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DRAWINGS ON PARCHMENT AND PAPER OF MEDIEVAL ITALIAN NOTARIES (12th–15th CENTURIES)

Riassunto

Il contributo ha lo scopo di portare all'attenzione l'ampia presenza di disegni e schizzi tracciati su pergamena e carta dai notai medievali italiani. Dagli esempi – differenti per area geografica, altezza cronologica e tipologia – risulta evidente che il know-how dei notai si esprimeva non solo attraverso parole e numeri, ma anche mediante segni e disegni più o meno estemporanei e funzionali alla propria attività. Infatti se già nella routine quotidiana, i notai dimostravano

capacità grafiche tracciando segni speciali di autenticazione e disegnando a supporto di specifiche esigenze documentarie, non va dimenticato che oltre a queste manifestazioni grafico-artistiche strettamente connesse all'esercizio della propria professione, i notai spesso tracciavano sulle coperte di legatura, sui fogli di guardia e sulle pagine inutilizzate dei propri registri pergamenei e cartacei disegni estemporanei, frutto della loro cultura poliedrica nonché dei loro sentimenti più intimi.

Keywords: Italy, Middle Ages, notaries, drawings

Contribution

Abundant scholarly literature exists on Italian notarial culture in the Middle Ages. Previous studies have tackled the vocational training of these professionals – that is, apprenticeship, technical know-how and problem-solving¹ – as well as their ability to use their knowledge outside the field of law. Regarding this last point, there are many attestations of notaries who

followed different paths in terms of geographical, social, and occupational mobility, adding their writing activity to their work as doctors, apothecaries, moneylenders, accountants, surveyors, merchants, butchers, priests, teachers, poets, and so on.²

1 In general on this topic, see: *La produzione scritta tecnica e scientifica nel Medioevo: libro e documento tra scuole e professioni* (Atti del Convegno internazionale dell'Associazione italiana dei Paleografi e Diplomatisti. Fisciano-Salerno, 28-30 settembre 2009, ed. by G. De Gregorio and others, Spoleto: Fondazione centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2012).

2 *Notariorum itinera. Notai toscani del basso Medioevo tra routine, mobilità e specializzazione*, ed. by G. Pinto and others, (Firenze: Olschki, 2018); *Notariorum itinera. Notai liguri del basso Medioevo tra routine, mobilità e specializzazione*, ed. by V. Ruzzin (Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2019) http://www.storiapatriagenova.it/Docs/Biblioteca_Digitale/SB/17ad39319c34c2e0a56490d1bf88c851/a2f8167ecc043750f2dddc89a1d3de01.pdf (last use 12.06.2019); A. BARTOLI LANGELI, *Notai. Scrivere documenti nell'Italia medievale* (Roma: Viella, 2006); *La langue des actes* (Actes du XI^e Congrès international de diplomatique. Troyes, jeudi 11-samedi 13 septembre 2003, Paris: École nationale des chartes - Sorbonne 2005) <http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/CID2003> (last viewed 12.06.2019); P. CAMMAROSANO, 'Laici ed ecclesiasti-

Aspects of the notaries' graphic culture are also well studied; even if this particular field of research has mostly focused on the paleographic aspects,³ and especially on the notaries' skills in resorting, according to the circumstances, to quick or cursive scripts or else more formal and legible ones modelled on the contemporary book lettering.

The fact that medieval Italian notaries expressed their know-how not only through words and numbers but also through signs, drawings, and sketches has remained at the fringes of this strand of research.⁴ In this sense, scholars have afforded their attention to this aspect only in those rare cases in which the art of drawing became a complementary profession to, or even overtook, the legal one.

In this respect, one can mention Francesco Barberino from Florence (1264–1348), who met Giotto in Padua and drew inspiration from him for the allegorical designs of the *Documenti d'Amore*, which date from 1309–1313.⁵ Another example is Neri from

Rimini (c. 1270–1338), an illuminator, educated in the milieu of 13th-century Bolognese artists, who at the same time worked as a notary and was regularly registered in the local college of notaries.⁶ Others include Matteo di Pietro di Bernardo from Umbria (1430/1435–1507), and his son and grandson Girolamo and Bernardo from Gualdo Tadino, most of whose artworks in oil on board are still kept in the Pinacoteca of Nocera Umbra.⁷

The examples may continue, but the aim of this paper is not to reflect on these and other remarkable cases that seem destined to remain numerically limited. Instead, I want to focus on some common, though no less diverse and relevant, elements that represent the Italian medieval notaries' heritage of graphic skills. I will, therefore, consider signs and drawings used by notaries in their daily professional routine as well as in their private life as means and spaces of free self-expression.

Higher artistic episodes aside, it is essential to point out that all notaries were required to have graphic skills to design, to place the writing on each page, to ensure the correct assembly of the quires and to signal clearly the division between each section. For these purposes, notaries exploited models and elements derived from book culture, wherein, especially from the 12th century and throughout Europe, a clearer demarcation of the textual sections developed so as to

ci nella produzione italiana di scritture dall'alto medioevo all'età romanica', in: *Libri e documenti d'Italia: dai Longobardi alla rinascita delle città*, Atti del Convegno Nazionale dell'Associazione Italiana Paleografi e Diplomatisti, Cividale, 5-7 ottobre 1994, ed. by C. Scaloni (Udine: Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1996) 1-14; A. PRATESI, 'Appunti per una storia dell'evoluzione del notariato', in: *Studi in onore di Leopoldo Sandri* (Roma: Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, della Scuola speciale per archivisti, bibliotecari dell'Università di Roma, 1983), 759-772, also in A. PRATESI, *Tra carte e notai. Saggi di diplomatica dal 1951 al 1991* (Roma: Società alla Biblioteca Vallicelliana, 1992), 521-535; E. PETRUCCI, 'An clerici artem notariae possint exercere', in: *Studi in onore di Ottorino Bertolini*, vol. II (Pisa: Pacini, 1972), 553-598; A. PETRUCCI, *Notarii. Documenti per la storia del notariato italiano* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1958), 3-44.

3 In general, on this topic, see: G. NICOLAJ, 'Alle origini della minuscola notarile italiana e dei suoi caratteri storici', in: *Scrittura e civiltà*, 10 (1986), 49-82.

4 A. GHIGNOLI, 'Writing Texts, Drawing, Signs. On Some Non-alphabetical Signs in Charters of the Early Medieval West', in: *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 62 (2016), 11-40; J.F. HAMBURGER & B.M. BEDOS-REZAK, *Sign and design. Script as image in cross-cultural perspective (300-1600 CE)* (Washington: D.C. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016); A. GHIGNOLI, 'Segni di notai. Scrivere per note e per segni in testi di chartae pisane dei secoli VIII-XI', in: *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo*, 115 (2013), 45-95.

5 Francesco da Barberino is the author of both text and illustrations of the *Documenti d'amore* now kept at Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Barb. lat. 4076* (digital reproduction of the manuscript available at http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Barb.lat.4076, last viewed 12.06.2019), and

illustrated it now kept at Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Barb. lat. 4077* (digital reproductions of the manuscript are available at http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Barb.lat.4077, last viewed 12.06.2019); see E. PASQUINI, 'Francesco da Barberino', in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 49 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997), 689-691, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-da-barberino_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (last viewed 12.06.2019); *Il notaio nella civiltà fiorentina. Secoli XIII-XVI*, <Mostra nella Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze, 1° ottobre-10 novembre 1984> (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1984), sheets 275 and 281.

6 S. NICOLINI, 'Neri da Rimini', in: *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani. Secoli IX-XVI*, ed. by M. Bollati (Milano: Edizioni Sylvestre Bonnard, 2004), 816-820; A. IAFRATE, 'Neri da Rimini', in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neri-da-rimini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neri-da-rimini_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (last viewed 12.06.2019).

7 *Matteo da Gualdo. Rinascimento eccentrico tra Umbria e Marche*, ed. by E. Bairati and P. Dragoni (Città di Castello: Electa editori umbri associati, 2004).

support the efforts of conceptualization and memory.⁸ If necessary notaries were able to put texts in a bi-columnar *mise en page*, to organise records into several sections separated by white lines, to assign running titles, to use brackets, line-fillers, compartments, paragraphs, *pieds-de-mouche*, reference signs, marginal markings, pointing hands, arrows to point out initials, distinctive writing and friezes, and so on. So much so that, to borrow Carl Nordenfalk's words, we can say that "practical purpose has been the mother of artistic invention".⁹

Medieval Italian notaries employed these devices in when compiling the *libri iurium*, papers and registers intended to represent the institutions for which they worked. Among the many such cases detected during the MECA project,¹⁰ we can mention as an example the initials, slightly detached from the rest of the word and ornate with floral motifs, written in brown and red ink at the beginning of the 13th century by the notaries responsible for the *Registro delli Instromenti Antichi del monastero di Chiaravalle Milanese*,¹¹ or else the figurative signatures placed at the end of each quire

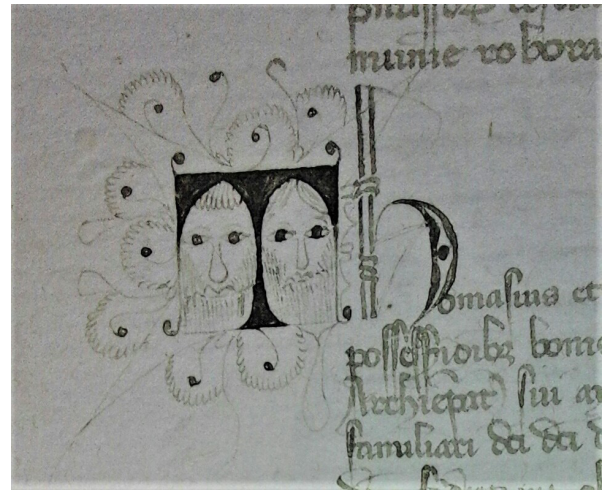


Fig. 1: Initial decorated in Ambrosolo Aresi's notarial register (1362–1364). Milano, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 9

intended to guide the binder in assembling the coeval *Liber continens exempla instrumentorum et actorum pertinencium et spectancium hospitali Beati Bartholomei Cumane, ordinis Cruciferorum*.¹²

However, notaries typically employed similar devices also in contexts not intended for public fruition, with the simple purpose of effectively reporting the beginning of the acts in their own registers. One such example is provided by the acts of notary Ambrosolo Aresi from Milan who customarily drew decorated initials outside the text justification (Fig. 1).

Similarly, the notaries Pietro di Lorenzo from Vertova (1288),¹³ Pietro Sforzatica from Bergamo (1302)¹⁴ and Guarisco Bonafede, also from Bergamo (1309),¹⁵ drew friezes with beautiful anthropomorphic and geometric decorations.¹⁶

Highly symbolic signs and drawings were programmatically placed also on the

8 R. ASSUNTO, 'Scrittura come figura, figura come segno', in: *Rassegna della Istruzione Artistica*, II/2 (1967), 5-18 and II/4 (1967), 5-15; M.T. CLANCHY, *From memory to written record. England 1066-1307* (Blackwell: Oxford-Cambridge Mass., 1993²), 132-135 and 172-177; R. CHARTIER, *L'ordre des livres. Lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre XIVe et XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1992); P. FIORETTI, 'Ordine del testo, ordine dei testi. Strategie distintive nell'Occidente latino tra scrittura e lettura', in: *Scrivere e leggere nell'Alto Medioevo* (Atti del convegno, Spoleto, 28 aprile-4 maggio 2011, Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2012), 515-551.

9 C. NORDENFALK, 'The Beginning of Book Decoration' in: *Essays in honor of Georg Swarzenski*, ed. by O. Goetz (Chicago-Berlin: Henry Regnery in cooperation with Verlag Gebr. Mann, 1951), 9-20; republished in C. NORDENFALK, *Studies in the History of Book Illumination*, (London: The Pindar Press, 1992), 1-8.

10 C. CARBONETTI and others, 'Les cartulaires ecclésiastiques de l'Italie médiévale', in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge*, 127/2 (2015), <https://mefrm.revues.org/2655?lang=it> (last viewed 12.06.2019). The *Medieval European Cartularies Project* (MECA) is still ongoing, for further information see: <http://www.efrome.it/it/la-ricerca/programmi/programmes-2017-2021/meca-medieval-european-cartularies.html> (last viewed 12.06.2019).

11 M.F. BARONI, 'I documenti su "libro", il "libro" come documento. Un registro di Chiaravalle (sec. XIV)', in: *Libri, e altro. Nel passato e nel presente* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006), 55-64.

12 F. FOSSATI, 'Codice dei Cruciferi di Como', in: *Periodico della Società Storica Comense*, 1 (1878), 155-174.

13 Archivio di Stato di Bergamo, *Notarile*, fasc. 3, f. 35r.

14 Archivio di Stato di Bergamo, *Notarile*, fasc. 2b, ff. 18r, 31v, 46v, 47r.

15 Archivio di Stato di Bergamo, *Notarile*, fasc. 4, f. 20r.

16 In general, on this topic, see: G. CAVALLO, 'Iniziali, scritture distintive, fregi. Morfologie e funzioni', in: *Libri e documenti d'Italia: dai longobardi alla rinascita delle città* (Atti del Convegno Nazionale dell'Associazione Italiana Paleografi e Diplomatisti, Cividale, 5-7 ottobre 1994, ed. by C. Scalon (Udine: Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1996), 15-33.

covers of the registers containing the acts of the ecclesiastical and civic institutions for which they worked. In this regard, we can mention the coats of arms of the podestà on the register of the court records of Bologna¹⁷ and Florence,¹⁸ or other coats of arms of the city gates on the oldest registers of the city of Milan,¹⁹ or again other self-representative images, such as the detailed prospectus of the façade of the cathedral of St. Maria Maggiore in Milan, drawn on the parchment cover of its first register (1387–1401) by the same notary responsible for writing the records.²⁰

These drawings are mostly on parchment. Sometimes they were drawn with the same ink used for writing the deeds and were intended to remain monochromatic; others were sketched with ink and then tempera-coloured using the same techniques, materials, and procedures used for illuminating manuscripts. In some Florentine registers, the indications, written in the vernacular by the notary as a reminder for the correct colouring of the blazons, remain visible. It is therefore not by chance that in analysing these drawings Ruth Wolff has called them “notarial illuminations”.²¹

Registers of civil and ecclesiastical institutions aside, we find signs and drawings also on the bindings or on the first folio of notarial registers: coats of arms of aristocratic families – like the one belonging to the Sermondi family, drawn by notary Simone Sermondi of Bormio on his first register

(1559–1567) –;²² sacred images with invocative functions;²³ depictions referring to the name of the notary – like the *psicostasia* (Fig. 2) depicting the archangel Michael weighing souls²⁴ drawn by notary Michele Mussi from Piacenza on the first folio of his register (1309–1310) –;²⁵ and specific recognition signs, or *signa notariorum*, specially conceived by each notary at the very beginning of his career.²⁶ These *signa notariorum* were initially designed around the invocative symbol of the cross associated with Tironian notes referring to the words *notarius* and *iudex*.²⁷

17 M. VALLERANI, ‘I disegni dei notai’, in: *Duecento. Forme e colori del Medioevo a Bologna*, ed. by M. Medica and S. Tumidei, <Catalogo della mostra, Bologna, 2000> (Venezia: Marsilio, 2000), 75–83.

18 R. WOLFF, ‘Visualizzazioni giuridiche in pietra e su pergamena. Gli stemmi dei Podestà di Firenze’, in: *L’arme segreta. Araldica e storia dell’arte nel Medioevo (secoli XIII–XV)*, by M. Ferrari (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2015), 207–220.

19 M.L. MANGINI, ‘Parole e immagini del perduto Liber instrumentorum porte Cumacine (Milano, metà del secolo XIII)’, in: *Ianuenis non nascitur sed fit. Studi per Dino Puncuh*, by C. Bitossi and others (Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, in the press).

20 Milano, Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Cod. Arch. C 6, *Atti della Fabbrica del Duomo* (1387–1401).

21 WOLFF, note 18, 217.

22 Sondrio, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile*, Pergamene sciolte, n. 485 and Sondrio, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile*, vol. 1386. R. PEZZOLA, *Pergamene sciolte dell’Archivio notarile di Sondrio. Ricognizione informatizzata (secoli XI–XVII)* (Morbegno: Ad Fontes, 2012), <http://www.adfontes.it/biblioteca/scaffale/rp-assosciolte/indice.html> (last viewed 12.06.2019).

23 For example, according to the statutes of Bologna of 1389, notaries must draw a sacred image on each of their registers: “in eorum libris pictas figuras domini nostri Iesu Christi et beate Marie virginis ac sancti Iohannis evangeliste sub pena viginti quinque librarum Bononiorum pro quolibet omitente. Et quod tempore quo sacramenta aliqua per iudicem aut notarios deferuntur, ipsi tales quibus sacramentum deferritur iurare debeant et sacramentum per eosdem prestare ad sancta Dei evangelia, manu tactis figuris predictis” in *Gli statuti del Comune di Bologna degli anni 1352, 1357, 1376, 1389 (libri I–III)*, ed. by V. Braidì (Bologna, Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province di Romagna, 2002), 999; see also G. TAMBA, ‘Gli atti di giurisdizione civile nella Camera actorum del Comune di Bologna (secoli XIV–XV)’, in: *La documentazione degli organi giudiziari nell’Italia tardo-medievale e moderna* <Atti del Convegno di studi, Siena, Archivio di Stato, 15–17 settembre 2008>, ed. by A. Giorgi and others (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2012), 249–274; cf. 260.

24 F. GENNARI, ‘I disegni dei notai: primi risultati di un’indagine sui registri del Fondo Notarile dell’Archivio di Stato di Piacenza (secc. XIV–XV)’, in: *In signo notariorum* <Atti della giornata di studi Piacenza, Archivio di Stato, 24 settembre 2016 - Giornate Europee del Patrimonio 2016>, ed. by A. Riva (Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2018), 32–69: 56–58, http://www.storiapatriagenova.it/BD_vs_contenitore.aspx?Id_Scheda_Bibliografica_Padre=5975&Id_Progetto=0 (last use 12.06.2019).

25 F. GENNARI, ‘Protocollo del notaio Michele Mussi’, in: *I misteri della cattedrale. Meraviglie nel labirinto del sapere*, <Piacenza, Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta, 7 aprile - 7 luglio 2018> (Milano: Skira, 2018), 94–95.

26 *Signa et insignia. Storia, notariato ed archivi notarili in Italia*, <Catalogo della mostra Firenze, 30 settembre–6 ottobre 1984> (Roma: Arti grafiche Jassillo, 1984); *Ego signavi et roboravi. Signa e sigilli notarili nel tempo*, ed. by A. Rovere, <Settimana della cultura, 22 aprile 2010, Genova, Complesso monumentale di Sant’Ignazio> (Genova: Brigati, 2014).

27 *Ego signavi et roboravi*, note 26, 3–6.



Fig. 2: Archangel Michael weighing the souls, drawing by the notary Michele Mussi of Piacenza on the first leaf of his register (1309-1310). Piacenza, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 15

From the beginning of the twelfth century, notaries started to design personal signs of recognition, making them deliberately complicated so as to prevent imitations and guard themselves from counterfeiters. Starting from this period, the graphic elaborations of *signa notarii* assumed the most varied forms according to the imagination and inspiration of each notary: spanning from the essential and geometrically stylized *signa* typical of Genoese notaries who, from the first half of the 12th century, used the personal pronoun *Ego*;²⁸ to the more complex, composed by intertwining the letters of the first name and the surname of each professional. Among these are the *signa* of Oddo de Torsellis de Colliculo (first half of the 13th century) who

28 *Ego signavi et roboravi*, note 26, 9-16.

apparently had fun playing with his palindrome name,²⁹ and those of notaries Antonio di Padova (1299) and Andreas *Capitanis de Vicomercato* from Como (1476) who elaborated personal monograms. Other notaries adopted *signa* that included drawings with reference to onomastic, toponomastic, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, phytoomorph, and architectural elements,³⁰ while others are evocative of Christian symbology, such as crosses, fish, Mount Golgotha, and pelicans.³¹

Different from *signa notarii*, but comparable to them due to their function which was strictly instrumental to the documentary context, are those drawings – human figures³² and animals³³ – that sometimes notaries put in the margins of documents to quickly find them or within certain deeds in order to better describe the subject of the contracts.

We can mention several of these cases. For example, the three drawings, in brown and red ink and tempera on parchment, of the dome of Florence drawn between 1420 and 1421 by Giovanni di Gherardo from Prato, a notary but also a scholar of optics and architecture, to support a complaint against Filippo Brunelleschi accused of not respecting the programmes and methods established for the realization of the building.³⁴

Another example could be the *signa figurata* stamped on some fabrics of fustian

29 Genova, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Segreto, 348, Paesi, Finale, n. 3; see *Ego signavi et roboravi*, note 26, 43-44.

30 *Ego signavi et roboravi*, note 26, 33, 45-55.

31 Genova, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Segreto, 342, Paesi, Bagnasco, n. 4; see *Ego signavi et roboravi*, note 26, 39.

32 *Il cartulario di Arnaldo Cumano e Giovanni di Donato. Savona, 1178-1188*, ed. by L. Balletto and others (Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1978), deeds number 93, 517, 769.

33 As we can see, for example, in *Il cartulario di Arnaldo Cumano*, note 32, deeds number 30 and 37; or in *Corradus Cossigi's registers*: this notary drew a bird alongside those notarial deeds relative to the Cathedral of Cremona (1305-1346), Cremona, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile*, b. 5.

34 *Filippo Brunelleschi: l'uomo, l'artista*, ed. by P. Benigni, <Mostra documentaria, Firenze 1977> (Firenze: Biemme 1977), 45-46, exhibition sheet number 45; *Il notaio nella civiltà fiorentina. Secoli XIII-XVI*, <Mostra nella Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze, 1° ottobre-10 novembre 1984> (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1984), 264-265, exhibition sheet number 282.



Fig. 3: *Signa figurata* depicted by notary Marcolo di Golasecca (1369). Milano, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 13



Fig. 4: Courtship scene by notary Giovanni from Pontenure (1371/72-1374). Piacenza, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 405

sold in Milan on June 10, 1369, and graphically depicted by notary Marcolo di Golasecca in the record of the sale (Fig. 3).³⁵ Similarly relevant are the stylized, elementary, and completely devoid of perspective representations of a section (between Lambrate and Linate) of the River Lambro by the notary designated to draw up the text of the sentence of a dispute concerning the management of the waters pertaining to the monastery of Chiaravalle.³⁶

In these, as in other cases that could be mentioned, we are considering drawings that are functional to the purpose of the document, yet they also indirectly inform us of the notaries' personal graphic skills:

35 Milano, *Atti dei notai*, b. 13, image published in A. LIVA, *Notariato e documento notarile a Milano dall'Alto Medioevo al Settecento* (Milano : Giuffrè, 1979), picture number VIII.

36 Milano, *Fondo di religione*, 2434, image published in *L'immagine interessata. Territorio e cartografia in Lombardia tra '500 e '800* (Como : New Press, 1984), 155 and 160, picture number Acque 1.

sometimes elementary, other times remarkable. Entirely for different purposes, even if often handed down within the same documentary context, are the many and mostly monochromatic sketches through which notaries expressed their iconographic microcosm. It often happened that, outside the more official dimension, these professionals indulged in extemporaneous graphic-artistic expressions, which not by chance were called *iscioperii* by the Florentines. These automatic or semiautomatic signs frequently stud the guardsheets, bindings and margins of the professional books of notaries. We can consider these drawings as free manifestations of each notary's personality, of his emotions and cultural interests.³⁷

The writing surface that these sketches occupy and the space that notaries

37 Courtship scene by notary Giovanni from Pontenure (1371/72-1374), in Piacenza, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 405 (Fig. 4).

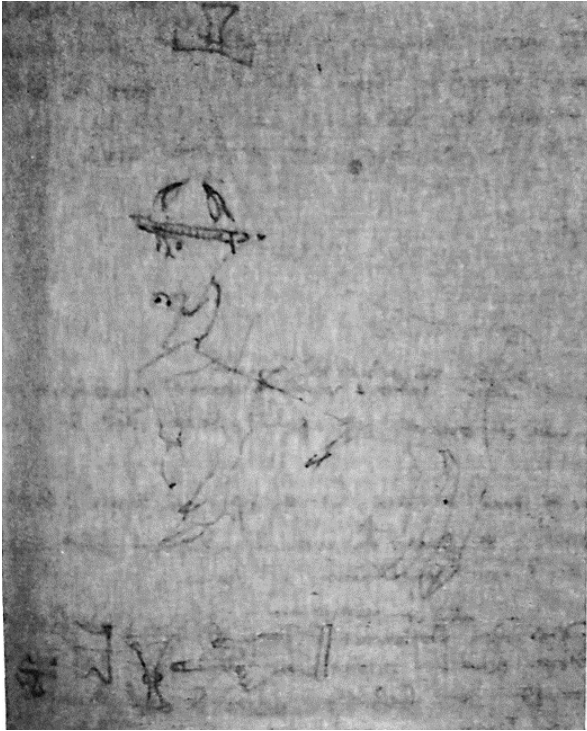


Fig. 5: Notary Silvestro Bossi's self-symbolic representation (1403). Milano, Archivio di Stato, *Atti dei notai*, b. 111

deliberately left empty or for other uses allow us to imagine the way each professional thought of himself in space and time.

In this regard, we can mention the emblematic case of early 15th-century notary Silvestro Bossi from Azzate³⁸ who between a record and the other of his register drew a clumsy ox with a pen in his mouth, and surmounted by a cross, under whose hoofs he added a caption with the pronoun *Ego* followed by three other sketches – a banner, a chalice and a pointing hand. If we break down this drawing we can easily understand the message the notary was trying to convey (Fig. 5): *I am a member of the important Bossi family* (whose surname comes from the Latin word *bos*, *bovis*, that is ox); *I am endowed with a strong identity* (suggested by the first person singular personal pronoun *ego*) *embodied by my coat of arms* (as we can see in the banner); *I am a good Christian* (this idea is represented by the chalice); and finally, *I am a notary* (evoked

by the hand, his main working tool).³⁹

Yet drawings are not always carefully considered representations. Often, these sketches were produced in response to a double process of automatism and projection. They are spontaneous evidence of a perceptive and graphic-expressive skill that normally remains limited within fixed patterns.

Notarial culture, therefore, allowed notaries to express themselves freely in the choice of iconographic themes such as more or less real and identifiable human figures, landscape views, allegorical, heraldic, phyto-zoomorphic elements. However, at the same time, it was also a culture in which some figurative themes – mostly pornographic and sacred elements – were repeated almost obsessively. In any case, these drawings show us the most intimate fragments of the context in which medieval Italian notaries mingled, operated, and after all spent their entire existence.⁴⁰

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38 For Silvestro Bossi's biography see *Notai del contado milanese in età viscontea (1347-1447)*, ed. by M. Lunari and others (Milano: Unicopli, 2009), sheet number 33.

39 F. DEL TREDICI, *Un'altra nobiltà. Storie di (in)distinzione a Milano. Secoli XIV-XV* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017), 63-75.

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