an adherent to the Guelf political view.[38] Proper coats of arms could detail the bearer's genealogy and aspirations. Réné d'Anjou's arms, for example, tell of of his claims to the lands of Anjou, Sicily, Hungary, Jerusalem, Aragon and to the Dukedom of Bar.[39] Similarly, alliances between different rulers or families not linked by blood-ties could be represented heraldically. For example, the Marchese and later Duke Borso d'Este of Ferrara won the privilege of carrying the black eagle of Frederick III as part of the Este arms in 1452, largely, it seems, from having entertained Frederick well on the two occasions when he happened to pass through Ferrara.[40] The Chigi family of Siena were given the right to use the delle Rovere familial symbol of the oak tree in 1509, as a reward for Agostino Chigi having served so admirably as Pope Julius II delle Rovere's banker.[41] Furthermore, members of a ruler's en-

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[36] See L.G. Boccia, F. Rossi, M. Morin, *Armi e armatura lombarde*, Milan 1980, pp. 68–71, pls 52 and 53.

[37] See M. Pastoureau, *Figures et couleurs. Études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales*, Paris 1986, esp. pp. 35–49 and 115–23 and Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 130–32.

[38] M. Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, pp. 55 and 65, n. 28.

[39] Quarterly of five: (1) argent three bars gules = Kingdom of Hungary belonging to the Sicilian branch of the Anjou line; (2) azure, fleuretty or, a label of three points gules = Sicilian Anjou line; (3) argent, a cross potent between four cross crosslets or = arms of the city of Jerusalem (unrealizable rights through Sicilian Anjou line); (4) azure, fleuretty or, a border gules = arms of Réné's father, Louis II, King of Sicily; (5) azure, crusilly two barbels addorsed or = Dukedom of Bar inherited from his grandmother; with the escutcheon or, three plats gold = arms of Aragon inherited from his mother, Yolanda of Aragon. See W. Leaf and S. Purcell, *Heraldic Symbols: Islamic Insignia and Western Heraldry*, London 1986, p. 51.

[40] A. Frizzi, *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara*, ed. C. Laderchi, Ferrara 1848, IV, p. 23.

[41] See F. Dante, 'Agostino Chigi', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome 1980, XXIV, pp. 735–43.

tourage were often permitted to sport his colours or devices as a sign of mutual fealty. Wearing hose or *calze* of a particular colour, for example, ensured a nobleman the same courtesy, and in some cases, liberties as that of his lord. Of course, the temptation to take advantage of this system was enormous. There is an amusing letter written by Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza to one of his secretaries, in which the Duke complains that too many unauthorized citizens have taken to wearing *calze* in his heraldic colours – white and *morello*. Galeazzo Maria insists on a purge in which every person wearing white and *morello* bi-coloured stockings be stopped and asked to produce the official document which entitled him to sport the Duke's colours.[42] Similarly, the notion that accepting a gift of sym-bolically-coloured *calze* implied the loyalty of the recipient is made clear by the incident in which Francesco Sforza writes to his then young son, Galeazzo Maria, saying that it is perfectly acceptable to keep some jewels which had been given to him by the Ferrarese Marchese, Borso d'Este, but that Galeazzo Maria had to return the present of a pair of *calze* in the Estense tri-colore of red, white and green. Francesco was obviously wor-ried about the political implications of the heir to the Milanese Duchy wearing the colours of the Ferrarese.[43]

Whereas the significance of a particular heraldic image was, to a large extent, a learned language, the premise that symbols in themselves were intended as '*signes de reconaissance*' was a pictorial given. This becomes clear when one considers illustrations of a text in which the fulcrum of the story is one of mistaken identity, such as in the history of Publius Mucius, or as he came to be known, Publius Mucius Scaevola, the left-handed one. The most popular image of the story of Mucius Scaevola illustrates its dénouement, when Scaevola thrusts his right hand into a fire to show his willingness to sacrifice all for the glory of Rome. The antecedents of this valiant gesture, however, are rarely depicted. In brief: Porsenna, the king of Clusium, had laid siege to Rome. Scaevola, a Roman soldier planning to kill the king, entered into the camp at a time when the soldiers were being paid. The king and his secretary, who happened to be dressed very much alike, were both seated on the royal tribunal. The soldiers, for the most part, addressed themselves to the secretary as it was he that handed them their money. As Scaevola could hardly ask which of these two identically dressed men was the king without betraying his own identity, he mistakenly slew the one who

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[42] Milan, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Sforzesco, Missive 118, fol. 247v, 23 October 1474: '*Intendemo che molti sono nel dominio nostro quali portano la divisa nostra biancha et morelo senza nostra licentia. Volemo faciate fare le cride opportune che chi porta la dicta nostra divisia o con licentia o senza licentia lo mandano ad notificare ad nuy . . .*'. Cited in E.S. Welch, 'Secular Fresco Painting at the Court of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, 1466–1476', Ph.D. thesis, University of London/Warburg Institute 1987, p. 273.

[43] See A. Cappelli, 'Guiniforte Barzizza, maestro di Galeazzo Maria Sforza', *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. iii, I (anno 21), 1894, pp. 399–442, esp. pp. 415 and 433–36.

seemed most important to the troops, the secretary.[44] The reason that this part of the story is seldom illustrated is self-evident: it is excedingly difficult to construct a scene whose meaning hinges on mistaken identity. The task is how to give the viewer sufficient visual clues regarding the identity of the various characters, whilst maintaining the fiction that the hero was justifiably mistaken in his choice. One very rare example of the illustration of the early episodes of Scaevola's story appears in a fifteenth-century *cassone* panel currently in Frankfort [PLATE 5].[45] Here, the artist solved the problem by restructuring the story and relying on the viewer's understanding of heraldic conventions. He ignores the fact that Porsenna and his secretary were seated together on the same parapet. In this way, he restructures events so that the viewer thinks he is privy to information which Scaevola lacks. By separating the story into two scenes, the artist gives the viewer the impression that Scaevola killed the wrong man because he did not see the king and his secretary together as we, the viewer, can. The question of how Scaevola failed to notice the difference in rank between the two men – for example, Porsenna's crown, and the difference in age between the two men – is avoided. To a fifteenth-century imagination, the claim that the king and his secretary were dressed nearly identically could only mean that the secretary was wearing Porsenna's colours. Scaevola is presented as having acted with the belief that the man wearing the king's colours, sitting in front of the king's tent must be the king. Given the way the artist has re-written Livy, it is a logical assumption. But it is important to stress how *our* understanding of the story depends on accepting the notion that a person could be identified, albeit in Scaevola's case erroneously, by means of heraldic imagery.

In all these guises, 'heraldry' functions primarily in the same way; namely, as a means of identification either in the sense of saying 'this is who I am and how I fit into the scheme of things' or in saying 'this is what I own and what is attached to me'. Both uses rely on the notion that the heraldic image *per se* is meant to trigger some sort of cognitive response. The degree and qualifications of that response are secondary considerations; the primary reaction is the recognition that the use of a heraldic device identifies the bearer as something apart from the norm, and thereby, something which demands our attention. Unless, of course, the prac-

[44] Livy, *Historiae ab urbe condita* II, 12. Plutarch's version of the story lacks all the details leading up to Scaevola's attack and never mentions the key role played by the secretary. See Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae*, Publicola XVII.
[45] See P. Schubring, *Cassoni. Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Frührenaissance. Ein Beitrag zur Profanmalerei im Quattrocento*, Leipzig 1915–23, pp. 295–96, nos 332, 333, and plate LXXIX. I thank Elizabeth McGrath for suggesting this example. There is also a preparatory drawing for the *cassone* panel in the Uffizi, Gabinetto dei disegni, no. 367 E (attributed to Pinturicchio). See *Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi. Inventario 1. Disegni esposti*, ed M. Petrioli Tofani, Verona 1987. I have yet to examine two further *cassoni* listed by Schubring: Verona, Museo civico, no. 389 (Schubring, p. 373, no. 670) and Florence, Uffizi, depot II, no. 144 (Schubring, p. 352, no. 558).

tice of bearing arms or heraldic devices has become commonplace.[46] In which case, another strategy for self-identification must be devised.

The proliferation of heraldic imagery, personal *blasons*, badges and devices during the middle years of the fourteenth century may account for a peculiar alteration in the ethic of the heraldic language. For about this time, we find the vocabulary of heraldry being adapted for the apparently new concern of limiting intelligibility. In art historical terms, this shift of purpose represents a kind of mannerism – when the formal elements of a given language are no longer used as a correspondent to function. This development seems linked directly to two aspects of the romantic mystique associated with chivalric pagentry: the moral quest of the Knight Errant and the formalized conventions of romantic love.

The first way in which heraldic imagery was altered was in its use as an indicator of a knight's moral quest. The moral quest was a development of the notion that the knight, as a 'Christian soldier', was fighting not only for his lord or country, but for the greater glory of the Christian God. An implied part of the knight's duty was to perfect his own noble, Christian virtues. This process was redefined in chivalric terms as being a personal quest. Thus, as a knight might enlist in the service of a particular lord or cause and, in doing so, adopt their heraldic arms; so, in accepting the challenge of a moral quest, the knight swore a similar allegiance to the virtue he wished to serve. As Michel Pastoureau has pointed out, in France at least, there are indications that as early as the second half of the fourteenth century, the accessory elements added to heraldic shields, those features he calls 'para-heraldic', such as crests and supports, were almost exclusively reserved for the proclamation of a knight's personal hopes and endeavors, in other words, of his moral quest.[47] In French, the contract binding a knight to his lord – the chivalric vow – is called '*l'emprise*': an 'undertaking' or 'enterprise'. Accordingly, a body of images was developed by the aristocratic classes solely to serve the purpose of symbolizing their committment to knightly virtue, their *emprise*.

The second alteration in the rules of heraldic language was generated by the contorted business of chivalric love. Erotic desire during the later middle ages was both bound and unbound by the poetic imagination. Allegory was the medium through which forbidden passions were con-

[46] See, for example, Francesco Sacchetti's complaints: 'A few years ago, everybody saw how all the workpeople down to the bakers, how all the wool-carders, usurers, money-changers and blackguards of all descriptions became knights . . . How art thou sunken, unhappy dignity! Of all the long list of knightly duties, what single one do these knights of our discharge? I wished to speak of these things that the reader might see that knighthood is dead'. Cited from J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* London and New York 1944, p. 221.

[47] M. Pastoureau, 'Aux origines de l'emblème', pp. 130–31 and M. Tung, 'From heraldry to emblem: a study of Peacham's use of Heraldic Arms in *Minerva Britanna*', *Word and Image*, III, no. 1, 1987, pp. 86–94, esp. pp. 86–7.

tained and covertly proclaimed. For example, Jouvenal des Ursins tells us that in 1414, the dauphin carried a standard embroidered with a golden letter K, the picture of a swan (*le cygne*) and a golden L as a means for indicating his love for one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting, the daughter of a certain Guillaume Casinelle.[48] Similarly, Jean, Duc de Berri repeatedly used the motif of the bear and a swan, alluding to the name of his beloved mistress, Ursine.[49] In both cases, heraldic conventions were manipulated for allusive rather than indicative purposes. The purpose of the rebus is to limit intelligibility to those who possess sufficient wit. One popular format for these 'love-messages' was as a lady's 'favour' or 'honour', which a favoured or honoured knight carried with him into battle or the joust. Taking the form of small knotted ribbons or scarves, chains, rings or collars, these 'honours' often bore pseudo-heraldic symbols or legends devised to be intelligible only to the knight and his lady. The 'honour' represented the '*devoir*' or 'duty' or 'obligation' under which the knight performed. In this sense, the 'honour' resembles the '*emprise*'.[50] But formally, it presents a curious contradiction. On the one hand, the knight is identifying himself – heraldically, as it were – to an undifferentiated crowd as one who has been (or hopes to be) honoured. On the other hand, the image which identifies the subject of this favour is left purposefully obscure.

Huizinga argued that the difference between the French middle ages and the Italian Renaissance was less a change of *ethos* than of focus.[51] Men of both ages were concerned with the achievement of a personal honour and glory which would ensure them a place in history. The difference between the two ages lay in what each thought history to be. The historical context within which medieval man operated was chivalric. For Renaissance man, the historical context was classical.

The development of the Italian *impresa* as the rephrasing of a chivalric convention provides an interesting test-case to this theory. As contemporary documents are lacking, one can only state that it seems that the French *emprise* was imported into fifteenth-century Italy as yet another piece of the immense baggage connected to the Italian fascination with the Northern courts of Anjou, Burgundy and Provence. This notion is, to

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[48] C. Enlart, *Manuel d'archéologie française depuis les temps mérovingiens jusqu'à la Renaissance. III. Le costume*, Paris 1916, p. 424.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Also see C.-F. Menestrier's definition for *emprise*: '*Les Emprises estoient des Joustes entreprises par quelque Chevalier particulier, qui portoit durant un mois, six mois ou un an au bras, à la jambe, sur son chaperon, ou en quelque autre endroit le signe de son Emprise qui estoit une écharpe, une manche, un garde-bras, une chaîne, une étoile, ou quelque autre marque semblable, dont vint le nom d'Emprises & d'Imprese, que l'on a donné aux Devises*' (*De la chevalerie ancienne et moderne*, Paris 1683, pp. 232–3). Cited by Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 28.

[51] J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages. A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, London 1924, pp. 58–62.

some extent, borne out by early fifteenth-century Italian paintings and manuscript illuminations, where those who are meant to be depicted as 'worldly' are shown dressed in French fashions, some of which bear French mottos.[52] Not surprisingly, the convention often appears in representations of the *Journey of the Magi* [PLATE 6].[53] In these cases, I would argue, the mottos seem to have no definitive meaning other than that they are in French and, therefore, fashionable.[54] This distinction is important to note, primarily because it contradicts the present scholarly opinion that the Italian *impresa* developed either out of the influence of military dress or from the rediscovery of the Greek text of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo. The former notion derives primarily from Mario Praz's misrepresentation of Paolo Giovio's discussion of the early history of the impresa. In the opening passages of his treatise, *Il dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose*, written in the early 1550s and first published in Rome in 1555, Giovio cites several antique and contemporary uses of the *impresa*.[55] He does not, as Praz implied, say that the invention of the Italian *impresa* was due to the invasions of Charles VIII and Louis XII into Italy. He merely mentions the fact that following the French invasions, 'everyone in the [Italian] military imitated the French captains, looking to adorn themselves with beautiful and pompous *imprese*'.[56] The earliest Italian *imprese* predate the French invasions by more than half-a-century. The latter idea, that the *impresa* reflects the discovery of the *Hieroglyphica*, was first proposed by Karl Giehlow in 1915[57] and was reiterated by Ludwig

[52] See *Abbigliamento e costume nella pittura italiana. Rinascimento*, Rome 1962, pl. 34 (Maestro di Fucecchio, *Cassone panel with Marriage Scene*, Florence, galleria dell'Accademia Uffizi); J. Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy, 1400–1500*, London 1981, frontispiece and pls 59 and 67 (Domenico Veneziano, *Adoration of the Magi*, Berlin-Dahlem, Gemäldegalerie); the Pisanello-circle drawing reproduced in Fossi Todorow, *I disegni del Pisanello e della sua cerchia*, pl. 255; and the Sforzesque Greek motto *amomos* reproduced in U. Ruberti, 'Un motto Sforzesco', *Emporium*, XII, 1900, pp. 382–87. One might also mention that the unarmoured figure of Lancelot is always identified in the *Tristana Riccardiana* by means of his name written on the upturned brim of his hat.

[53] Such as in the Domenico Veneziano *Adoration of the Magi* cited note 52 above or the *Adoration of the Magi* attributed to Bonifacio Bembo in a private collection in Bergamo. See M.L. Ferrari, 'Corollari bembeschi', *Paragone*, CCLIII, 1971, pp. 54–69, esp. pl. 48.

[54] Also note the description of the dress of Lorenzo de'Medici's attendants: 'E fu lui con una brigata di giovani vestiti della livrea di lei, ciopette pagonazze ricamate di belle parole'. Cited in Ames-Lewis, 'Early Medicean Devices', p. 123, n. 6. Guasti reads 'perle' for 'parole' in A. Macinghi negli Strozzi, *Lettere di una Gentildonna Fiorentina del secolo XV ai Figliuoli Esuli*, ed. C. Guasti, Florence 1877, p. 575.

[55] Praz, *Studies in seventeenth-century Imagery*, pp. 47–8.

[56] Giovio, *Dialogo*, edn cited, pp. 36–7: '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'.

[57] K. Giehlow, 'Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance besonders der Ehrenpforte Kaisers Maximilian I', *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, XXXII, 1915, pp. 1–232, esp. pp. 28–40.

Volkmann in 1923.[58] Like many Renaissance discoveries, it took a long time before the theories outlined and examples provided in the *Hierogly-phica* entered into even the most sophisticated intellectual circles. Al-though the text is first reported in Florence in 1419, Ficino seems to have been the first to utilize it as a philosophical source sometime during the late 1460s.[59] And despite Ciriaco d'Ancona's excitement over discovering 'hieroglyphics' in Greece,[60] Alberti's advocation of the picture-writing on buildings in the *De re aedificatoria*[61] or Mantegna's cribbing of 'hierogly-phic' motives from the Roman sacrificial frieze then in San Lorenzo fuori le mura in his *Triumph of Caesar*,[62] the *Hieroglyphica* itself was not used as a pictorial source until the publication of Francesco Colonna's *Hypneroto-machia Poliphili* in 1499.[63] At best, it seems not so much that the *Hierogly-*

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[58] L. Volkmann, *Bilderschriften*, pp. 10–28. See also, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, Eng-lish transl. G. Boas, New York 1950; E. Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs*, Copenhagen 1961; R. Wittkower, 'Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance', *Developments in the Early Renaissance*, Albany 1972, pp. 58–97; P. Castelli, *I geroglifici e il mito dell'Egitto nel Rinascimento*, Florence 1979; and L. Dieckmann, *Hieroglyphics: The History of a Literary Symbol*, St. Louis MO, 1970.

[59] See the notation in Laurenziana, Plut. 69, cod. 27 cited by Giehlow, 'Hieroglyphen-kunde', pp. 12 and 22–4.

[60] See Giehlow, 'Hieroglyphenkunde', pp. 19–20 and Volkmann, *Bilderschriften*, p. 9.

[61] L.B. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria libri decem*, VIII, iv. In this context, it is important to notice Alberti's reasoning. For him, the importance of hieroglyphics lay not in their mystery, but in the accessibility of the picture over the word (Florence: Nicolas Laurentius Alamannus, 1485, fol. t iii[r–v] and Strasbourg 1541, pp. 118[r–v]): *Aegyptii signis utebantur hunc in modum. Nam oculo deum: vulture naturam: ape regem; ciclo tempus: bove pacem et eiusmodi significabant: dicebantque quibusque suas tantum litteras notas esse: et futurum olim, ut earum cognitio penitus pereat: ut apud nos aetruscos evenit per aetruriam ex oppidorum ruinis et bustuariis defossa vidimus sepulchra litteris uti omnes sibi persuadebant inscripta aetruscis. Earum notae imitantur graecas: imitantur etiam latinas, sed quod moneant intelligit nemo. Itaque et caeteris fore futurum ut eveniat id aeque autumant. Suum autem adnotandi genus quo istic Aegyptij uterentur toto orbe terrarum a peritis viris quibus solis dignissime res communicandae sint perfacile posse interpretari.* See the English translation in L.B. Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*, English transl. James (Giacomo) Leoni (1755), ed. J. Rykwert, London 1955, pp. 169–70 (slightly rationalized): 'The Ægyptians employed symbols in the following manner: They carved an eye, by which they understood God, a vulture for nature, a bee for a king, and ox for peace, and the like. And their reason for expressing their sense by these symbols was, that words were understood only by the respective nations that talked the language, and therefore inscriptions in common characters must in a short time be lost: As it has actually happened to our Etrurian characters: For among the ruins of several towns, castles and burial-places, I have seen tomb-stones dug up with inscriptions on them, as is generally believed, in Etrurian characters, which are like both those of the Greeks and Latins; but no body can understand them: And the same, the Ægyptians supposed, must be the case with all sorts of writing whatsoever; but the manner of expressing their sense which they used upon these occasions, by symbols, they thought must be always understood by ingenious men of all nations, to whom they alone were of opinion, that things of the moment were fit to be communicated.' For the 'hieroglyphic' on Alberti's portrait-medal, see pp. 66 and 69–71 below.

[62] See Volkmann, *Bilderschriften*, pp. 16–7 and Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt*, pp. 66–7.

[63] F. Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1499. Evidence sug-

phica occasioned the popularity of the *impresa*, but that it was enthusiastically welcomed as a potent source for additional imagery for an art form which was already well-established.

Although the *impresa* is defined by sixteenth-century theorists as a bi-partite *concetto* composed of an image (the body) and a short motto (the soul), throughout the fifteenth century it appears in various forms: as a free-standing motto, a textless image and a combined image and motto.[64] The use of the *impresa* is equally wide-ranging. It could be created as an occasional piece, invented and used for a specific situation – such as Louis XII's use of the image of a swarm of bees together with the motto, *Rex non utitur aculeo*, which appeared on his horse's trappings when he entered Genoa in 1502;[65] or the reverse of Pisanello's portrait-medal of Leonello d'Este, supposedly celebrating his April 1444 marriage to Maria d'Aragona with the image of a putto teaching a lion to sing.[66] The *impresa* can be used as a sub-heraldic personal device throughout the bearer's life, such as Borso d'Este's baptismal font, wattle fence and unicorn or Isabella d'Este Gonzaga's candelabra and her *impresa delle pause*.[67]

gests that Colonna was working on the *Hynerotomachia* as early as 1467, but this still post-dates the appearance of the *impresa* in Italy by nearly three decades. See also E.H. Gombrich, 'Hypnerotomachiana', *Symbolic Images*, pp. 102–08.

[64] In this context, it is interesting to consider Florio's definition of *impresa*: 'an attempt, an enterprise, an undertaking. Also an impresse, a word, a mot or embleme. Also a jewell worne in ones hat, with some devise in it'. John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues*, London 1611, p. 240. Torriano adds the following definitions in his 1688 version of Florio's dictionary: '. . . also a peculiar impress, device, emblem, word or motto, that any man undertaketh to give upon any humour or occasion, as upon escutcheons is usual'. G. Torriano, *Vocabulario italiano & inglese: A Dictionary, Italian and English, first compiled by John Florio . . .*, London 1688, *ad. cit*.

[65] Cited by Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 32 and fig. 6 (Paris BN, fr. 5091, fol. 20v). Also see Russell's discussion of the '*devise en veuvage*', used 'to express devotion to a spouse, and especially in times of mourning and widowhood' (*Ibid*., p. 27).

[66] G.F. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals before Cellini*, London 1930, p. 10, no. 32 and J. Becker, '*Amor vincit omnia*: The closing image of Goethe's *Novelle*', *Simiolus*, XVIII, no. 3, 1988, pp. 134–56.

[67] Very little has been written about Borso's *imprese*. For numerous examples, however, see G. Treccani degli Alfieri, *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este*, Milan 1942. For Isabella d'Este Gonzaga's *imprese*, see Giovio, *Dialogo*, edn cit., pp. 129–30; A. Luzio and R. Renier, 'La coltura e le relaztioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XXXIII, 1899, pp. 1–62, esp. pp. 49–52 and I.L. Mumford, 'Some decorative aspects of the imprese of Isabella d'Este (1474–1539)', *Italian Studies*, XXXIV, 1979, pp. 60–70. One might also mention the forty-page, twenty-seven chapter thesis written by Mario Equicola on the theme of Isabella's motto, *Nec spe nec metu*, in which he claimed he would show 'the methods of ancient poetry, philosophy and theology, connecting *Nec spe nec metu* with each in turn, and praising this motto above all others ever composed'. Isabella received the treatise on her birthday, 16 May 1506. Her response: 'I certainly never imagined all these mysteries when I made the little motto!' See J. Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539. A Study of the Renaissance*, 3rd edn, London 1904, I, pp. 279–82 and Luzio and Renier, *La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, pp. 50–51, n. 5.

Or it can become a familial image, such as the Visconti-Sforza image of a muzzled dog, the flaming dove or the knotted veil, or the Medicean diamond ring.[68] Some might hesitate to call these devices *imprese*, specifically because many lack the corresponding motto. But, considered in terms of function, each qualifies as an *impresa* in the sense that each expresses some sort of aspiration, promise or *emprise*.[69]

It is a matter for debate as to which image can rightly be called the first Italian *impresa*, though two favoured contenders would be the image of the 'winged eye' which appears on Leon Battista Alberti's self-portrait plaque[70] and the reverse of the Pisanello's first portrait-medal of Leonello d'Este, both of which date to sometime between 1438–44 [PLATES 7 and 8].[71] What is important to note, however, is the fact that regardless of which of these two might claim precedence, both derive from the *ambiente* of the Ferrarese Court. The importance of Alberti's contacts with the Ferrarese *intelligentsia* in his intellectual development has been too often overlooked by Tuscan-centric, Renaissance historians. His personal friendship with Leonello d'Este is well-demonstrated. They seem to have remained close all their lives.[72] Unfortunately, once having defined the importance of Alberti's Ferrarese experience, one must then confess that we actually know surprisingly little about the activities of this peculiarly intense centre of humanistic activity, presided over by the famous teacher, Guarino da Verona.[73] It does seem, however, that in Ferrara,

[68] For a list of the Visconti-Sforza *imprese*, see L. Beltrami, *Il castello di Milano sotto il dominio dei Visconti e degli Sforza MCCCLXVIII–MDXXXV*, Milan 1894, pp. 706–25 and G. Mongeri, 'Il castello di Milano', *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. ii, I (anno ii), 1884, pp. 457–60. For a resumé of the Medici dynastic use of *imprese*, see Ames-Lewis,'Early Medicean Devices', pp. 122–43. See also J. Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art. Pontormo, Leo X and the Two Cosimo's*, Princeton 1984, pp. 15–59. Of course, the process could work the other way as well. The device of the diamond ring was adopted as a personal *impresa* by Ercole I d'Este, though there is evidence that it had been used as a family *imprese* previously by Niccolò III. For information regarding the early use of the diamond as an Este *impresa*, see C.M. Ady, *A History of Milan under the Sforza*, London 1907, p. 7 and Ames-Lewis, 'Early Medicean Devices', pp. 130 and 140–41.

[69] Tung suggests: '. . . the arms commemorate a virtuous or victorious deed done in the past by a member of an illustrious family, whereas the *impresa* records a noble individual's exhortatory virtuous or amorous intent to be performed in the future. When the individual intent of an *impresa* is universalized, together with the addition of an explicatory verse or prose and the use of human figures, the emblem is born' ('From heraldry to emblem', p. 87).

[70] Hill, *Corpus*, pp. 5–6, no. 16.

[71] Hill, *Corpus*, pp. 8–9, no. 24.

[72] For Alberti's connections with Ferrara during the reign of Leonello d'Este, see M. Baxandall, 'A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este. Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria Pars LXVIII*', *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVI, 1963, pp. 304–26, esp. pp. 306–09. Alberti dedicated his *Philodoxeos*, *Theognis* and *De equo animante* to Leonello. The presentation copy of *Philodoxeos* is illustrated with Alberti's *impresa* of the winged-eye (Modena, Biblioteca Estense, lat. 52 (α. O. 79), fol. 1r).

[73] In general, the bibliography on Ferrarese intellectual culture of the mid-Quattrocento

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 pictor-
ial vocabulary. What one finds in Ferrara, remarkably less evident else-
where 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 neo-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.[74]

We now know, in fact, that the image of the three-faced putto on the
reverse of Leonello's portrait-medal is directly related to the influence of
Guarino. It does not represent, as twentieth-century iconographers have
repeatedly insisted, an image of prudence.[75] But, as Eörsi has pointed out,
the three-faced putto represents the muse of epic verse, Calliope.[76] In a
letter dated 5 November 1477, Guarino provided Leonello with a series of
iconographic *formulae* for a cycle of paintings of the Muses intended for
his *studiolo* at Belfiore. The description of Calliope reads as follows:

> Calliope doctrinarum indagatrix et poeticae antistes vocemque
> reliquis praebens artibus coronam ferat lauream, tribus compacta

has not progressed since the turn of the century. See R. Sabbadini, *La scuola e gli studi di
Guarino Guarini Veronese*, Catania 1896 and R. Sabbadini, *Guariniana*, revised edn, Turin
1964. More recently, see Baxandall, 'A Dialogue on Art'; M. Baxandall, 'Guarino, Pisanel-
lo and Manuel Chrysolorus', *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVIII,
1965, pp. 183–204; and A. Grafton and L. Jardine, 'Humanism and the School of Guari-
no. A Problem of Evaluation', *Past and Present*, XCVI, 1982, pp. 51–80.

[74] See my forthcoming article, 'The Iconography of the *Salone dei Mesi* and the Study of
Latin Grammar in fifteenth-century Ferrara', *Ferrara: La corte degli Estensi e il loro mecenat-
ismo, 1441–1538*, eds M.S. Jensen, M. Pade, L.W. Petersen and D. Quarta, Modena 1989,
pp. 95–111.

[75] The textual basis for this belief being a passage from the pseudo-Senecan *De virtutibus*
in which the tri-partite spirit of prudence is described: '*Si prudens es, animus tuus tribus
temporibus dispensetur: praesentia ordina, futura praevide, praeterita recordare*'. See *Martini
Episcopi Bracarensis opera omnia*, ed C.W. Barlow, New Haven 1950, p. 240 and H.
Haselbach, *Sénèque des IIII vertus. La Formula honestae vitae de Martin de Braga (pseudo-
Sénèque) traduite et glosée par Jean Courtecuisse (1403)*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1975, p. 382.
Haselbach suggests 'provide' for 'praevide'. See also E. Panofsky, 'Titian's *Allegory of
Prudence*: A Postscript', *Meaning and the Visual Arts*, Garden City NY 1955, pp. 146–68
and E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London 1958, p. 45, n. 1.

[76] A.K. Eörsi, 'Lo studiolo di Lionello d'Este e il programma di Guarino da Verona,' *Acta
Historiae Artium Accademiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXI, 1975, pp. 15–52; M. Baxandall,
'Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chyrsolaras' pp. 186–88; and C. King, 'Mnemosyne and
Calliope in the *Chapel of the Muses*, San Francesco, Rimini', *The Journal of the Warburg and
Courtauld Institutes*, LI, 1988, pp. 186–87.

vultibus, cum hominum, semideorum ac deorum naturam
edisserat.[77]

The identity of this image as Calliope helps to explain the framing
device of armour crowned with laurel. Guarino mentions the laurel crown
as one of Calliope's attributes and the armour is included as an indication
of the specific nature of the heroic glory immortalized by epic verse. In
this light, the significance of Leonello's *impresa* as a rephrasing of the
French *emprise* becomes clear. The striving towards chivalric glory, has
been replaced by a quest for a place amongst the heroes of classical history
and myth. The choice of Calliope as an *impresa* particularly suitable for
the humanist prince is supported by Hesiod, who says that as the muse of
epic poetry 'she is the most excellent of the sisters, because she is the
companion of splendid princes'.[78]

Guarino's image of Calliope, however, seems decidedly odd to our eyes
– based, as it is, on textual rather than pictorial associations. The sub-
sequent history of the image is equally telling. It reappears, in a slightly
altered guise, amongst the figures of the Muses and Liberal Arts in Sigis-
mondo Pandolfo Malatesta's *Tempio* in Rimini [PLATE 9].[79] The connec-
tion is important because not only did Sigismondo have intellectual links
with Ferrara through Alberti (Alberti being the original architect of the
Tempio Malatestiano); but Sigismondo's court poet, Basinio da Parma,
was schooled and later taught in Ferrara immediately before coming to
Rimini.[80] Guarino's Calliope reappears again when Pisanello makes an
attempt to reuse the figure in his 1469 medal of Alfonso V of Aragon. As
one can see from the preparatory sketches for the medal in the Louvre, at
some point, Pisanello had intended to add an image of the three-faced
putto to Alfonso's armour [PLATE 10].[81] The allusion, which certainly
would fit nicely with the image of Alfonso as 'Triumphator et Pacificus',
may have been abandoned simply because it was too fussy and the details
would have cramped the clarity of the finished medal. On the other hand,
it seems equally possible that the image was deleted because Alfonso did
not like it. Being slightly outside of the mainstream of Guarino's influ-

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[77] Cited by Eörsi, 'Lo studiolo', p. 43 . Baxandall's English translations reads: 'Calliope,
the seeker out of learning and the guardian of the art of poetry, also provides a voice for
the other arts; let her carry a laurel crown and have three faces composed together, since
she has set forth the nature of men, heroes and gods' ('Guarino, Pisanello and Chrysolo-
ras', p. 187). The appearance of this figure on the reverse of Leonello's medal reinforces
Baxandall's suggestion that Guarino may have played an important role in Pisanello's
revival of the portrait medal as a genre. See Baxandall, 'Guarino, Pisanello and Chrysolo-
rus', p. 189.

[78] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 79. Cited by Eörsi, 'Lo studiolo', pp. 43 and 52, n. 117.

[79] See Eörsi, 'Lo studiolo', pp. 46–48, esp. p. 46.

[80] See I. Affò, 'Notizie intorno la vita e le opere di Basinio Basini' in *Basini Parmensis
poetae opera praestantiora nunc primum edita et opportunis commentariis illustrata*, ed. L.
Drudi, Rimini 1794, II, 3–42.

[81] Fossi Todorow, *I disegni del Pisanello e della sua cerchia*, pp. 118–19, no. 160.

ence, Alfonso may not have appreciated the particular intelligence be-
hind this admittedly ugly figure. If this were the case, it might be instruc-
tive to note the potential limits it implies regarding the artist's
capabilities to disseminate ideas solely through his art.

The example set by Guarino's image of Calliope should warn us that,
in several cases, with *imprese* one is dealing with an *ad hoc* pictorial
language. This language is *ad hoc* in two senses: first, in its having been
invented for a specific purpose; and second, in its reflection of the 'inter-
mediate quality' of what we call the early Renaissance. We tend to under-
estimate the degree to which the middle years of the fifteenth century
were a period of growth and transition. Considered solely from the per-
spective of how one makes images, for example, the Quattrocento was
very different from the immediately previous and subsequent ages.
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*, such as Giraldi, Conti, Cartari and Ripa,[82]
artists whose lives spanned the late 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. In
such a climate, Guarino's *invenzione* for a representation of Calliope was
an inspired stop-gap. But as the Renaissance matured, these ungainly
approximations of the 'antique' were discarded and their meanings forgot-
ten. In this sense, one must recognize the possibility that the apparently
mysterious nature of certain fifteenth-century *imprese* might be merely a
reflection of our own ignorance. We can understand the significance of
an *impresa* as far as it coincides with the limited iconographic vocabulary
we happen to have inherited. We can easily understand the reverse of
Cecilia Gonzaga's medal [PLATE 11], since we know that both the moon
and the unicorn were accepted symbols of virginity and also because the
legend on the obverse makes it perfectly clear that this portrait represents
'CICILIA VIRGO FILIA IOHANNIS FRANCISCI PRIMI MARCHIONIS MAN-
TUE' .[83] Again, the legend 'LIBERALITAS AUGUSTAE' on the reverse of
Alfonso V of Aragon's medals ensures that we do not miss the signifi-
cance of the eagle distributing its catch amongst the smaller birds as a
symbol of liberality.[84] One can begin to understand Leonello's *impresa* of
the blindfolded lynx, if one knows that the lynx was reputed to have sight

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[82] L.G. Giraldi, *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia in qua simul de eorum imaginibus et
cognnominibus agitur* . . ., Basel 1548; N. Conti, *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri
X*, Venice 1551; V. Cartari, *Le imagini colla sposizione degli dei antichi*, Venice 1556 and C.
Ripa, *Iconologia* . . ., Rome 1593.
[83] Hill, *Corpus*, p. 11, no. 37.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 12, no. 41.

so keen it could see through walls [PLATE 12].[85] There is no sense in trying to blindfold a lynx, as it can see through everything. As an *impresa*, this image could refer to Leonello's immunity to deceit by political subterfuge. But what meaning can be suggested for Leonello's other *imprese*, such as that of 'two nude men each carrying a basket of olive branches; in back, two vessels upon which rain is falling'?[86] Or, to return to Alberti's winged eye, Alberti himself describes the image in his dialogue, *Anuli*, as a symbol of God's omniscience.[87] As an *impresa*, therefore, it is a reminder to be as vigilant and circumspect as our spirit allows. A wreath and a motto were added to this image in Matteo de'Pasti's medal of 1446–50 [PLATE 13].[88] Alberti describes the wreath as a symbol of joy and glory.[89] To this extent, the image functions perfectly as an *impresa*. The problem lies in the meaning of the accompanying motto: '*Quid tum*'. Wind suggested that the '*Quid tum*' was a warning to be prepared for the Day of Judgement.[90] One problem with this reading of the motto is that it undermines the power of the image as an *impresa* and contradicts the sense of the picture. Again

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 9, nos 28 and 29. On the lynx's keeness of sight, see most recently C. Nordenfalk,'Les cinq sens dans l'art du Moyen-âge', *Revue de l'art*, XXXIV, 1976, pp. 17–28.

[86] Hill, *Corpus*, p. 9, no 27.

[87] R. Watkins, 'L.B. Alberti's Emblem, the Winged Eye, and his name, Leo', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, IX, 1959–60, pp. 256–58. The text is edited in *Leonis Baptistae Alberti Opera inedita et pauca separatim impressa*, ed G. Mancini, Florence 1890, pp. 224–235, esp. pp. 229–30: '*Corona et laetitiae et gloriae insigne est: oculo potentius nihil, velocius nihil, dignius nihil: quid multa? Ejusmodi est ut inter membra primus, praecipuus, et res, et quasi deus sit. Quis quod deum veteres interpretantur esse quidpiam oculi simile, universa spectantem, singulaque dinumerantem? Hinc igitur admonemur, rerum omnium gloriam a nobis esse reddendam Deo; in eo laetandum totoque animo virtute florido et virenti amplectendum praesentemque, videntemque nostra omnia et gesta et cogita existimandum. Tum et alia ex parte admonemur pervigiles, circumspectosque esse oportere, quantum nostra ferat animi vis, indagando res omnes quae ad virtutis gloriam pertineant, in eoque laetandum si quid labore et industria bonarum divinarumque rerum simus assecuti*'. In English this reads: 'The crown is a symbol of joy and glory. The eye is more powerful, swifter and more worthy than everything else. What more can I say? In this way it is the first amongst the parts of the body, like a chief or a god. Why else did the ancients regard God as similar to the eye, seeing everything and distinguishing them individually? On the one hand, we are reminded to give praise to God for all things, and to rejoice in him and to embrace him with our entire spirit and manliness (*virtù*), knowing that he is aware of everything we think and do. Then, on the other hand, we are reminded to be as vigilant and circumspect as our spirit allows us to be, searching out those things which lead to the glory of virtue, and rejoicing when, by means of labour and industry, we attain something which is good and divine', For variant English translations, see Watkins, 'L.B. Alberti's emblem', p. 257 and L.B. Alberti, *Dinner pieces. A Translation of the* Intercenales, English transl. by D. Marsh, Binghamton NY, 1967, pp. 213–14.

[88] Hill, *Corpus*, p. 39. no. 161.

[89] See note 87 above.

[90] Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, pp. 186–88.

one is struck by the distance between Renaissance assumptions and twentieth-century reconstructions.[91]

But was the early Italian *impresa* intended to be impenetrable? Here, it seems best to recall the origin of the *impresa* in the dual nature of the French *emprise*, whose role was to summarize a hope or desire for the benefit of a specific audience. Like the *emprise*, the Italian *impresa* was a quasi-heraldic mechanism which defined both the bearer and the symbol's audience simultaneously. The earliest Italian *imprese* reflect the exclusivity of the early humanists, but that is not to say that it was ever meant to be intentionally obscure. On the contrary, it was a means of communication which no doubt functioned perfectly well in that particular *milieu*. As mentioned above, Alberti believed that pictographs had been invented by the Egyptians to improve communication between peoples of different nations.[92] In as far as the *impresa* expresses some inner ambition or hope, it is an obviously self-reflective, intimate medium. This quality is reinforced by the personal scale of the portrait-medal, an object one is meant to held in one's hands; but the portrait-medal was never a secret thing to be hoarded and protected from the uninformed masses. Nor was the significance of its reverse meant to be any more obscure than the obverse. The suggestion that these medals reflect traces of early Renaissance *arcana* or even that the images on the reverse can be termed legitimately as hieroglyphs, or 'sacred writings', seems a purposefully anachronistic misreading of the evidence.

Given this, one is tempted to make a literal analogy between the portrait-medal's form and its content. On one side there is the portrait, providing the exterior features of the subject; on the reverse, one is given

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[91] One possible reading for the '*Quid tum*' would be as 'What next', with the idea that if one were striving continually towards excellence, one would always be vigilant for opportunities to attain the glory of virtue. It is also possible, however, that Alberti himself never intended to pair this particular motto with the winged eye. Note, for example, the combination of '*Quid tum*' with an eagle in the dedication manuscript of *Della pittura*, Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, II, IV, 38. Cited by Watkins, 'L.B. Alberti's emblem', p. 256. For another example of an early *impresa* which later generations would have found difficult to decipher, see Paride Ceresara's letter to Federigo Gonzaga: '*alla interpretazione della quale la deve sapere che da gli antichi cabalisti prima et poi da gli Padri nostri del Testamento Vecchio è stato detto che all'entrare del paradiso delle delitie sono due arbori, una di quali è della vita, l'altra della morte. In questa impresa donque, alludendo al nome delle persona [Isabella Boschetti] per chi è fatta, V.S. vederà un picola boschaya et dal canto ove si può entrare da l'uno de lati è l'arbor vitae, dall'altro l'arbore mortis, ambi abbracciati dallo Amore, in demonstratione che dallo Amore della piccola boschaya depende la vita et la morte de l'Amante. A due cose ho atteso, l'una che 'l senso della impresa non sia molto volgare et facile da esser interpretato, l'altra ch'ella habbi qualche vaghezza*' (Archivio di Stato di Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, ser. F. II. 8, busta 2494, c. 26r). Cited from A. Comboni, 'Paride Ceresara, mantovano', in *Veronico Gambara e la poesia del suo tempo nell'Italia settentrionale [Atti del Convegno (Brescia-Correggio, 17–19 ottobre 1985)]*, Florence 1989, pp. 279–80, n. 63. I thank Prof E.H. Gombrich for this reference.

[92] See note 61 above.

a glimpse into his ambitions or his essence.[93] In this way, the portrait-medal seems to fulfill the bi-partite prerequisites of later definitions of the *impresa*: the obverse presents the 'body' while the reverse alludes to the 'spirit'. The idea being that one could come to know a man through examining such a medal.

Following this analogy, one might consider other examples of bi-partite imagery for their potential as *imprese*. One well-known example is Lorenzo Lotto's designs for the *intarsie* for the choir of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo. The project involved providing the designs for thirty-three narrative scenes and their pictorial covers. The contract dated 16 June 1524 stipulates that the subject matter of each cover must 'correspond in meaning' to the narrative scene over which it was to be placed [PLATES 14 and 15].[94] Whereas the specific meaning of several of these covers still baffle art historians – indeed, they seem to have baffled his contemporaries as well – it is interesting to note that Lotto himself repeatedly refers to the covers as '*imprese*'.[95] Whereas his reasons for using the term *impresa* are never specified, if one compares the structure of the

[93] For a similar interpretation of the portrait-medal, see J. Pope-Hennessey, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, New York 1966, pp. 208–09 and Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, p. 30.

[94] For the most complete documentation of the Bergamo intarsie, see L. Chiodi, *Lettere inedite di Lorenzo Lotto (su le Tarsie di S. Maria Maggiore in Bergamo)*, Bergamo 1962, p. 25 and L. Chiodi, 'Lettere inedite di Lorenzo Lotto', *Bergomum*, LXII, fasc. 2, 1968, pp. 3–167, esp pp. 43–44: '. . . Cioè ditto m.ro Lorenzo promette pingere tuti li quadri andarà ne le tavolete quale se hano a ponere sopra li quadri del choro, quali picture de ditte tavolete siano di quella corespondenza in significato a li altri quadri sopra quali se ponerano respectivemente . . .'. The idea that each cover was intended for a specific story is also made clear in Lotto's letter of 6 March 1532 [Chiodi 1968, pp. 159–61]. See also P. Pouncey, *Lotto disegnatore*, Vicenza 1965, pp. 18–21; D. Galis, 'Lorenzo Lotto: A Study of His Career and Character, with particular emphasis on his emblematic and hieroglyphic works', Ph.D. thesis, Bryn Mawr College, 1977 and D. Galis 'Concealed Wisdom: Renaissance Hieroglyphic and Lorenzo Lotto's Bergamo *Intarsie*', *The Art Bulletin*, LXII, 1980, pp. 363–75.

[95] See letters dated 2 September 1524 ('. . . vi mando tre imprese per li coperti di chiaro e scuro al solito . . . con li motti che vederete fatti per miser Baptista Suardo . . .' [Chiodi 1968, p. 65]); 18 July 1526; 3 February 1527; 18 February 1527 ('Per un'altra de 3 de l'instante avisai in riposta de la vostra non aver havuto le lettere con le inventione per la impresa mia ne le particular necessità a tal abisogni che altre volte ho dato aviso . . .'; '. . . le imprese per coperto de le istorie . . .' [Chiodi 1968, p. 87]; 22 February 1527; 5 August 1527; 16 September 1527 and 10 February 1528. Mysteriously, he also refers to an *impresa* for the altarpiece: '. . . havesse a essere con meser Bernardo de Marino con el sculptor anchora che ha da far la impresa de l'ancona' (16 March 1526; Chiodi 1968, p. 71). For Lotto's trouble over the meanings of his *imprese*, see the letters dated 18 February 1527 ('Tuti questi disegni sono notati da riverso quello significano le cose et a V.re Signorie replico che non ho havuto risposta de le cose fano bisogno a sequitar li disegni, che mi è fato torto perché li voreti poi in freza et io sono occupato in altre cose, che solum le vostre voriami sequestrato totalmente ad esse' [Chiodi 1968, p. 87]); 4 September 1527 ('. . . etiam le lettere presente ne le quale sono una che a m.o Iuan Franc.o dricio, quanto fa el bisogno de l'opera et li significati de li coperti' [Chiodi 1968, p. 107]); 16 September 1527 and, finally, in his letter of 10 February 1528, Lotto concludes: 'Circha li disegni de li coperti, sapiate che son cose che non essendo scritte, bisogna che la imaginatione le porti a luce . . ., [Chiodi 1968, p. 127].

Bergamo *intarsie* with the portrait-medal, one can see certain similarities. The *intarsia* cover, like the reverse of the medal, alludes to the character of the main subject. In both cases, the main subject is delineated in a straight-forward fashion – either by means of the naturalistic portrayal of the facial features or by straightforward, unambiguous narrative depiction. The *intarsia* cover or medal-reverse uses allegorical, symbolic language to summarize one aspect of the subject's 'personality'. The *intarsia* cover could be considered as an *impresa* in so far as it encapulsates the intention of the *storia*.

In this context, it is interesting to consider two fifteenth-century paintings as the first step in the conceptual progression from the portrait-medal to Lotto's *imprese*: Leonardo's portrait of *Ginevra de'Benci* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington and Piero della Francesca's double-portrait of *Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza* in the Uffizi.[96] In Leonardo's painting Ginevra is portrayed on the front of the canvas, surrounded by identifying juniper (*ginevro*); on the back of the canvas, there is the *impresa* of a sprig of juniper, enclosed by a palm frond and a bay laurel branch with the motto '*Virtutem forma decorat*' alluding to the beauty of her virtue [PLATE 16].[97] On the front of the Montefeltro *Diptych* are the paired portraits of Federico and his wife; on the back we see Federico and his wife being drawn in triumphal chariots accompanied by the Virtues. The four Cardinal Virtues (Justice, Prudence, Strength and Temperance) ride on the front of his cart, while Federico himself is shown being crowned by a figure of *Fortuna*. Battista's cart, drawn by unicorns, bears the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity) and an angel.[98] Two lengthy inscriptions are also included beneath each triumph, which describe Federico's prowess as equal to the soldiers of antiquity and Battista as the virtuous wife.[99]

[96] For previous proposals of this idea, see Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, pp. 209–210 and Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, pp. 195–96, n. 150. Pope-Hennessy also mentions Raphael's plans to paint the reverses of his portraits of *Angelo and Maddalena Doni* with scenes illlustrating the story of *Deucalion and Pyrrha* (Ibid., pp. 210–11).

[97] See, most recently, J. Walker, 'Ginevra de'Benci by Leonardo da Vinci', *Report and Studies in the History of Art*, Washington DC 1967, pp. 1–38. Note especially p. 20, where Walker suggests that the drawing of *A girl with a unicorn* in the Ashmolean may reflect a preliminary idea for the portrait. Equally, it could represent an early attempt at formulating an appropriately virginal *impresa*. For additional *imprese* devised by Leonardo, see L. Reti, '*Non si volta chi a stella è fisso*: Le *imprese* di Leonardo da Vinci', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, XXI, 1959, pp. 7–54 and C. Pedretti, 'Three Leonardo Riddles', *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXX, 1977, pp. 153–59.

[98] See C. Gilbert, 'New Evidence for the Date of Piero della Francesca's Count and Countess of Urbino', *Marsyas*, I, 1941, pp. 41–53; K. Clark, *Piero della Francesca*, London 1951, pp. 38–40; E. Battisti, *Piero della Francesca*, Milan 1971, pp. 368–69 (who identifies Battista's angel as Chastity) and M. Salmi, *La pittura di Piero della Francesca*, Novara 1979; pp. 118–21.

[99] Federico's verse: '*Clarus insigni vehitur triumpho/ quem parem summis ducibus perhennis,/*

The development from a two-sided 'portrait' to a portrait-with-cover is not a large one. One only need remember one of Lotto's earliest works, the *Portrait of Bishop Bernardo de'Rossi* in the Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte in Naples, with its allegorical cover in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, to note how sucessfully the transformation was accomplished [PLATE 17].[100] The inner picture, the portrait of Rossi, depicts the features of the man, while the outer 'portrait' represents his *impresa*, the subject of which is a variation on the 'Choice of Hercules'.[101] A similarly allegorical painting in Washington, depicting a reclining maiden upon whom a cupid pours flower petals, seems to have been a second example of Lotto's portrait covers, or *imprese*,[102] although in this case, the significance of the *impresa* is less clear.[103] Later in his career, Lotto combined both elements – portrait and *impresa* – into a single canvas. For example, in the portraits of *Lucina Brembate* in Bergamo (who can be identified by the familial stemma on her ring and the rebus 'CI' on

fama virtutum celebrat decenter/ sceptra tenentem'. Battista's verse: *'Quemodum rebus tenuit secundis/ coniugis magni decorata rerum/ laude gestarum volitat per ora/ cuncta virorum'*. See also D.A. Covi, 'The Inscription in fifteenth-century Florentine Painting', Ph.D. thesis, New York University 1958 (Garland edn 1986), pp. 402–03.

[100] Pope-Hennessy notes the earlier examples of the covered portraits of *Alvise Contarini* and *A Nun of San Secondo* in New York and the additional lost covered portraits attributed to Giovanni Bellini (*The Portrait in the Renaissance*, pp. 211–12 and 321–22, n. 9).

[101] See L. Coletti, 'Intorno ad un nuovo ritratto del Vescovo Bernardo de'Rossi', *Rassegna d'arte*, XXI, 1921, pp. 407–20. For a discussion of the possible Platonic context of this image, see Galis, 'Lorenzo Lotto', pp. 190–203 and 447–57. The connection between the cover and the portrait is made clear by the inclusion of the Rossi familial arms of a rampant white lion on azure field in the middle of the cover and the inscription formerly on the reverse of the cover, which was recorded by V. Carrari, *Historia di Rossi parmigiani*, Ravenna 1538, pp. 195–96. See also I. Affò, *Memorie degli scrittori e letterati parmigiani*, Parma 1789, III, pp. 200–201.

[102] See A. Frizzoni, 'Lorenzo Lotto pittore.: A proposito di una nuova pubblicazione', *Archivio storico dell'arte*, ser. ii, II, 1896, pp. 1–24, 195–224, 427–47, and esp. p. 11 and T. Borenius, 'The New Lotto', *The Burlington Magazine*, LXV, 1934, pp. 228–31. Galis suggests that the cover was intended for the *Portrait of a Young Woman* in Dijon ('Lorenzo Lotto', pp. 212–17).

[103] See F. Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XV–XVI Century*, London and New York 1968, pp. 158–59 and Galis, 'Lorenzo Lotto,' pp. 212–17 and 435–46. A later possible example of the same sort of conceit appears in portrait-cover in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence variously cited as a late work by Pontormo or early work of Bronzino's depicting *Pygmalion and Galatea*. Vasari records that: *'Ritrasse similmente, nel tempo dell'assedio di Fiorenza, Francesco Guardi in abito di soldato, che fu opera bellissima: e nel coperchio poi di questo quadro dipinse Bronzino, Pigmalione che fa orazione a Venere, perchè la sua statua, ricevendo lo spirito, s'avviva e divenga (come fece, secondo le favole di poeti) di carne e d'ossa'* (Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi, Florence 1881, VI, p. 275). François Quiviger has suggested to me that the *Pygmalion* may be a canting device on Guardi's name, with the intention that Galatea was brought to life through Pygmalion's adoring gaze (*guardare*). For a reproduction, see A. Emiliani, *Il Bronzino*, Milan 1960, pl. 8 and J. Cox-Rearick, *The Drawings of Pontormo*, New York 1981, pp. 274–77 and fig. 284.

a crescent moon (*luCIna*);[104] the *Man with a Lion's Paw* in Vienna, the *Portrait of a Woman with a Drawing of Lucrezia* in the National Gallery (with the *cartellino* '*Nec ulla impudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet*') and the possible self-portrait known as *Il Trentasettenne* in the Galleria Doria-Pamphili in Rome.[105] In each of these cases mentioned, symbolic images have been included as 'the other side' of the sitter, with the *impresa* employed as a device to tell us more about the 'identity' of the person portrayed.[106]

The *impresa* offered the noble individual the opportunity to hallmark those characteristics which set him above and beyond the masses. It remained a viable pictorial tool well into the twentieth century. The only time it was seriously threatened was during the late sixteenth century, when the concept of nobility as an innate, uncodifiable quality became fashionable. If one considers late Renaissance portraiture as a genre, it is interesting to note how often the subject's rank is displayed solely by his bearing. The identity of the sitter is established by his physical integrity, rather than by attribute, *impresa*, or obvious external manifestations of wealth and power.[107] It is an intriguing development, but, unfortunately,

104 See C. Caversazzi, 'Una dama bergamasca di quattrocent'anni fa riconosciuta in un ritratto del Lotto', *Bergomum*, VII, 1913, pp. 23–5.

105 See R.V. Cristaldi, '*Homo ille melancholicus. Il trentasettenne* di Lorenzo Lotto', *Syntaxis*, II, 1984, pp. 201–38. For further interpretations of the 'meanings' of these paintings, see Galis, 'Lorenzo Lotto, pp. 190–258; J. Grabski, 'Sul rapporto tra ritratto e simbolo nella ritrattistica del Lotto', *Lorenzo Lotto. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi per il V centenario della nascita [Asolo, 18–21 settembre 1980]*, Treviso 1981, pp. 383–92; and A. Gentili, 'Virtus e Voluptas nell'opera di Lorenzo Lotto', *Lorenzo Lotto. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi per il V centenario della nascita [Asolo, 18–21 settembre 1980]*, Treviso 1981, pp. 418–23.

106 In this sense, the pictorial *imprese* mirrors the popular genre of the verse *imprese* mentioned by Poliziano and Erasmus. See J. Babelon, 'La médaille', in *Encyclopedia de la Pléiade: Histoire de l'art*, Paris 1965, III, pp. 130–38 and Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France*, pp. 30–1. For Poliziano's complaints about having to furnish *imprese* for the Medici court, see A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Geneva 1954, pp. 141–42; A. Salza, *Luca Contile, uomo di lettere e di negozj del secolo XVI*, Florence 1903 and Klein, 'Le théorie de l'expression figurée', p. 321. See also A. Warburg, 'Delle *imprese amorose* nelle più antiche incisioni fiorentine', *Rivista d'arte*, III, 1905, pp. 1–14. One should also consider the fifteenth-century Florentine list of '*riflessioni morali*' as pertaining to this category. See G. Corti, 'Una lista del tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico, caratterizzati da un motto o da una riflessione morale', *Rinascimento*, III, 1952, pp. 153–57. Also, in the sense that the *imprese* 'sums up' the character or message of a person or story, one should note Vincenzo Borghini's use of '*principalissime imprese*' in his schemes for the Florentine *Apparato* of 1565. See R. Scorza, 'Vincenzo Borghini and *invenzione*: The Florentine *Apparato* of 1565', *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLIV, 1981, pp. 57–75, esp. pp. 61–3.

107 This development may be a manifestation of the Italian fascination with Spanish sobriety which reached its peak influence in Italy during the late sixteenth century. One interesting earlier example is in the description of the triumphal entry of Don Federigo of Naples into Florence in 1465. The young Prince had recently lost his mother and was dressed all in black. His princely hertitage, however, was betrayed by his manner. As one contemporary witness notes: 'he showed *virtù* above his age, as is to be expected from royal

it is also the source of problems for the art historian, since, when the *impresa* and legend are abandoned, the historical identity of the sitter often vanishes as well.

In summary, when studied from the level of example, the fifteenth-century *impresa* appears to be quite different from its sixteenth-century counterpart both in the definition of its parts and the apparent intent with which it is used. Its form is flexible. Its primary purpose was as an allegorical medium through which specific information could be conveyed. This hope, of course, rested on an unrealizable premise. Even Alberti should have recognized that the Egyptians were wrong in their supposition that picture-writing 'must always be understood by ingenious men of all nations'.[108] The failure of the *impresa* as the communicative medium it was intended to be is attested to by our present-day inability to 'read' the significance of the majority of examples we come across. We assume, wrongly, that the humanists of the early Renaissance were trying to be mysterious, taking perverse delight in the knowledge that their heritage would be completely indecipherable by the turn of the century. Instead, if they are to be faulted at all, it would be for being too naïvely optimistic about the power of art and overly confident of the longevity of those cultural commonplaces they cherished.
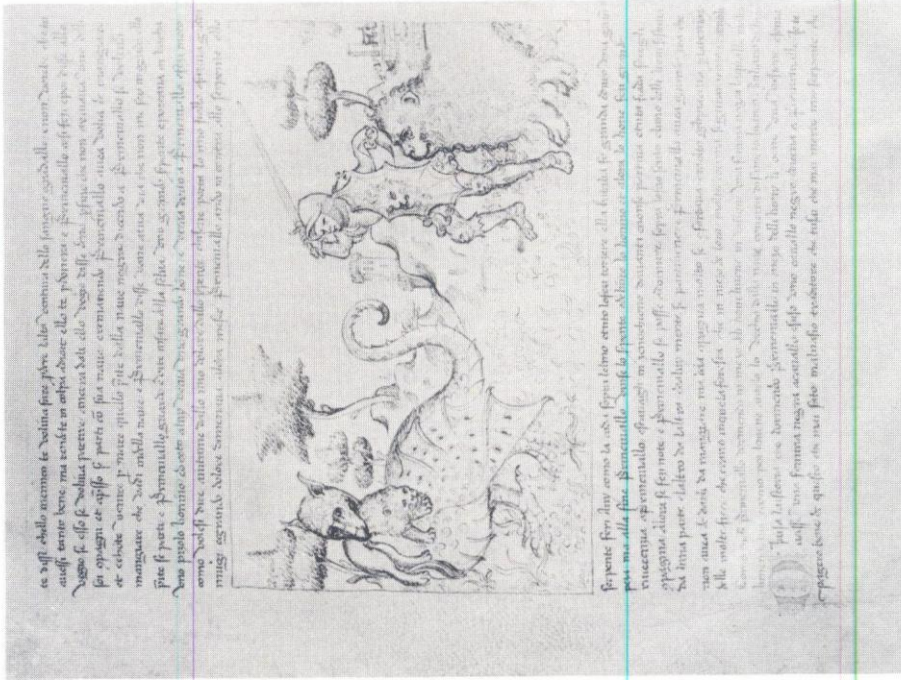
persons, who are expected to be ahead of others in patience and *virtù*'. From Macinghi negli Strozzi *Lettere di una Gentildonna*, p. 400. Cited from R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York 1980, pp. 313–14.

[108] See n. 61 above.

2 The *Tristana Riccardiana*.
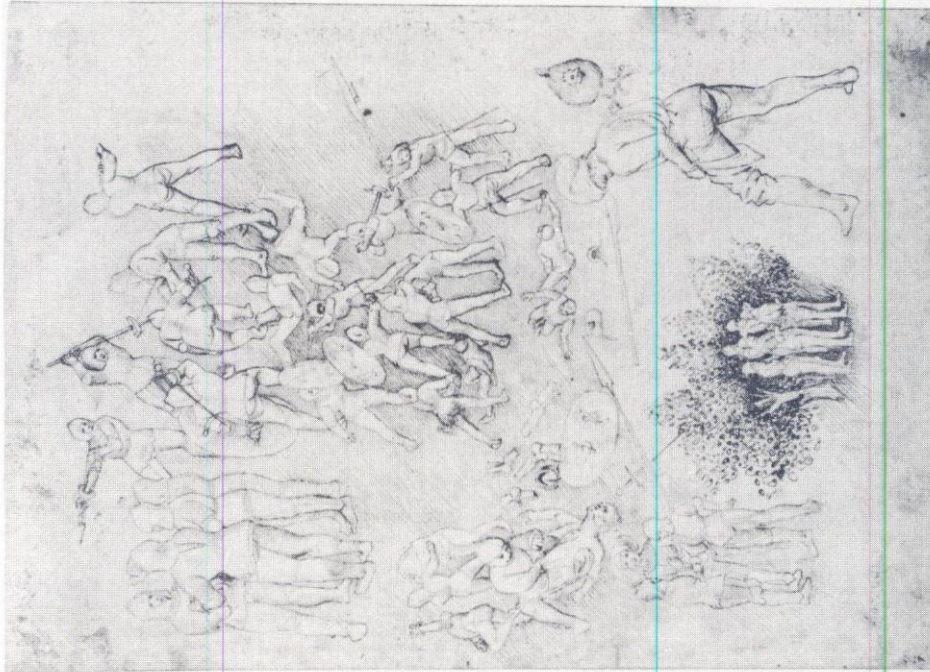
1 Anonymous Veronese artist, *Battle scenes.*
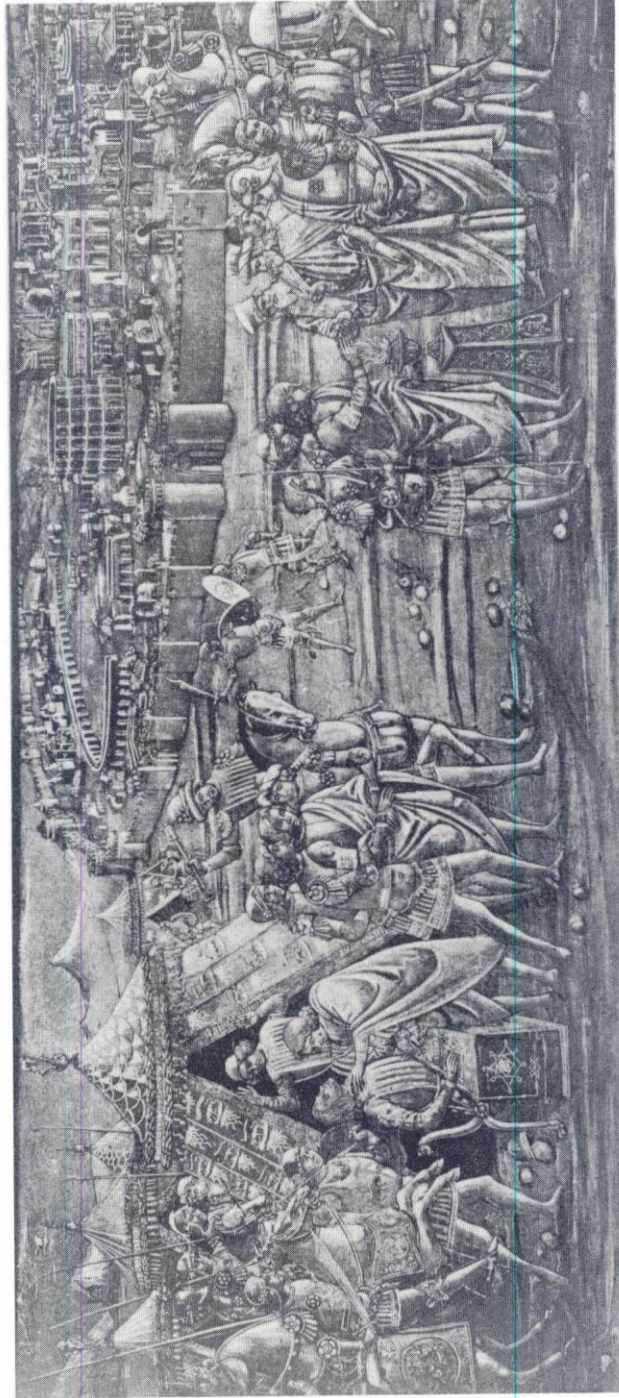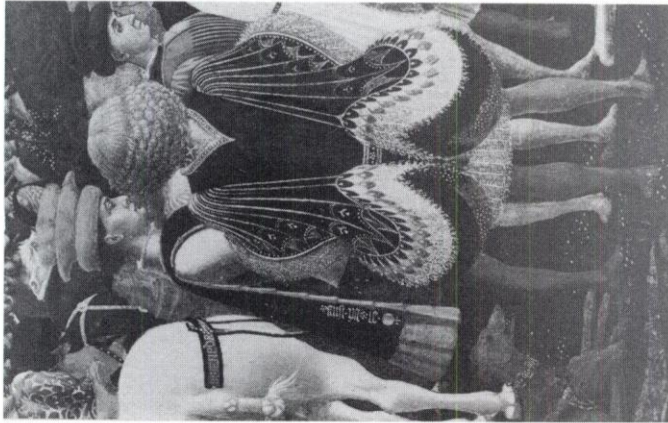
3 La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei.

4 Duke William lifting his helmet.

5 Anonymous Florentine painter, Cassone panel depicting the Story of Mucius Publius Scaevola.

7 Attributed to Leon Battista Alberti, *Portrait Plaque with the impresa of the winged eye*.

6 Domenico Veneziano, *Adoration of the Magi* (detail).

10 Pisanello, *Sketch for the Portrait Medal of Alfonso V of Aragon*.

9 Attributed to Agostino di Duccio, *Calliope*.

8 Pisanello, *Portrait Medal of Leonello d'Este. Reverse* – impresa of the three-faced putto (Calliope).

13 Matteo de'Pasti, *Portrait Medal of Leon Battista Alberti. Reverse* – impresa of the winged eye with the motto 'Quid tum'.

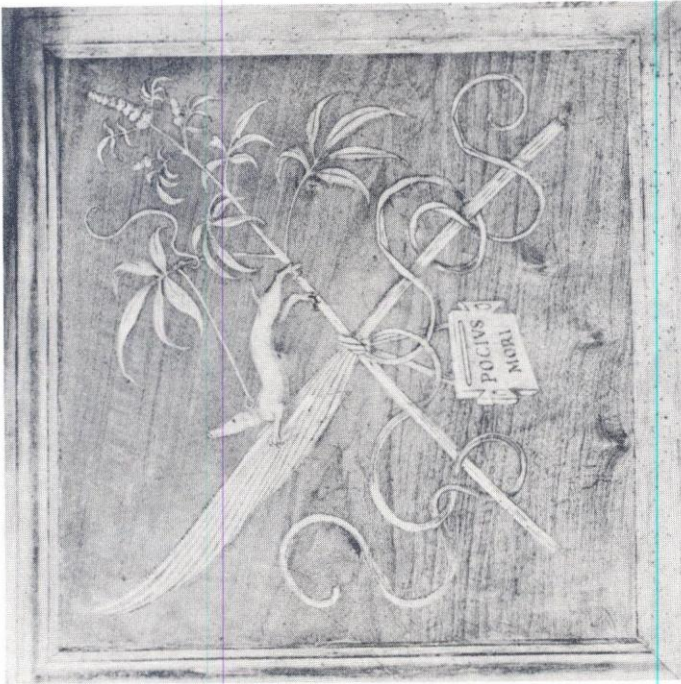12 Pisanello, *Portrait Medal of Leonello d'Este. Reverse* – impresa of the blindfolded lynx.

11 Pisanello, *Portrait Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga. Reverse* – impresa of a virgin and unicorn.
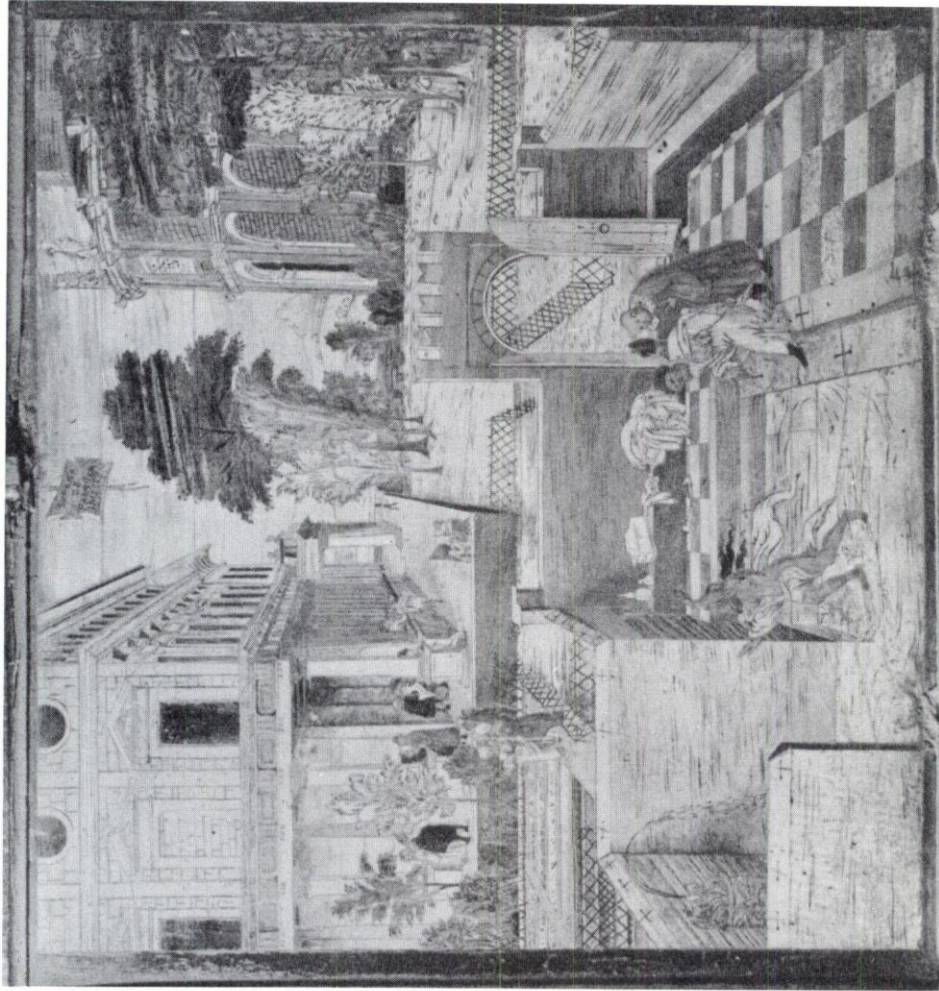
14 Lorenzo Lotto, *Intarsia of Susannah and the Elders.*

16 Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci. Reverse* – impresa.

15 Lorenzo Lotto, *Intarsia impresa/cover for Susannah and the Elders.*

17 Lorenzo Lotto, Impresa/Cover for the Portrait of Bernardo de' Rossi.