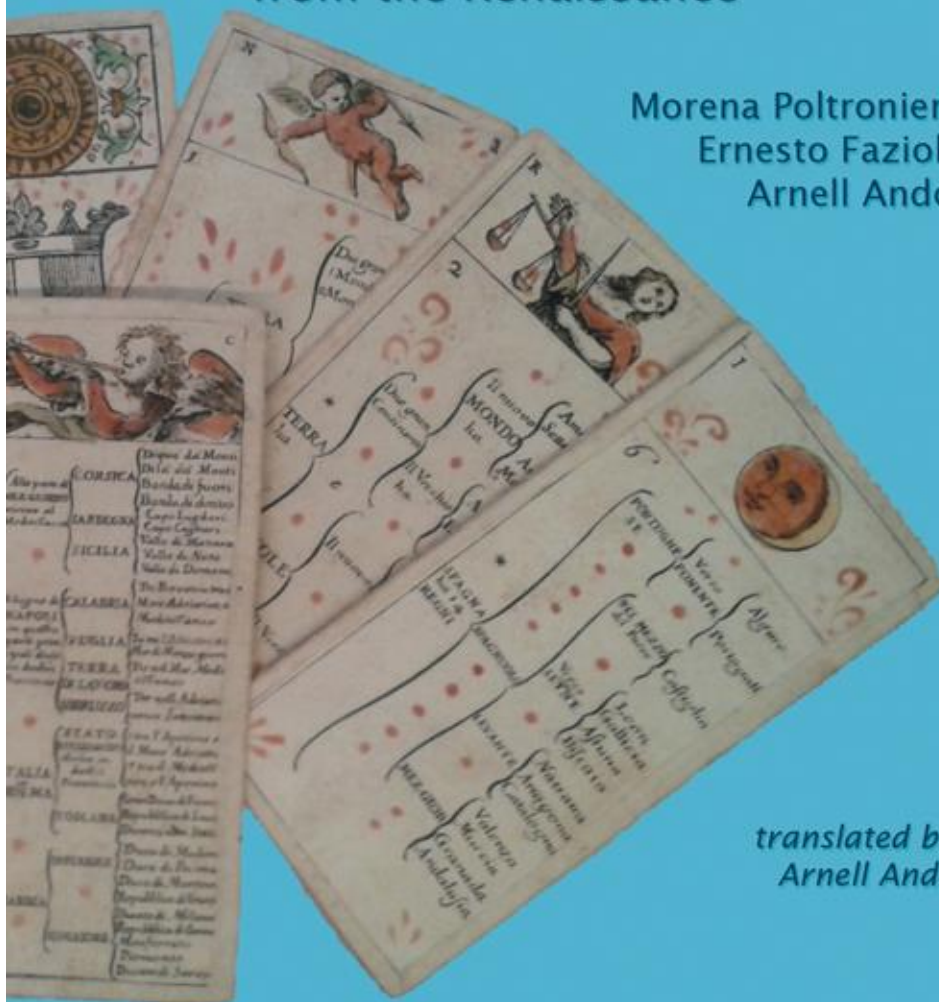


# Tarot Travel Guide of Italy

History of a Mystery  
from the Renaissance

Morena Poltronieri  
Ernesto Fazioli  
Arnell Ando



*translated by  
Arnell Ando*



# Tarot

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**Tarot Travel Guide of Italy:  
History of a Mystery from the Renaissance**  
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**Book Cover Cards: Tarot Montieri from XVIII Century**

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	6
Preface.....	7
Introduction.....	8
From Olive's Terrace.....	9
<b>MAGICAL ORIGINS OF TAROT.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Out in the World.....	12
China.....	12
India.....	16
Gypsies.....	18
Egypt.....	19
Cabala.....	22
Other Hypotheses.....	25
Divinatory Korean Arrow.....	25
Cards of Fez, Morocco.....	25
The Crusades.....	25
Only a Game.....	27
<b>ORIGIN OF TAROT IN ITALY.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Milan: the First Tarot.....	28
The Visconti Sforza Tradition.....	28
Griselda in Sforzesco Castle.....	29
Tarot in Borromeo Palace.....	33
Brera's Sola Busca Tarot.....	34
Il Meneghello Publishing House.....	41
Bologna, Where Tarot was Born.....	43
1st Hanged Man: of St. Petronius.....	50
St. Bernardino of Siena.....	52
High Priestess Mummy of Bologna.....	53
Symbols in St. Stefano.....	55
Triumph of Fame and Death.....	65
Poggi Museum's Card Players.....	69
Ferrara: Golden Age of Tarot.....	74



Magic of Tarot in Ferrara.....	74
St. George and the Dragon.....	78
Treasure Chest of Schifanoia Palace.....	87
Museo dei Tarocchi in Riola.....	100
Siena.....	103
Siena Cathedral's Philosophical Symbols.....	103
Tarot Garden of Niki de Saint Phalle.....	110
Mystical Bergamo.....	113
Accademia Carrara.....	114
Masnago Castle's Esoteric Frescos.....	116
Clusone.....	120
Dance with Death.....	120
Astronomical Clock Tower.....	122
Turin - Torino.....	124
Piedmont's History of Tarot.....	124
Lo Scarabeo Publishing House.....	126
Le Tarot' Cultural Association.....	126
<b>RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>128</b>
Maps and Guides.....	128
Artists and Authors of Italy.....	138
Essential Bibliography.....	139
Mutus Liber's Manifesto.....	140
Tarot Travel Guide Bonus Links Page.....	140
About the Authors.....	141
Publications by Mutus Liber.....	142

*Dedicated to Tarot travelers, scholars, artists, readers both near and far, then and now; with thanks for all that you contribute to our collective journey...*

## Preface

With thanks to Tarot artist, author, historian and all-around Renaissance man, Brian Williams, who led Tarot tours throughout northern Italy during 1999 and 2000; where we, the fortunate few were witness to this fascinating history unfolding while our imaginations soared.

This experience altered destiny and connected us to many wonderful places and people including beloved artist/publisher Osvaldo Menegazzi, who we were so impressed by that we created a website to honor his life's work. At some point Osvaldo referred Morena Poltronieri of the Tarot Museum to me, which eventually led to my hosting a collaborative deck (LiteraTarot USA) for the museum's publishing house; while inviting 21 favorite American artists to make cards for it and then bringing all these precious artworks to Italy, meeting our Museo dei Tarocchi friends for the first time. This merging of hearts led to creating our own version of Tarot art tours, always with a tip of the hat to dear Brian Williams, for sharing his great legacy. And to all our friends who have inspired us with art, writing, storytelling and for encouraging us to dream big...we are forever grateful. It has been a meaningful and enriching experience.

We have savored the sharing of these incredible tours with our *Merry Bands of Tarot Travelers* since 2011. Each adventure unique and full of evocative discoveries, synchronicities and enchantment, while friendships were being forged and deepened along the way. We explore Italy, our suitcases laden with curious decks, cryptic books and unique treasures found from these wondrous places long envisioned. Tarot art and iconography thrives, leaving clues of a fascinating tale in some unlikely places, (with secret signs to follow the trail.)

While these amazing tours may continue to evolve over time, we have received numerous requests to write a book that both describes Italian Tarot history in more detail and aids those of you who cannot join these escapades to find a way to experience it all, from the comfort of your own realms or for whenever you can make the trek to Tarot's birthplace.

From the chapter: 'Origin of Tarot in Italy' onward, this has been organized in chronological order of our tours (more or less) to make it easier to find the way, along with the associated Tarot history of each area included in that section of text. We attempted to make visits to these places simpler by sharing maps, live links and details, but because websites and contact information can change over time I created a password protected webpage with active links pertaining to various places in this edition, along with other helpful info: **User Name:** traveler **Password:** Italytour21 and the **Webpage:** [www.arnellart.com/travelguide/italy.htm](http://www.arnellart.com/travelguide/italy.htm) We hope this book will be a friend and guide and are so delighted to share the journey with you.

~ Arnell Ando  
[www.ArnellArt.com](http://www.ArnellArt.com)

## Introduction

Travel is always an adventure in the labyrinths of the psyche. When our physical body moves and the senses are stimulated by new colors, sounds, tastes and visions, the mind travels to evoke in ourselves ancient memories. If the journey is a dip into the historical and cultural memory of our own civilization, every cell in our body vibrates in tune with places visited. But if, as in this case, Tarot is the objective, but also the symbolic realm which guides an extraordinary trip to Italy, then every moment will be a memorable cultural experience ~ emotional, evocative, esoteric, evolutionary and educational.

The Italian Renaissance was an extraordinary moment in history in which the ancient cultural traditions were dramatically challenged by the cult of beauty and harmonious artistic expression in an atmosphere of freedom and exploration. Brilliant humanists who were still unknown at that time, created a fascinating game for aristocrats and the multitudes, which concealed an initiatory phase of content; a philosophical heir to Platonic thought, aimed at freeing humanity, with wings to attain higher consciousness, beyond limits of matter and mind.

Traveling the trail of Tarot in Italy is to venture into the past, surrounded by art and beauty, by history and legend, culture and mystery. It is not a journey for everyone; for not all are prepared to become mirrors of infinity. When that which is infinite wants to manifest itself to us, it must first be translated into something finished; when the invisible wants to reveal itself, it must become visible, and when we invite the unknown to express itself, the absolute descends into a space denser and more intelligible than the senses and the mind. The journey of the Tarot in Italy is nourishment for the senses, the intellect and the spirit. The connections between the Tarot, the destinations, the characters, the situations, the experiences that you can live out in Italy are innumerable, and a lifetime would not be enough to comprehend it all. Like any travel, it is an adventure that never ceases to amaze, and a quest that never ends. Bologna, Milan, Siena, Ferrara, Bergamo are only the first stages of a bountiful path that would cross every village and city of the peninsula. Pisa, Florence, Lucca, Orvieto, Rimini, Urbino and Mantua might be suggestions for further travel, but this would only be a tantalizing hors d'oeuvre, to stimulate the intellectual palate; an invitation to totally immerse yourself in the fascinating world of Tarot, with the genuine risk of getting lost in the vast and stimulating, consciously functioning, open-air museum that is Italy.

Even Italians are often surprised by the rich heritage that their illustrious ancestors left behind, but more often they take for granted the good fortune of living each day immersed in history and culture, art and beauty. For a foreigner, such total immersion is a unique and absolutely memorable experience.

So as not to get lost in the esoteric journey narrated in the *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri needed three guides: Virgil, Beatrice and St. Bernard. If you choose to take an Italian Tarot tour, the expertise of Morena Poltronieri, Ernesto Fazioli and Arnell Ando offer the best guides possible for an amazing trip: their love of the history, art and culture of Tarot is tangible, while their knowledge of the themes, events and places is unique, and their humanity heartfelt. Buon viaggio.

~ Giovanni Pelosini: writer, researcher, teacher and founder of Humanistic Tarologia:

[www.giovannipelosini.com](http://www.giovannipelosini.com)

Elated to share this poignant poem, inspired during 2015 Tarot tour of Italy and written by our dear friend.

### From Olive's Terrace

I speak as a stone tower  
held together with iron bands  
above the cold waves,  
corroding against the wet  
mineral winds and also time  
which is motion and compassion.

Every day an old man climbs  
to wind the clock; everyday a woman  
leaps to her death, her blue  
gown turning as petals in midair.  
Lightning strikes from within;  
you feel the gears... and the sky.

I speak as a bell, my metal  
fashioned in the shape of alarm  
and glory, my song  
not exactly a song  
but the true dog tracking  
the tracker, sniffing out our  
rough and tumble history.

I am the black bee come to visit  
your country kitchen  
with nothing on my mind  
but left over toast and jam  
and the crumbs of dreams brought  
from the crypt of your far flung  
nocturnal wonderings.

Through the open door I come  
and go, through light falling  
on the floor. Last night  
you closed it against the storm  
and you'll close it again  
before final dawn.

The bee finds its way  
through the smallest crack

and light moves according to passion.  
I love as spider threads strung  
between the roof, the rose  
and the sun, and I am broken  
by black birds and cats,  
by the wind and the woodsman,  
by the wishes of children rushing  
heart first into this garden.  
I am diligent and sticky like hope.  
I am for you now and always.

~ by Stewart S. Warren,

Evocateur and author of over 20 poetry collections, five of which explore the Tarot: [www.heartlink.com](http://www.heartlink.com)

# Tarot Travel Guide of Italy

## MAGICAL ORIGINS OF TAROT

### Out in the World

Tarot cards are a series of symbols which hold the primordial energies of existence and send them back to humankind, on a refined level, through the mantic; that is, by way of the reading of signs, or as Manuela Mariani shares:

*When one examines the cards with their complex symbolism, one may also realize surprisingly, that the archetypes are universal. From the ancient Greek realm or that of the Egyptian, from the Indians in America to the Chinese, in mythologies and cosmogonies of all people we can track a common inspiration: humanity shares the same origin and will have the same destiny; therefore, in the history of humankind the myths and secret hopes of all people are aligned in an amazing way.*

A univocal definition of Tarot does not exist, nor does sufficient documentation which would establish the exact origin and original use. The matter of origins, meanings, characteristics and uses has always been a subject of discussion over the centuries and prompted the curiosity of art historians, ethnographers, literary scholars and esotericists. Setting the scene for various suppositions linked with the origin of Tarot, some believe that the early beginnings were antecedent to the Egyptian culture, connected to some group of people which have since disappeared, or perhaps are lost or long forgotten, such as a phantasmal society like Atlantis, while others believe that the Tarot images were actually instruments in which secret messages were engraved, under the form of symbols and codes, which hermetic orders zealously concealed and protected as secret, encrypted knowledge handed down only to their followers.

### China

As the land where the paper card was invented, China is a place surmised to be a likely source for the invention of playing cards. According to ancient narrations, the process and production of cards was invented in China, 2nd century AC. During this period, the eunuch, *Ts'ai Lun* presented the first sheets of such material to the emperor. The factors which allowed this to become possible, were raw materials combined with constant flows of pure water. This experimentation was enhanced further by elaborate handmade techniques derived from ancient Chinese alchemical knowledge.

Inscriptions on cards have been discovered to have existed since the 2nd century AD. Regarding early playing cards however, the scarcity of sources and the difficulty of language interpretation still leaves many obscure areas unanswered regarding the history of the first Chinese cards.

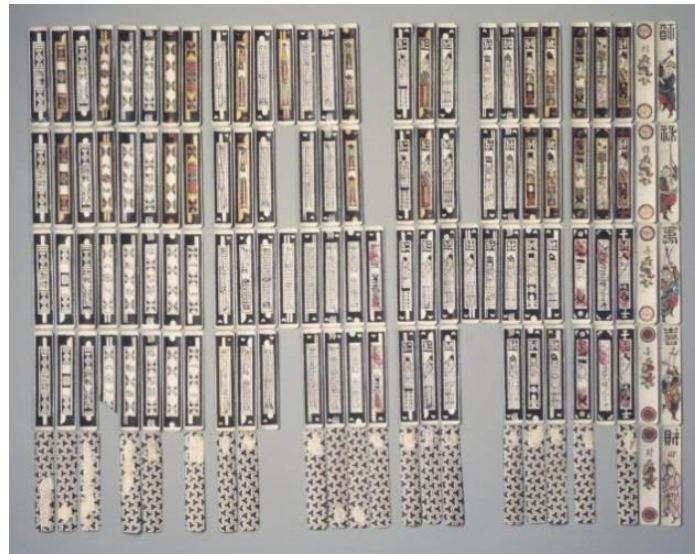
Towards the end of the 1800s, Stuart Culin and, Sinologist, Sir William Henry Wilkinson did profound research on the subject.

Wilkinson reported that the current Chinese term which indicated either domino or the playing card was *p'ai*. Accordingly, a difference in terms between *card* and *domino* (tiles) in China did not exist, for the term *p'ai* implied 'flat and square things which people use for gaming'.



The Chinese style domino, marked with points as well as dice (from which the card possibly derives) was probably used originally for divinatory practices. It is composed of 21 pieces, the synthesis of the combinations of two dice; eleven of these are doubled, in order to obtain a game with 32 pieces.

If a linguistic distinction is possible, this is connected to the term *chih pái*, or 'pái for card' and *ya pái* or *ku pái*, otherwise 'pái for 'ivory' or 'bone'. In fact, the same games are made either with cards or with *tessera* (similar to *mahjong*; as a game that can be played with cards or tiles). Some sources maintain the cards were attached to small boards to permit the game to also be played outdoors (regardless of wind), while others believe it is more likely that the cards were a reduced version of the boards.



*Pai Cards, of the 19th Century*

In Wilkinson's day, the terms *yü-p'u* and *yeh-tzâ* were also used in the written language meaning 'strip' and 'sheets' respectively. With these terminologies, people defined two Chinese games; the first of which was already known by the 3rd century AD, while the second became well known by the 10th century AD.

Wilkinson confirmed that these cards had an ancient origin. They were from materials originally made like scrolls and eventually had detachable pages for text, in order to allow for easier use and consultation. The use for this type of entertainment would consequently have caused a reduction of the sheets' dimensions over time (the origin attributed to mid-8th century).

The cards with corresponding symbols for coins were inspired by an ancient regional monetization. The *ku pái* were in fact, the cards based on three suits, which Wilkinson identified as *Jian* (or *Qian*) or 'coin, money', *Tiao* or 'wands, long objects' and *Wan* 'myriads, 10,000, tens of thousands'.

The series of these cards was completed through three other themes: *Qian Wan* ('Thousand Myriads', or 'Thousand Multitudes'); *Hong Hua*, 'the red flower' and *Bai Hua*, the 'white flower' for 120 cards total. Some

series had a different number of cards (similar to the Joker in modern decks), which could vary by having up to 6 additional cards.

Wilkinson affirmed the name of this game could also be *Ma Jue*, which eventually was changed in Western countries to *Mahjong*. Wilkinson described also a third style of antique cards, (*lat chi* or 'tattered card', for Culin), which was similar to the game of *Ku p'ai* with four suits.

These were *Wen* (or 'Cash', the antique Chinese stamped coin, which had less value), *Suo* ('cord' or 'ribbon', which was used for keeping coins together), *Wan* ('myriads' or '10,000'), and *Shi* ('tens' or '10'). According to Wilkinson they could represent Coins; Ribbons, Rouleaux or Lakh ('hundreds of thousands'). In the case of Culin, there were: Coins, Ribbons, Tens of thousands and Tens.

*Wen*, the suit of money, is made with a symbol designed on the coin (as pinned Cash); *Suo*, or 'ribbons' representing the stamped coin inserted with thread (ancestor of the modern purse) in a series of parallel lines; *Wan*, which was the 'myriads' or 'multitudes' inspired by a series of Chinese tales, transcribed in the 14th century, *Shui-hu Chuan*, was interpreted as 'the margin of water', and thought to be in this same suit, though the values are not indicated by symbols, but by Chinese numbers (from 1 to 9); sometimes this suit was substituted by *guan* (in Cantonese: *gun*), or was 'perforated' which 'passed through' or was the 'cord of a thousand coins'. The ideograms of these two terms could be used interchangeably.

The deck was furthermore, composed of two other themes: 'White Flower' and 'Red Flower'. They resembled the suit of *Wan*, and in fact, were inspired by the very same series of ancient folk tales.

A special card in the deck was *Gui* (*Gwai* in Cantonese), interpreted as a 'demon' or 'ghost', and represented by a male dignitary (the only image in color) in traditional Chinese attire. The numeral value of the cards tally was from 1 to 9.

Between the *ku p'ai* and the *lat chi*, it is not clear which game came first, although it is possible that both were derived from the same ancient source.

The group of cards inspired by 'coins' also adopted part of the style from 4 suits, called *Hakka* and Vietnamese cards known as *Bâ't*.

The suits of Chinese cards could be transformed, in the Western world, into traditional suits of common playing cards: the Cords similar to sticks, later became Swords and Wands; the Circles or Balls, were represented by Gold Coins; while the Tens of thousands become the Cups, probably due to a wrong interpretation of similar ideograms.

Around the 12th century, the first cardboard decks were created to substitute for the tesserae tiles of bone and ivory, and by 1120, the emperor introduced the game on boards while reviving various symbols of virtue.

Some Chinese cards successively have similar characteristics given to chess pieces; for example *Keu-ma-pou* means 'chariots or horses'.

How did these cards arrive in Europe?

It is still Sir Wilkinson who can provide an answer, through the intermediary of the first adventurers who confronted the long journey during the 12th and 13th centuries.

He confirmed in a note regarding the Zani which referred to a certain Abbé Tressan, who showed him (in Paris) a deck of Chinese cards, while telling him they had been obtained from a Venetian, who was the first to bring the cards to Europe. Perhaps it was Niccolò Polo, with his brother, Matteo, returning from China in 1269; or possibly even, the infamous Marco Polo..

According to Wilkinson, there are many synchronicities between the first European decks and the *ku p'ai*, while their principles are also similar to the game of Tarot; and in fact, *ku p'ai* also includes a certain number of symbolic cards.

The names of the different suits had a logical reason in Chinese games, while on the contrary, in Europe there was none. There has been an attempt to find a connection between various social classes (wands/peasants; pentacles/merchants; swords/nobility and cups/clergy) and to even bring the suits back to emblems of virtue (Strength, Charity, Justice and Faith), but none of these explanations are as satisfying as the connection with the Chinese cards.

The sign for the Italian Pentacles is almost identical with that of Chinese Cash, and the Wands which appeared in Italy in the 16th century, also called Pillars, has a great similarity with the card *ku p'ai*, but which could also possibly represent the image of Swords. With regards to the Cups, it is likely that it was a Chinese hieroglyphic abbreviation of *wan*, seen from a Western eye (from right to left, and not read left to right as is done in Chinese) and if read upside-down, it could symbolize a cup.

The King and Jack (or Knight) are the prototypes of 'Old Thousands' (or card of numerical value superior to the others). The King was most likely the 'Red Flower', while the Knight would have represented the 'White Flower' which often appeared on a horse. Moreover, in *Ku p'ai*, there were three unnumbered cards, as well as in European decks.

Also the numeration of the 22 Major Arcana of Tarot could be borrowed from the Chinese cards, which in turn (as we have seen) found their roots in the game of dice and dominos. The latter has exactly 21 combinations possible and to those can be added 'zero', which in the domino game was represented by a white tile, used with the same value as the Fool card in Tarot.

Our first journey with Tarot researching its roots in China concludes here, and it is time to set off for another magical place...India and her cards.

## India

The images represented on the cards may have been inspired by chess, while relating this connection to a game of ancient India, which provided for pieces of personified figures, both royal and military. The oldest Indian table-game *Ashtapada* (renamed in the 5th century: *Chaturanga*, or 'of 4 Kings,') is very similar to the 4 suits of playing cards. It relates to a precursory game of modern chess; the figures were the King, the General (which became the Queen), the horse and the Jack. The Queen did not exist because a female figure in a strategic military style game was in contrast with their idea of decorum at that time.

The *Chaturanga*, which later became the Persian game, *Shatranj*, is considered one of the most likely origins of round Indian cards. It was composed of a strategy game with various pieces, ordered according to a precise hierarchy, of which the highest value was the *râjâ*.

In Sanskrit, *catur* means 'four', while the term *anga* originated from 'part' or 'faction', such as, to give place to four factions of the Indian army: the elephant riders, the cavalry, the infantry and the drivers of chariots (later changed to 'ships'). It is probable that at a certain point, the players were without game tokens, and chose to substitute them with pieces of tree bark or paper, thereby contributing bit by bit, to the origin of a new game.

Some antique Indian playing decks have eight to ten suits, with twelve cards for each suit, numbered 1 to 10 plus two face cards.

The elephant riders, cavalry, and infantry were also represented among the suits of the *Kridapatram* cards. The term *Kridapatram* implies 'painted cloth for playing', and was a game of which the combination was based on number 12: and in fact, twelve was the number of suits as well as the number of cards in each suit.

This is similar to *Ganjifa*, the cards used for drawing card games. Two of these (*Ekrang* and *Hamrang*) used an arrangement similar to that borrowed for the first European Tarot cards. It is believed that the *Ganjifa* cards have a Persian origin, influenced by the Eastern world (probably decks with a monetary suit), that reached India at the time of Emperor Mughal (or Mogol - from the 16th century), the golden age for this game and for Indian cards. During this period, the first quotations on the *Kridapatram* cards and also those of *Ganjifa* returned. The term derives from 'ganjifeh', or 'playing card'. Although Culin, connects them with the fusion between the term *ganj* (and 'treasure') with the 'cards for playing' of the Chinese card *chi pai*.

This exchange was possible thanks to the spread of Buddhism in China. Also the *Ganjifa* deck constituted twelve themes, with the non-face cards (from 1 to 10) and included two face cards: a minister (or adviser) and a king.



*Modern Ganjifa Cards*

The illustrations represent human figures and incarnations of many Indian gods, among which the incarnation or avatares of Vishnù, (one of the Indian Trinity):

Incarnation	Name	Symbol
First	Matsya	Fish
Second	Kurma	Turtle
Third	Varah	Wild pig
Fourth	Nara-Simba	Lion
Fifth	Vamana	Dwarf or jar
Sixth	Paracu-Rama	Axe
Seventh	Rama-Chandra	Arrow
Eighth	Krishna	Cow
Ninth	Buddha	Triton
Tenth	Kalki	Sword or horse

The cards were subdivided between strong suits, 'bishbar' and weak suits, 'kambar'. In the first group the value increased from 1 to 10, while in the latter this order was reversed.

The exoterist, Wilhelm Postel (from the 16th century) in his famous *Chiave dei Grandi Misteri* ('The Keys of Great Mysteries') used the letters T A R O – written around a circle. This reference most likely meant TAROT since, as you may have gathered, the first letter of this word is also the last.

'Taro' is also a term similar to the Tibetan Goddess, *Tara*, the personification of eternal wisdom, and an incarnation of peace and justice. The Sanskrit root of the term *tar* signifies 'cross by sea', 'arrive at the bottom', 'dominate completely'. The noun *Tara* means 'floating', 'boat', 'ferry'; *Tara* is also another name which indicates *Vishnu*.

Regarding the derivation of the card from the Indian world, the term *Taro o Tarota* gains the valence of a wheel or the circle of Heaven's divinity, whose vision could bring awareness of life and of the human role within creation.

We have come to the end of our Indian tour with the cards on our search for Tarot's roots and it is now time to depart for another magical place, where dwell...

## Gypsies

Regarding the origins of the first immigrations of *gypsies*, Anne Marie Mamontoff has surmised, "There are only speculations and hypotheses". Apart from those invented by the *gypsies* themselves, the more antiquated theories are found in the descriptions by people who offered hospitality to them.

Only the study of linguistics offered a scientifically based answer, revealing that the origin of gypsies was actually Indian.

The gypsies are universally recognized (or stereotyped) as card fortune-tellers and it is generally believed that they have divinatory skills coursing through their veins.

Some traditions report a connection between Tarot cards and the realm of gypsies. In attempting an etymological explanation of the term 'Tarocco', we make a distinction between the words 'Taro', 'Tarot' and the term 'Tantra', (Indian mystical technique, aimed at the obtainment of contact with the divinity which dwells in each of us, while finding harmony with all creation). The appropriated sources of a sacred Indian game, which could be found in relation to the images coloring the cards of the Major Arcana of Tarot.

According to Sergius Golwin: "In the 13th century the Islamic conquerors destroyed the main schools and centers of tantrism and massacred its citizens: People, who were able to, escaped to Nepal, Tibet, Assam, Burma, southern India, Ceylon and Java. Consequently the golden age of tantrism in India ended. Some element of this original tradition however was kept alive, in Tibet, Nepal and in the valleys of the Himalayas..."

It is interesting to note in legends handed down from some European tribes of gypsies; that their ancestors were characterized as endlessly escaping from invaders responsible for the devastation of their homeland, while the recollections of nomads associated these legends with different historical events and sometimes even with conflicting dates and personages. This migration and the succeeding diffusion of Indian wisdom

may be represented by Garuda, (the mythical humanoid bird), an unusual “mount” of Vishnu, which flies from East to West.

According to this hypothesis, the ruling class of India may have reunited with a nomadic tribe of *gypsies* and promulgated ancient knowledge, which later merged into a prototype of the cards. The subsequent migrations of the 14th and 15th centuries may have rendered possible the introduction of this system to the Western world.

Many associate divinatory cards with gypsies, (natives of Hindustani, expelled from Italy at the beginning of the 15th century by Timur Lenk, the Islamic conqueror of the major part of Central Asia and Eastern Europe).

The Italian researcher, Calocci has pointed out that the cultural axiom, which historically linked the game of Tarot with the *gypsy* population, also attributed the four suits of denominations descending from the Indian language:

*Spade* (Swords) - ‘Spathi’ may derive from a Sanskrit term ‘Sa-patri’, or ‘covered with leaves’;

*Bastoni* (Wands) - ‘Pal’ may derive from the Sanskrit expression ‘Pallav’, namely ‘leafy branch’;

*Denari* (Pentacles) - ‘Rup’ from the Hindustani term signifying ‘money’;

*Coppe* (Cups) - ‘Pohara’ from the Hungarian word, ‘cup’.

The migrations of gypsy tribes to the West (during the 15th century) moved past Indo, Afghanistan and the Persian deserts (present day Iran), arriving at the Persian Gulf, the delta of the river Euphrate and deserts of Arabia, eventually reaching Europe.

Witnesses confirmed the presence of nomadic tribes in Crete, Corfu and in Balkan before 1350, while in the first half of the 15th century, documents indicated they appeared in the north of Germany (Hamburg), and Rome (1422), as well as Barcelona and Paris (1427).

...Having met these nomads and their arcana, we must set off on another journey...

## **Egypt**

To investigate this hypothetical origin we need to travel back in time to ancient Egypt. Where the Pharaohs had blades and sacred objects, carved by stone or other materials, and for which the meanings of symbols remains unknown. The Tarot would conceivably be card representations of Egyptian ideograms, reproduced from the most ancient text of Pharaonic Egypt known as the *Book of Thoth*.

Thoth to the Egyptians is likened to the archetypal *Mercury* and considered one of the principle rulers, while also being the mythical inventor of the written word (hieroglyphics more specifically), and certain symbols correlated for a series of mystical occurrences: an alphabet in which gods are letters and these letters are ideas, while these ideas are also numbers, and the numbers also fixed signs.

With the invasions of the Roman Empire, such works were brought to Europe, and considered fascinating curiosities of Egyptian culture.

This unproven hypothesis was further advanced by Court Gebelin (*Le Mond Primitif analysé et comparé avec le mond moderne*, 1781). In *Le Mond Primitif* he speculated thusly:

*If I were to say that in contemporary times somebody found the legendary Book of Thoth, a work of the ancient Egyptians containing an extraordinary magical doctrine, I am sure that many would be surprised. And the surprise would increase if I added that this work had been passed down as a deck of 'strange' playing cards. Many would think I am joking, or that I am a charlatan in search of notoriety. However, I would still insist that it is absolutely true. The Book of Thoth and the cards of Tarot are one in the same.*



*Monde Primitif, 1773-1782*

According to the scholar, the symbols represented in the Tarot cards may have been passed down by nomads who in ancient times, migrated from the banks of the Nile River to European countries. This migration would have occurred around the 15th century. Supporting this theory there should have been historical evidence of migrations derived from either India or North Africa, during that period. In Court de Gebelin's view, the Tarot was the key to opening the secret seals of the hieratic hieroglyphics.



This book was the first attempt at studying the origin of playing cards. Gebelin took an advanced step in this research by elaborating what had occurred before the 17th century as was documented by Guillaume de Postel in the *Clef des Choses Cachées*. Among the elements which formulated the basis of his hypothesis (of which Court de Gebelin offered no actual evidence) was the relation between the four suits and social classes of ancient Egypt:

*Swords*: the Pharaoh and military

*Wands*: those devoted to agriculture

*Cups*: the priests

*Pentacles*: the traders



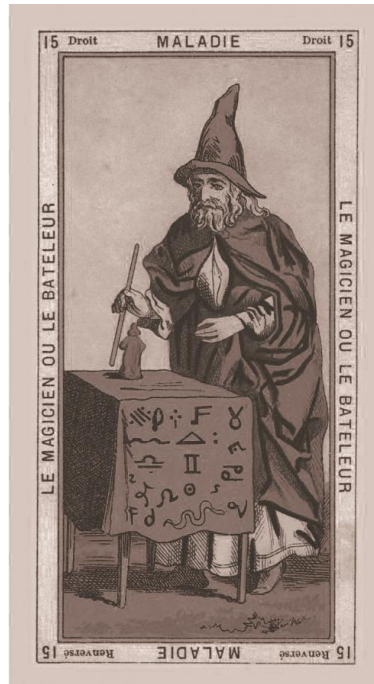
### *Court de Gebelin*

With this popularized notion set in motion, Jean-Baptiste Alliette also felt destined to make a name for himself in the history of Tarot. While using the pseudonym: Etteilla, (his surname spelled backwards), during the 18th century, he published *Etteilla, ou manière de se récréer avec un jeu de cartes* – ('Etteilla, A Way to Entertain Yourself With a Deck of Cards') which became the first book that contained explanations of the meanings of all the cards along with instructions for suitably reading them.

He began studying Tarot from 1757 and probably codified and collected pre-existing systems borrowed from popular tradition. He agreed with the theory of the Egyptian origin (of Court de Gebelin) thereby further cementing its supposed authenticity for some time.

He stated that Tarot was the work of seventeen magicians, descending from Thoth (Mercury), of the Temple of Fire, close to Menfi, and generated 1,828 years after creation or 171 years after the great flood.

In 1791, he published a deck of Tarot, called *Petit Etteilla*, based on a symbolic, interpretative system and designed specifically for esoteric purposes.



### *The Magician, Etteilla's Book of Thoth*

His life's work was based on this research, which also became his spiritual foundation, including preparation courses for divination. In 1788 he also founded the first organization exclusively dedicated to this fascinating world called, *la Société des Interprètes du Livre de Thoth*.

Such historical sources however, have never been confirmed and there is no evidence of an Egyptian origin of Tarot and so we have no choice but to set off on another journey...

### **Cabala**

“The thing which immediately impresses me with the Tarot is the number 22, which is exactly the number of letters of the Hebrew alphabet. For then is it possible to question whether this is not by chance that we owe our twenty-two Cabalistic figures to the Hebrews.” ~ Oswald Wirth, from *The Tarots*.

The symbols contained in the iconography of some cards of Tarot were also found in the prophecy of Ezekiel of St. John.

We can also make the hypothesis that the Tarot, on an archaic level, could be the emblematic embellishments evolved from sequentially devised talismans. In fact, there are thirty-six small keys of Solomon, (clavicles, or talismans) which carry sixty-two seals similar to the hieroglyphic symbols found in the tarot.

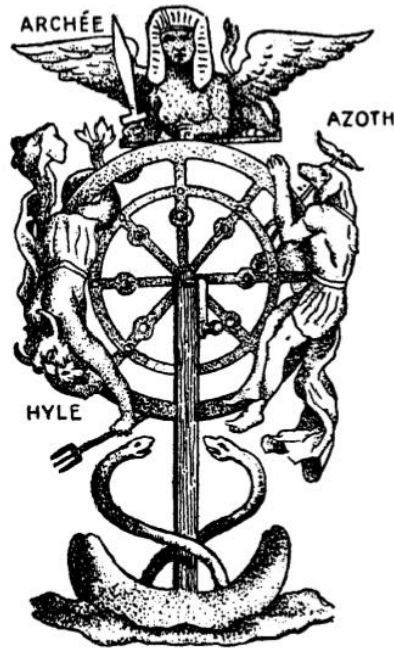
Furthermore, these seals make up part of the book of twenty-two roads, and their explanation can be found in the text attributed to Abraham, or the *Sepher Jézirah*. The stream of speculation arrives at its conclusion seeing in the Tarot the representation of the Jewish Cabala's wisdom. These are interpreted as a clear connection with *rota*, or the 'wheel', from which 'Tarot' and 'Torà' are linked.

*The concepts expressed by the means of numbers and letters are an incontestable reality. They connect and correspond with the very same numbers. They proceed logically from one to the next. A man is a son of a woman, but the woman comes from a man like the number of the unity. The woman signifies Nature, and nature reveals an authority, creating the religion which serves as a foundation of freedom and renders humanity as the master of itself, and of the universe, and so on. Provide yourself with a deck of tarots (though I believe you already have one) and arrange it in two sections of ten allegorical cards numbered from one to twenty-one. You will see all the figures which describe letters. As for the numbers from one to ten, you will find the explanation, repeated four times, with the symbols of wands, or a father's sceptre (rod), the cup of mother's delight, the sword, or fight for love, and the pentacles, or fertility (productiveness). The Tarot cards are related to the hieroglyphic book of the twenty-two roads, and their surmised explanation can be found in the book attributed to Abraham, the spiritual leader who is called Sepher Jézirah [...]*

*It is from this book that our deck of cards was derived. The Spanish cards bring with them the principle signs of a primordial tarot, and how they served playing the game of Phombre, that is to say, of Human existence, the vague reminiscence of the primitive use of a mysterious book containing the varying stages of all human divinity.*

*The most ancient tarots were made from the signs and symbols of which later, the talismans were made. The clavicles, or small keys of Solomon, consist of thirty-six talismans which carry sixty-two seals analogous to the hieroglyphic figures of the tarots. These figures, altered by copyists, found on the antique clavicles of which manuscripts can be studied in libraries. One of these manuscripts can be found in the National Library and the other in the Arsenal Library (Paris). The only genuine manuscripts of the clavicles are those which contain the series of thirty-six talismans with thirty-six mysterious names; the others, although they are ancient, belong to the realm of black magic and are nothing but mystifications. You can see, from the explanation of Tarot, my Dogma and ritual of white magic.*

These words were shared by Alphonse Louis Constant, or Eliphas Lévi, born in Paris in 1810. He studied theology in a school directed by ecclesiastics, (the seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet); in order to follow a religious path. He became a deacon, but a young female student, Adèle Allenbach, awoke in him passion and love and he left without being ordained.



*The Key of the Mysteries, by Eliphas Lévi*

As a consequence his mother committed suicide and he fell into profound grief for a time. He was interested in alternative views and joined the socialist party, which got him sent to prison three times. In 1846 he married Noémi Cadiot, who abandoned him in 1853, which definitively opened within him an interest in Esoterism including his contacts with a socialist group of the French Masonry.

Consequently he came to know the great Polish occultist, Hoëné Wronski, through whom he learned the mysteries of the Cabala and numerology and transformed his own name into Eliphas Lévi Zahed. A channel of study and research important to this French ex-priest above all else was the Cabala (the mystical Hebrew discipline).

The last years of his life in Paris were the most prolific from a viewpoint of literary production. Other works of Eliphas Lévi which continue to be of great interest are: *The Key to the Great Mysteries*, (1861), *The Science of Spirits*, (1865), and *Paradoxes of the Highest Science*. From this last work we share a snippet:

*Living is suffering; knowing how to live is being happy.*

*Love is obligation; knowing how to love is to dominate.*

*Speaking is to make noise; knowing how to speak makes a melodious voice.*

*Searching is torment; knowing how to search is finding.*

*Use is often abuse; knowing how to use is to be amused.*

*Practicing magic is for the imposter; learning magic is for the Thinker.*

*Believing without knowing is for the insane; knowing without believing is for the senseless; but true knowledge brings faith with it. The one who knows has no motive to doubt; when the Spirit stops doubting the truth ceases hesitating, then the person gets what for which he is longing.*

Subsequently, in 1855, in *Dogma and Ritual of the High Magic*, Eliphas Lévi described the 22 Major Arcana as the emanation of 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, making a clear reference to the Cabala, while creating a seal in the seal.

The Group known as the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* and Papus, as well as the Cabalistic group, confirmed in their book *The Tarot of Gypsies* that the Tarot was characterized by a strong imprint derived from this mystical Hebrew system.

Alas, this theory has not convinced the historians either and thus has pushed us to search onward.

### **Other Hypotheses**

To make a panoramic view on various suppositions related to the origin of the Tarot, some believe that their origin is an ancestor to the Egyptian Culture or connected to a tribe of people long gone, perhaps long forgotten, such as an imagined or real Atlantis, while others insist that the Tarot was actually the instrument on which secret messages were engraved, under the form of symbols and codes, which the Hermetic Orders zealously protected as 'secret and sacred knowledge' to be handed down to their disciples.

### **Divinatory Korean Arrow**

The Korean deck *Htou-Tjyen* (composed of 80 cards) may have been derived from a divinatory arrow. They are rectangles of oil-paper decorated with plumed arrows. The deck is composed of eight suits.

### **Cards of Fez, Morocco**

A hypothesis of Paul Foster Case (*The Tarot, a Key to the Wisdom of the Ages*) asserts that the Tarot cards may have originated in 1200, Fez, Morocco. Supposedly a group of scholars arriving from all over the world created a book of linguistic symbols in order to improve communication. And according to the scholar, this may have been the prototype of the Major Arcana, made more comprehensible. Unfortunately there is no proof to verify this theory either.

### **The Crusades**

Other sources speculate on Crusades playing cards. Regarding this theory, we recall the occultist Oswald Wirth who, in his great work in the realm of Tarot, placed the birth of playing cards and of Tarot in Bologna, with Francesco Fibbia Castracani. This nobleman lived in the Felicini building; (the place legend sets as the scene where Leonardo da Vinci painted the Gioconda).

Most likely he attempted, through this personage, to praise an origin related to the world of the Crusades and more occultly to the knowledge of the Templars, of which Francesco Fibbia Castracani appears to have been secretly in possession.

In this place a painting was discovered with an inscription which reads:

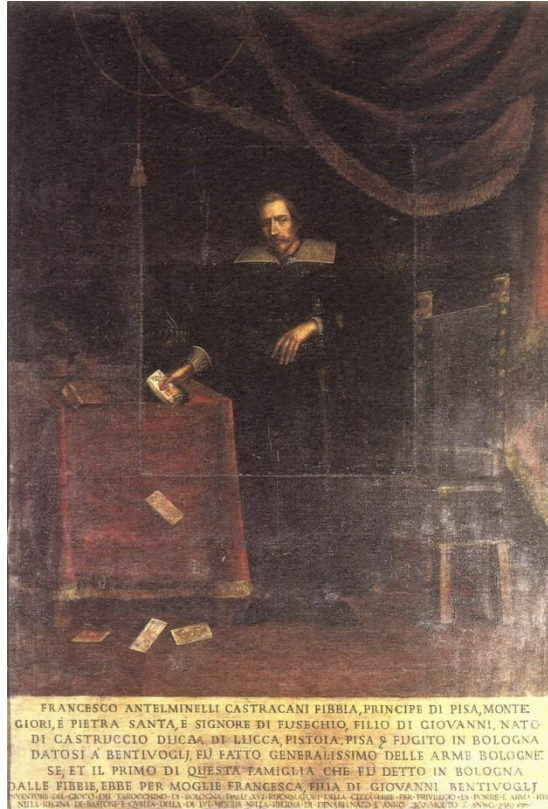
*Francesco Antelmitelli Castracani Fibbia, prince of Pisa, Monte Giori, and Pietrasanta, and lord of Fuscchio, son of Giovanni, descended from Castruccio Duke of Lucca, Pistoia, Pisa, fled to Bologna, was retained at Bentivoglij, and made General of the Bolognese army, and became first in this family which was called in Bologna Dalle Fibbie, had as a wife Francesca, daughter of Giovanni Bentivoglij. Was the inventor of a game of Tarot in Bologna from the fourteenth Reforming of the city, had the privilege of placing the Fibbia arm in the Queen of Wands and his wife in the Queen of Pentacles. Born in 1360, died in 1419.*

This eulogy of sorts is however, contradicted by history, which certifies the presence of a member of the Fibbia Castracani family in Bologna only in 1441 (twenty-two years after the death of Francesco).

Contributing to this speculation, it perhaps is a false projected biography, devised in the 17th century, (the period in which the painting was made) and may have been created in order to add value to the family lineage.

Most likely though, it was an effort, by means of this persona, to elevate an origin connected to the world of the Crusades and keep hidden from knowledge the Templars, of which Francesco Fibbia Castracani seems to have secretly gained access.

It is possible that Prince Fibbia was the inventor of the Tarocchini game, though not of Bologna, but rather of the game itself, of which the origin has been estimated to have been prior to 1420. In fact, we should note, the person who formulated the legend on the portrait of Fibbia did not make clear the difference between the invention of tarot and that of *tarocchino*.



*Painting of Prince Francesco Antelminelli  
Castracani Fibbia, XVII Century*

### Only a Game...

Among many hypotheses, there are also those who believe the Tarot has nothing to do with enigmatic ideas, nor with magical-esoteric lore. They think it is merely a game invented for the purpose of entertainment. Nevertheless, one thing is for certain, none of these speculations, neither those which support the magical-esoteric and intuitive views, or those which perceive the Tarot as simply a game, can be considered more credible than established theories, but we will conclude with these conjectures, at this point, with a quote by Eliphas Lévi from *Dogma of High Magic*, (which comments on the value of the Tarot):

*It is a genuine philosophical instrument which impedes the spirit to transcend, and find initiative and liberty; it is mathematics applied to the absolute, it is the alliance of an ideal positivity, it is a perception organized rigorously exactly like numbers; it is perhaps, in the end, as much as the human genius can apprehend, the simplest truth and at the same time the greatest.*

## ORIGIN OF TAROT IN ITALY

Milan: the First Tarot



*The Cary-Yale Deck*

### **The Visconti Sforza Tradition**

Tarot cards reached their greatest popularity in Europe, between the end of the middle ages and the Renaissance.

Visconti Filippo Maria, the Duke of Milan, appears to be one of the key characters in the world of the Trumps. In order to celebrate the incredible anticipation of the upcoming birth of his son, he commissioned one of the most important decks of Italian Tarot (in 1424), of which sixteen divinities were chosen among those related to the Greek Pantheon. The following year when his heir was born, there arrived instead a daughter, Bianca Maria Visconti. This changed history and the symbolism of each card.

A reference to this historical deck, or rather the manuscript of basic game rules by Martiano da Tortona appeared during this time, which indicated the order the deck of Tarot cards would be in, (preceding the above mentioned date). These Tarot cards which depicted Greek Divinities were not very famous at that time and so as a consequence Martiano, who wrote about them on several occasions, became the 'first writer of a book on Tarot'.

The Tarot deck format before 1440, consisted of 5x14 numbered cards, but eventually arrived at 4x14 cards, plus the 22 Major Arcana (21 Trumps plus the Fool).

This story, therefore tells us that before 1420, a certain interest in playing cards had already existed in Italy. From 1420 to 1429 the first rules used to regulate the game of cards in the region of Milan and the area surrounding Florence appeared.



Without specific historical dates as a reference, determining the timeline of the Cary-Yale deck appears quite difficult, with an estimate of its creation varying between 1428~1441, or 1468 at the latest.

Many scholars have tried to discover the correct date through the analysis of the life of this royal family, since quite often these card printings were carried out to commemorate significant events. For example, there was a visit of Bianca Maria of Savoy to Ferrara in 1440, (when most likely the work on these cards became better known and influenced others to the point of their ordering decks, which were later referred to as '5x14'). The Cary-Yale deck is estimated by some historians to have been created for the auspicious occasion of the marriage of Bianca Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza in 1441.

### **Griselda in Sforzesco Castle**

#### Secrets of Griselda's Chamber and the Card Players Fresco

In the Castle there are several things worth seeing including a painting by Leonardo da Vinci and a sculpture of Pietà Rondanini carved by Michelangelo; but we can also discover a beautiful and cryptic astrological Renaissance cycle of frescos of Roccabianca (which include Tarot cards) in the so-called *Griselda's Chamber*.



*Nobles Playing Tarot in the Tale of Griselda*

On the walls, an unknown painter depicted the story of Griselda, as told by Boccaccio in Decameron, which is a famous fable translated from Latin by Francesco Petrarca.

Here briefly is that dark tale: Gualtieri, the Marquis of Saluzzo, spent much time hunting and partaking in sports while giving no thought to marrying or making a family. His friends and subjects, fearing that old age would arrive before he acquired an heir, pressured him to find a wife. He finally agreed to court a beautiful but poor, young woman from a neighboring village.

Gualtieri informed the young woman, Griselda of his intentions to marry her, and asked if she would accept him as her husband, to love, honor, and obey, for better or worse, never criticizing or questioning his authority. She readily agreed and their wedding was celebrated shortly thereafter.

Griselda appeared to be a worthy addition to Gualtieri's noble household, but the marquis, unsure of the depth of her character, decided to test her loyalty and patience. Thus, soon after the birth of their first child, a beautiful baby girl, he informed her that his subjects were unhappy with the child and that it would be put to death. Without hesitation she accepted her husband's demands and surrendered the child. However, instead of killing the baby girl, Gualtieri had her spirited away and tended to in a secret location.

Sometime later Griselda gave birth to a son and her husband, intent on carrying his test still further, berated her and insisted this child also be put to death. She again yielded to his demands without complaint and as before, he took the child to a secret place where it was well tended.

Still unconvinced, Gualtieri devised a final test. He publicly denounced Griselda, claiming the Pope had granted him dispensation to divorce her and to take a more deserving wife. Griselda, wearing only a slip, was sent back to her family. She bore these indignities without complaint.

As the day approached when Gualtieri was supposed to take a new bride, he asked Griselda to return to his palace, for no one knew better how to prepare for guests than did she. Griselda returned to her former residence, now as a cleaning woman and servant, to make preparations for her former husband's wedding.

Gualtieri had their daughter, (now twelve years old), dressed in bridal attire, and he presented her to Griselda, who could not have known this was her child. "What do you think of my new bride?" he asked.

Griselda replied without guile, "If her wisdom matches her beauty, then the two of you will be very happy together."

At last recognizing Griselda's sincerity, faithfulness, and patience, Gualtieri revealed to her the trials he had devised to test her loyalty. With tears of joy, she received her children and once again assumed the position of Gualtieri's ever patient and obedient wife. The End!

This tale, while on one level seeming misogynistic and cruel to modern sensibilities, was in fact, according to Professor Milano, meant to show that people of an economically challenged social class (as was Griselda), may actually be more honest, loyal, trustworthy and hardworking than the aristocracy and can teach the affluent a thing or two about integrity and class.

The Chamber of Griselda is in room XVII (the Star) and is reconstructed from 15<sup>th</sup> century detached frescos to create a scale replica of how it looked in its original location, *Castello di Roccabianca*, near Parma.

The Story of Griselda and the astrological chart were reproduced in the bedroom located in the southeast tower of the castle of Roccabianca. The work was carried out by an anonymous painter around 1458-64 in monochrome shades of earthy green. The date is deduced from the presence of a box of History of Griselda's seals of Pope Pius II, whose pontificate covered precisely the years from August 1458 to 1465.

An unusual map of the sky was painted on the ceiling, when compared with the star atlases that were used in those days, since they followed a code by Aratus as a reference. Planets and their rulers were added to this fresco along with those exalted in signs of the zodiac, creating an incomprehensible puzzle. Some scholars thought it represented the horoscope of Pier Maria Rossi combined with that of Bianca Pellegrini, (the woman he loved and to whom he had dedicated Roccabianca castle). While other researchers have discounted this theory, having analyzed the horoscope and found it did not correspond with that of the fresco.

This ceiling is divided into tablets with outlines in relief, forming a sort of grid. The first guideline for reading the ceiling of Roccabianca is to eliminate the contours and imagine a continuous surface.

While not in a specific order, we can still presume a pattern in the distribution of planets. The zodiac signs occupy the lower apex of the panels and are accompanied by the planets governing them on the left, if the house is daytime, and on the right if night time; while the exalted planet then rises in the remaining space. Some constellations carry Arabic names, while others have Latin names; some show unusual iconography, and others refer to the code of Arato. For this reason it is difficult to manage an exact deciphering. Most likely the artist was inspired not by an astronomical map translated from Arabic into Latin, but from a text of Mesopotamia through the studies of the Sabaeans.

Other scholars believe the aspiration comes from the 48 Ptolemaic constellations, according to the following map, which is a lithograph from 1878:

In the four central squares there are constellations of the northern hemisphere, while in the surrounding eight quadrants we can find southern constellations, planets, and zodiac signs.

In the vault we discover two uncommon elements, never depicted in this kind of astrological fresco before: the Nodes, according to their traditional exaltation, are *Caput Draconis in Gemini* and *Cauda Draconis in Sagittarius*. That is inspiration from Indian Astrology, where the two Nodes have a karmic interpretation. *Cauda Draconis* ('the tail of the dragon') is described as past life experiences and the *Caput Draconis* ('the head of the dragon') is thought of as one's goals in an actual lifetime.

The four walls follow 24 scenes, in pale monochrome greens, that are brightened by touches of red. The story takes a double take around the room, while being depicted on two levels, starting from the arch above the entrance door. The anonymous creator is also recognized by his works in Niccolò da Varallo, and is thought to be a Piedmont artist who worked on the windows of the Milan Cathedral, and in Cigognara Antonio, as a painter, and as a miniaturist in Cremona.



*Ceiling in Chamber of Griselda*

It is important to remember that Count Leopoldo Cicognara (1767-1834) was an influential politician and collector of art and books, and the director of the newly founded Academy of Fine Arts in Venice from 1808-1827. He was also the founder of a museum.

From his later writings, the work, *Memorie spettanti alla storia della calcografia*, (1831), became important to the history of the cards. Cicognara presented six Tarot cards in his possession from a complete deck, of which some have a close similarity to the so-called *Rouen or Leber Tarocchi*; a fragmented deck with only 30 existing cards, dating back to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Sir Michael Dummett gave critical commentaries to Stuart Kaplan's representations regarding Cicognara in the *Encyclopedia of Tarot*, Volume I, which appeared in 1978 shortly before his own work *The Game of Tarot* (1980) was published. In the frescos on the walls, a section was dedicated to the game of Tarot (XI south wall).

The scenes shared the story of Gualtieri and Griselda and emphasized the noble and chivalrous temperament that we find depicted within the various settings. From parades on horseback (scenes IV West wall, V and VI north wall, IX and XX East wall), to visions of festive banquets (III West wall, X and XXI East wall), and aristocratic games including backgammon, chess and Tarot (XV b West wall). It is one more beautiful and mysterious Italian fresco with a dash of Tarot that presents this popular pastime as a cultural reference.

### Castello Sforzesco ~ Castle Visconti Sforza Museum

'Chamber of Griselda' (XVII - Star Room)

Exhibit costs only a few Euro. Museum also hosts works by Leonardo da Vinci & Bonifacio Bembo (of earliest known Tarot deck) and other treasures.

Address: Piazza Castello, 27029, Milan

Hours: 9:00 AM – 5:30 PM, closed Mondays

[www.milanocastello.it/en](http://www.milanocastello.it/en)

### Tarot in Borromeo Palace

Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan is one of the key figures in the world of Tarot. As mentioned earlier, to celebrate the anticipation of his first son, he commissioned one of the most important Italian Tarot decks (in 1424), for which sixteen deity among those linked to the Greek pantheon were chosen. The following year, arrived instead a daughter, Bianca Maria Visconti. This changed the symbolism of the individual cards.

These Tarot cards which depicted Greek Divinities were not famous at that time, so as a consequence Martiano, who wrote about them on several occasions, became the 'first writer of a book on Tarot'. The Tarot deck format before 1440, consisted of 5x14 numbered cards, but eventually arrived at 4x14 cards and 22 Major Arcana (21 Trumps plus the Fool).

Therefore, before 1420, a certain interest in playing cards had already existed in Italy. From 1420 to 1429 the first rules used to regulate the game of cards in the region of Milan and the area surrounding Florence also appeared.

The iconographic theme of the Tarot was widespread in the Visconti court; illustrated by these three decks of the 15th century: the Brera-Brambilla deck (Pinacoteca di Brera). It seems this deck was commissioned by Francesco Sforza for the artist Bonifacio Bembo in 1463. What remains are 48 cards with only two Trumps: the Emperor and Wheel of Fortune. All of the face cards have a gold background while the non-face cards have a silver background. Next, the Colleoni deck, (now divided between the Pierpont-Morgan Library in New York, the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo and the private collection of Colleoni), dates back to around 1451. 20 Trumps remain along with 15 court cards and 39 pip cards.

And finally, the Cary-Yale or Visconti di Modrone deck (Yale University Library, New Haven). In the case of the Cary-Yale, it appears difficult to define the date, with estimates ranging from 1428 to 1441, and up to 1468, (without clear historical data to confirm). Many scholars have tried to decipher the correct timeline through an analysis of the life of this family, because quite often these cards were made to commemorate particularly important events. For example, a visit of Bianca Maria of Savoy to Ferrara in 1440 occurred when she probably was aware of these cards and was influenced to the point of commissioning a deck, known then as 5x14. This is not historically documented, but if it were, it could be shown that Cary painted it in 1441 for the occasion of the wedding of Francesco Sforza and Bianca Maria.

The Cary-Yale was then concluded in February 1442, when Leonello d'Este commissioned the painter Sagromoro to design some decks. In this way it could alter the unofficial birth of this deck to around 1468. Sixty-seven cards (11 Trumps, 17 Court cards and 39 Pip cards) of this deck still remain.

The atmosphere is particularly powerful in the second courtyard of Palazzo Borromeo, in Milan, where a fresco dedicated to the game of Tarot appears, as part of a festive cycle commissioned by Vitaliano Borromeo between 1445 and 1450.

*The Game of Tarot*, painted by the artist known as the Master of the Borromeo Games, is a scene depicting five young aristocrats playing cards under the shade of pomegranate trees. Their facial expressions betray the philosophical nature of this game.



*Game of Tarot in Borromeo Palace*

## **Brera's Sola Busca Tarot**

### **An Alchemical Path**

The *Sola Busca Tarot* deck was purchased by the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities in 2009, at a price of eight hundred thousand euro (over one million U.S. dollars at the time); with the aim of re-launching the art gallery, Pinacoteca of Brera. The deck takes its name from the family to whom it belonged; the Milanese family, Sola Busca. The cards measure 144x78 mm. (5.7x3.07 inches). This is a full deck of 78 cards (22 Trumps and 56 pip cards divided into 4 Italian style suits) and it is considered to be the oldest complete deck of the Renaissance era. This deck is part of a particular type of Tarot; namely one in which imaginative scenes grace each card (not only the Major Arcana but also the 'numbered' cards). The origin of each card along with its imagery or setting is customarily linked to relevant aspects of the



culture at that time. This is done not only for recreational purposes, but also with educational, religious or political intentions in mind. It was especially apparent that the characters, scenes and imagery of these Tarot cards were created for such purposeful aims.



### *Sola Busca Tarot*

The cards were designed with a technique known as burin engravings on copper. According to the English iconologist Arthur M. Hind in 1938, they were also richly painted in tempera at a later date by an unknown artist (from the Veneto region) and with silver and gold detailing on the coat of arms and on the various shields. We are led to assume that this coat of arms was connected to the patron's tarot deck. Reliable theories and discoveries confirming this deck's importance emphasize that most of the written text which we find on the cards, was added at a later time from the miniaturist that executed the coloration of the deck. In particular, on the shield of Trump III – Mario, appears the inscription SENATUS VENETUS, while the shield of Trumps XV – Metelo, displays an almost unreadable abbreviation, S.P.Q.V. which according to Hind, refers to Senatus Populusque Venetum; also, at the base of the column next to Metelo, can be read, V.F. which Hind interprets 'as Venetia Factum; TRAHOR FATIS, 'dragged by fate', and on the Ace of Cups and Coins; ORFATIS, is a likely contraction of Trahor Fatis, on the shields of Trumps II Postumio and XIII Catone; SERVIR CHI PERSEVERA INFIN OTTIENE on the Ace of Coins, perhaps a heraldic MOTTO (or merely meant as a proverb). Additionally, the artist who executed the coloring of the cards introduced on the shield of Trump XIV – Bocho, the coat of arms that appears with the wording ANNO AB URBE CON(N)DITA MLXX, which unfortunately is not legible.

Taking into account the year Venice was founded: traditionally set between 421 and 452 CE. according to a source quoted by Wilhelm Schreiber (1935); Hind's calculation was that 'this deck had to be made in 1491 or at the latest, 1522-23'. A coat of arms similar to that of Bocho is 'visible on the Ace of Swords and in Trump IV – Mario. Through studies of heraldry it would appear that the coat of arms painted on these

cards is attributable to the Venier family coat of arms of Venice; wrapped in red and silver with crossing gold bands. Who knows if it is accurate since many variations exist; although it is also well documented, this variant with gold bands does exist. It is in fact from a different family branch. The band of gold is a 'Brisure': a variation of the coat of arms in order to differentiate it from those of other lines of the same family. D. Casimiro Freschot in *La nobiltà veneta 1706* noted a gradient coat of arms that may apply to our cards: speaking of three ruby bands and three silver bands. So then let us consider purple instead of vermilion. It seems that the bands painted on the shield are purple like the armor of Bocho. These observations together with technical and stylistic considerations, led Hind to the conclusion that the deck was made in Venice in the Veneto region. Moreover, he noticed similarities between etching methods of the Tarot of Mantegna, executed by an unknown engraver of Ferrara between 1460-65. So Venice is part of the ongoing research and imaginative history of this extraordinary Tarot deck.

Giordano Berti and Michael Dummett, in accordance with Arthur M. Hind, also suggest this deck may have been made in Ferrara and then painted in Venice or otherwise created for the Venetian market or even for a Venetian patron; perhaps even the Venier family. This may explain the presence of their coat of arms in the deck, as well as (in the Trump cards), biblical as well as Roman characters. In fact, according to Freschot, the House of Venier's illustrious origins would have descended from the ancient Roman emperor, Valerian specifically. We also know from Freschot, that the Venier family arrived 'in Italy from Byzantium and before reaching Venice, had stopped in Pavia' (because the Visconti Castle was there). Probably in those days of the Pavians (which it not possible to date accurately) they had relations with other royal courts of Northern Italy and therefore we speculate, why not also with Ferrara?

The 22 Major Arcana Trumps, marked with Roman numerals from I to XXI, bear the names of characters of Roman history as well as two biblical archetypes. One card depicts the traditional figure of the Fool, but with different iconography.

The history of these cards is exciting, mysterious and had long been considered lost. Testimony of Renaissance Ferrara was presented for the first time in Italy in a 1991 exhibition at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan. With regard to the paternity of the cards, they were probably made by a Ferrarese master associated closely with Cosmè Tura or by Tura himself. We can even postulate that it was part of his own studio, due to the extraordinary stylistic techniques attributed to Tura: the facial expressions, the contours of the figures and clothing, the hard lines, the haunting style, the certain way of marking and treating the bodies; and the bright colors that distinguishes and sets it apart. This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that Cosmè Tura was the court painter of Ercole and Borso d'Este in Ferrara; one of the most culturally active courts in northern Italy; but not only this, we also know Ferrara was at the center in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was further distinguished by a lively production of Trumps, which were commissioned by the court. Between 1441 and 1450, throughout the short reign of the Duke Lionello d'Este, Ferrara became a sophisticated center of culture during the Renaissance. As stated by Stephen J. Campbell, the Ferrarese environment was original and unique when compared to other centers of culture. Ferrara was also one of the first cities in Italy to become a main center in which the art of engraving flourished, boosted by the commissioner of the court. In this regard, as pointed out by Giordano Berti (in 1995), there was an evolution in this field: since the creation of decks *MINIATI* (illuminated) with a precise



iconography to decks created through the technique of engraving, with varying stylistic and iconographic methods. It was determined by demands of the patrons making it extremely susceptible to renewed interest in classical culture. The drafting of the iconographic program was generally entrusted to writers, translated into design and finally to the engraver (by artists circulating through the Este court). This is the case, for example, of a Tarot deck designed by the poet, Matteo Maria Boiardo.

It is therefore conceivable that the Venier of Venice and the Este court were in touch and there are two possible conclusions: that the Venier requested the Este court create a deck of cards, or that the Este court offered a gift to this distinguished family of Venice. In both cases the shop of the painter of the 'humanist' court would have been commissioned. In fact we know from Leopoldo Cicognara (1831); at that time Tarot decks were created for prominent wedding occasions or as gifts for famous celebrities. This important detail should not be forgotten; (to support the paternity of a painter at the Este court): the study of Alchemy and Astrology was typical in the environment of the court in Ferrara. The Este court greatly valued writing, languages, and esoteric studies as well as its scholars. Ferrara became an environment able to assimilate, rework, spread and influence various aspects of the culture.

Cosmè Tura (1430-1495) became the court painter in 1456. As stated by Stephen J. Campbell, one of the foremost experts on the works of Cosmè Tura, it is important to keep in mind that this artist was extremely eclectic, and used for various activities; both sacred and mundane, such as frescos and portraits, but also for preparing models for tapestries, beds, blankets, vases; and decorated trappings, providing heraldic designs and preparing triumphal equipment. During that time a court artist such as he would be a painter of the sacred, an artisan, blacksmith, decorator and even a miniaturist.

So it is with great trepidation, in light of this realization that we come to attribute the creation of the Sola Busca Tarot to Cosmè Tura or to his studio. While at the same time recognizing the influence that his painting style had on the creations of other artists such as Domenico Costa, Ercole de' Roberti, and that of Francesco del Cossa.

We should also keep in mind the contributions that Tura shared even to the minor arts, including the cards of the 'Master of Tarot' of Mantegna, (Campbell 2006). Campbell stated that Cosmè Tura is a poet of imagery closer to Boiardo than any other painter of his time. With his use of light, colors, incredible landscapes, imaginative scenes and alchemical figures, made of stone and metal rather than of flesh, Tura was able to give culture a figurative boost in an expressionistic sense, at the turn of the 15th century. His poetic sense, sometimes chivalrous and impressive and at other times devotional, is revealed in every look, every manner of physiognomy; the grace of a gifted hand combined with the individuality of an artist.

Alternatively the creation of these cards was supposedly given in 1960 by Eberhard Ruhmer (1917-1996) to the painter Marco Zoppo (Cento 1433 - Venice 1478).

First of all, Zoppo does not appear during the years when these cards allegedly were made and in fact Zoppo passed away in 1478. And if it is true that Ruhmer began to compare the drawings of Zoppo (taken from the Book of Sketches in the British Museum in London) with the cards Sola Busca, and that in this comparison he saw many things in common, then it is also true that using the Morelliano method, it is

not a stretch to suggest Marco Zoppo as the author of the same and in these years (1460 to 1468) he was in Bologna, and therefore in the Emilian territory, which leads to the hypothesis that it is possible that he could have seen some cards; perhaps during those years when they began to emerge and that he may have even been a guest of the Este court. This would explain the similarity between his sketches and some of the cards. And there is no doubt regarding the closeness of his style to that of the school of Ferrara; a style characterized by rough and broken contours, and the use of intense colors, and that of antique elements for decorating the scene. Ruhmer writes:

*Zoppo who preferred rounded shapes, the baroque style; shapes with a freedom and fullness anticipating the art of Michelangelo". And these qualities can actually be found in the Book of Sketches, which he defines as "an ironic game of the artist, where the serious and the humorous are the dominant motifs.*

Furthermore, staying in Bologna, Zoppo as a mature artist, influenced by the culture of Ferrara emphasized the expressionism of the images. Thus, according to Ruhmer, Zoppo is author of most, if not all, of the compositions in Sola Busca: 'In the series of Tarot it seems to me what predominates in an absolute way the fantastic element, spontaneous, humorous and plebeian quite allusive: traits that are matched very well with the topic and the personality of Zoppo'.

According to Ruhmer the Sola Busca Tarot would be for Zoppo a commissioned work and certainly belonging to his first stay in Venice in the mid 50's. So for Ruhmer the Sola Busca Tarot would have been made in the first half of the '60s and the different subjects of this Book of Sketches of London would have the same characteristics as those of the Sola Busca. Returning to the analysis of our cards, we know from Leopoldo Cicognara in his Memoirs, related to the history of engraving in 1831, about the deck in question, that it 'was printed in Venice with permission from the Venetian Senate in the *ab urbe condita MLXX* put the figure of Bacchus no. XIV which corresponds to 1491, it was because the Venetian *ab urbe condita* starts from the 421'. Then the year of realization would also be true for Cicognara, according to Hind, 1491. Cicognara, he goes on to say, found that the precious deck was located in Milan, owned by the noblewoman Marquise Busca, (born Duchess Serbelloni), who allowed a careful examination of the cards by Cicognara, from which it appeared that, 'these cards were lightly etched in copper, with visible traits of the burin appearing through the overlay color'. But Cicognara also stated that this was the same edition of cards that Abate Zani reported having seen split into two Cabinets in Naples. 'Which he attributed to those artists who were at that time creating the most precious and beautiful works, known as the game of Tarot or game of Mantegna. The analogy of which style is clear and visible'. But Cicognara also speaks of another deck of Venetian cards contemporaneous with those of which we have written about in the collection of the Marquis Durazzo in Genoa, as only engraved, and probably those of Naples. The only cards to be colored were also those of Milan. This source is proof of our thesis that began with Hind. Even he caught a glimpse of a certain affinity with the incision method of so-called Tarocchi of Mantegna, executed by an unknown engraver of Ferrara between 1460 and 1465.

In addition please note that the 22 Major Arcana represent ancient Roman archetypes or depict characters of Roman antiquity which in turn are connected to specific historical events over a long period of time. Initially the characters appear more detached from events related to the history of Christianity. However in virtually every card there is a reminder of the history of Christianity and an aspect connected

to that narration. By Trump XVIII – Luntulo; the characters emerge in a more dramatic way. Many were the sources for the creation of these cards; with an eye towards the past. For example; if we recall Paolo Orosio (from around 375-420 CE); priest, historian and defender of the Roman Empire who wrote, among other things, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* (*A History Against Pagans*). He was a disciple of St. Augustine, and wrote at his bequest this massive *Historia Adversus Paganos*, over the course of seven books, which became the first universal historical record of Christianity, and which was also meant to serve as a manifesto for his master and the foundation for the City of God. While also giving attention to Dante Alighieri in this regard and to the iconography traceable in his great works, such as the *Divine Comedy*. We do not know how long it took to create these cards. One would imagine several years, considering the incredible amount of material that exists within each Arcana, not to mention the alchemical meaning of each card as well.

For thousands of years the alchemical *Opus* has been a mental exercise for artistic illumination of the symbols that are present on the 'path of individuation' which is a process of transformation for the rational consciousness of the Ego while moving towards the consciousness of Self.

Alchemical art is characterized by a cyclical preparation of psychic material (instincts, drives, and libido) to extract the melancholy, or rather the *Melancholia* that Albrecht Dürer (1514) represented with expertise in his engraving, (of the same name). This describes one of three stages of the Royal Art, the *Nigredo*, also known as the Black Work; where the material is dissolved. It then moves to *Albedo* or White Work, where the substance is purified and spiritualized. Everything eventually arrives at the Red Work or *Rubedo*; the stage where it gathers unto itself, and by a restorative process can thereby allow for the proliferation of metals in order to achieve the noblest goal; that of Gold.

The identification process occurs in three stages: mental, sensory and intuitive. During the Middle Ages painting was inspired by alchemy and was interpreted in various ways; from the perspective of the symbolic and esoteric, to the search for use of unalterable pigments intended to immortalize artworks. From these precepts, eventually evolved Tarot iconography; conceived from a synthesis of the ideal path for liberation from false personifications of the self and the suggestive power of unconscious visions.

During the Italian Renaissance, alchemical art occurred spontaneously within the artists through various archetypes such as Aphrodite; considered as a mediator between Soul and Eros, between Psyche and Love, and between Reason and Instinct.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hermeticism was born in Florence, inspired by Marsilio Ficino and Cosimo de Medici the First. This gave special impetus to the esoteric and alchemical arts. Marsilio Ficino first translated and released in Latin (and after which in the Florentine vernacular), 'Corpus Alchemical' by Hermes Trismegistus, (a legendary, wise sage of the Hellenistic era). Sometimes Hermes was regarded as a man; the father of all magical arts, including Tarot, and at other times as Thoth; the Egyptian God, related to letters, numbers and geometry. This code was discovered by Leonardo Alberti de Candia, alias Leonardo da Pistoia, the 'Monk', who was commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici to track down valuable Greek and Latin manuscripts. Which turned out quite well during a trip to Macedonia, where Leonardo da Pistoia discovered fourteen books of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The work was in its original form,

belonging to Michael Psellus (1018-1078) of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Psellus was a Byzantine monk, writer, philosopher, politician and historian of the Byzantine Empire, who altered the text, eliminating many portions dedicated to magic in order to make it more acceptable to the Church. *Corpus Hermeticum* represented the source of inspiration of Hermetic thought and Renaissance Neo-Platonism and many scholars argue that the mysterious knowledge hidden in the Tarot and Alchemical Opus is derived from this work. The translation was made by the philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), a pioneer of humanistic astrology; and had enormous and widespread influence over the cultural environment, while laying the groundwork for the Renaissance.

Cultural integration between Alchemy and the Hermetic arts of the Renaissance threw into question the precepts of Aristotle, which had been the dominant scientific zeitgeist during the Middle Ages and in perfect harmony with the traditions accepted by the Church of Rome. For this reason the Renaissance, initiated by Cosimo de Medici, gave way to the concept of a possible transmutation of base metal into gold, which until then, was considered impossible to achieve.

This led to new research related in part to the Arts and Crafts which, thanks to Vannoccio Biringuccio, author of the book *De la Pirotechnia*, (published in Siena in 1540), Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) and many other artists who favored the growth of a humanistic approach through a school of craftsmen and artists made famous for its esoteric knowledge of the secrets of the Elements. So for example, through the element of fire, it became possible to produce glass, which could melt metals to produce new colors and to experiment with medicines. All thanks to an art that was often considered controversial, as magic or alchemy. This gave rise to a new form of 'experimental psychology' which was expressed with symbolic images.

Sandro Botticelli celebrated this worldly event in *The Birth of Venus* (1482-85). Nowadays, some art scholars have begun to reinterpret the great works of Renaissance art in the light of alchemical symbolism; tracing the allegories, metaphors and emblems created by Simone Martini, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raffaello Sanzio, Cosmè Tura, Albrecht Durer, Hieronymus Bosch, the Brueghels, Caravaggio and Diego Velázquez; a thread of continuity encompassing alchemical thought.



*The Shells Divination, (1974)*

Oswaldo Menegazzi was born to be a painter and with over 45 years of experience, has created gorgeous Tarot decks and collaborations as well as some of the most prestigious and important historical reproductions of ancient cards. After devoting himself to collecting antique playing cards and tarot, he decided, around 1970, to establish the publishing house, *il Meneghello*. His fascination with symbolic work and the art of print making went hand in hand over the decades, winning him admiration and acclaim. Menegazzi is a self-taught artist who began his esoteric studies with the creation of subjects on oil and canvas that were transposed into the 22 Major Arcana. His first Tarot deck was *The Shells Divination*, published in 1974. Since then, each year the shop's catalog is enriched with limited edition decks, created by Oswaldo and by new artists. The special editions of *il Meneghello* are of particular value for their craftsmanship which makes them unique in the world (both the cards and packaging being hand-crafted). One example would be the type of box the maestro creates for the Visconti Tarot (of the 15<sup>th</sup> century). Menegazzi succeeds in making the paper look like wood; a most stringent test of his attention to detail. He also creates elaborate, exquisite 3D shadowboxes, handcrafted from wood and glass with esoteric themes that are far beyond measure.

In 2013, *il Meneghello* was granted permission by the Ministry of National Heritage and Cultural Activities, to reprint the 22 Major Arcana of Sola Busca, owned by the Pinacoteca di Brera. Until then no one had ever printed these cards directly from the originals. The presentation is of singular Renaissance beauty; both the cards and packaging that embodies this great work.

Oswaldo Menegazzi, a gentle hearted soul with incredible imagination and inventiveness, is one of the few living masters entrusted with the ancient secrets of esoteric painting. An artist who has witnessed the evolution of his country and his beloved city of Milan for over eight decades.



*Osvaldo Menegazzi in his Amazing Tarot Emporium*

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## Bologna, Where Tarot Was Born



*Rosenwald Tarot*

Regarding the city of Bologna, the research carried out by Sir Michael Dummett and Andrea Vitali has helped enlighten us. These scholars have generously allowed us to include portions of their historical evidence that is of great interest.

Some sources state that by the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Bologna, the Major Arcana were already popular, most likely thanks to the presence of the university to which students from all over Europe attended. In this regard we are reminded that the famous Tarot deck of Bologna was reduced to only 62 cards, (compared to 78 of a full deck). This reduction was useful during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and we owe thanks

for the birth of the game of Tarocchino, which conceivably was already being played by the beginning of that century in Bologna.

The current Bologna version of Tarocchino has been handed down from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the inclusion of new combinations and the invention of the Meter function. Each suit has an ace, cards with values from 6 to 10, and four court cards. The rules and characteristics of these 22 Trumps are a bit different from those of the Marseilles Tarot, as described below.

The Tarot of Bologna, aside from not having titles written on the Trump cards, also had Arabic numerals (from perhaps around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century). The 22 Majors of Bologna's Tarot were traditionally called by their regional names by the players.

Regional	Italian	English
Béghet	Juggler	Magician
Murett	Morish Men	(4) High Priestess
Empress		– Emperor - Pope
l'Amàur	Love	Lovers
al Car	Chariot	Chariot
la Virtò	Virtue	Temperance
la Giustézzia	Justice	Justice
la Forza	Strength	Strength
la Furtòuna	Fortune	Wheel of Fortune
al Rumetta	Hermit	Hermit
al Traditàur	Betrayer	Hanged Man
la Mort	Death	Death
al Dièvel	Devil	Devil
la Tarr	Tower	Tower
el Strel	Star	Star
Lòuna	Moon	Moon
Sàul	Sun	Sun
Mand	World	World
Anzel	Angel	Judgement
Mat	Fool	Fool

#### *Tarot of Bologna Regional, Italian and English Titles*

A particular characteristic already evidenced during this ancient period was a series of four male figures of equal value that took the place of their traditional counterparts: (the Female Pope or 'Papessa' – High Priestess, the Empress or 'Imperatrice', the Emperor or 'Imperatore' and the Pope or 'Papa'.) In the beginning they were called the Four Popes, but over time their names were changed into the *Mori* (also called *King*



*Mori*, or *Moretti*, back then); until a ban by Pope Benedetto XIII (1725) on the use of ‘the Pope’ and ‘the Angel’ as characters in card games; however this last one was never removed.

In the modern editions the *Mori* appears as three different figures, one of which is a double.



*Aces: Tarocchino Bolognese, 1953*

Four different yet similar characters, with dark faces were in the editions from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, however during the following century one of them was duplicated (three different characters, one of whom had a double), and their complexion was no longer dark. Sylvia Mann revealed that this change was made for economic reasons, or in other words, to end costly updates of old matrixes, by removing a specific papal or imperial dignitary in order to standardize a representation of the Pope or *Mori*.

Therefore a very effective system was established for distinguishing a deck of Tarocchino, from prior to, or later than 1725: while it is still unclear exactly when, it is enough to be able to classify by noting if it contains the ‘four Popes’ or ‘the Mori’ (with one of them doubled).



*Anzlein & Anzlaz, Tarocchino Bolognese, 1953*

Although Bologna did not have a princely court to influence luxury decks during the Renaissance, the evolution of the court style inspired by the great governing families allows us to observe some similarity with the Tarot cards depicted in Ferrara. For example, the Hermit does not have a lantern, but has instead sprouted wings. For this reason, since the ancient name of the card was Time, wherever it was represented, it had an old character with wings. As a consequence, the nickname for the Hermit is the *Anzlaz*, or *Angelaccia*, while Love (or the Lovers) is nicknamed the *Anzlein*; that is to say, the angel who represents Cupid.

Also the *Traitor*, an ancient Trump card, represented as a man hanging upside down from a wooden beam, was eventually retitled the Hanged Man. Trump XVI, or the Tower, originally was defined as Lightning (though numbered as XV) and was depicted, (in Bologna's version), as a construction on fire collapsing, while maintaining a strong resemblance to the Tower destroyed by lightning which appears in the so-called *Tarot of Charles VI*, during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It is important to note another resemblance with the group of three cosmological archetypal cards, which are the Star, the Moon and the Sun, and which have something in common with Ferrara's Tarot cards, or rather the presence of astrophysics in the first two, and a woman with spindle held high, towards the Sun in the third image.

In Bologna, the World card, (which was represented in Ferrara's cards with a globe wandering the sky, under the guidance of an archangel), seems to have transformed into the God Mercury; but in general the representation of this card remains quite similar.

Moreover, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Tarot of Bologna was one of the first to use double-headed characters.

There also appeared at this time the edition of Bologna's Tarot of fantasy, conceived by Giovanni Maria Mitelli in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, which brought particular innovations. His deck of sixty-two cards was engraved on copper between 1663 and 1669 for the Bentivoglio family. Color samples of this deck can be

found in the Museum of the U.S. Playing-Card Company in Cincinnati (producer of the infamous Bicycle brand playing cards), and a volume of those engravings has also been published. From this text we can fully deduce the order of the Trumps, and also the system of utilizing the Popes with the same value. In fact, Mitelli substituted the High Priestess with a second Pope, which was different in design, but not distinguishable on the basis of the character of the card.

The oldest reliable documentation of Tarot decks from Bologna is from 1459, but there are not enough cards remaining after the 16<sup>th</sup> century to make a conclusive study. These cards are the *Masson* and *Rothschild* of Paris, with an isolated card, *Willshire* in London. These are all Trumps, without numbers. Those in the collection sheet of Rothschild are: top row from left to right, the Tower, Star and Moon; while in the lower row, the Sun, World, Devil, Chariot and Death. Those on the sheet of Beaux Arts are, in the top row, the Sun, World and Hanged Man, and in the lower row, the Wheel of Fortune, the Angel and Hermit.

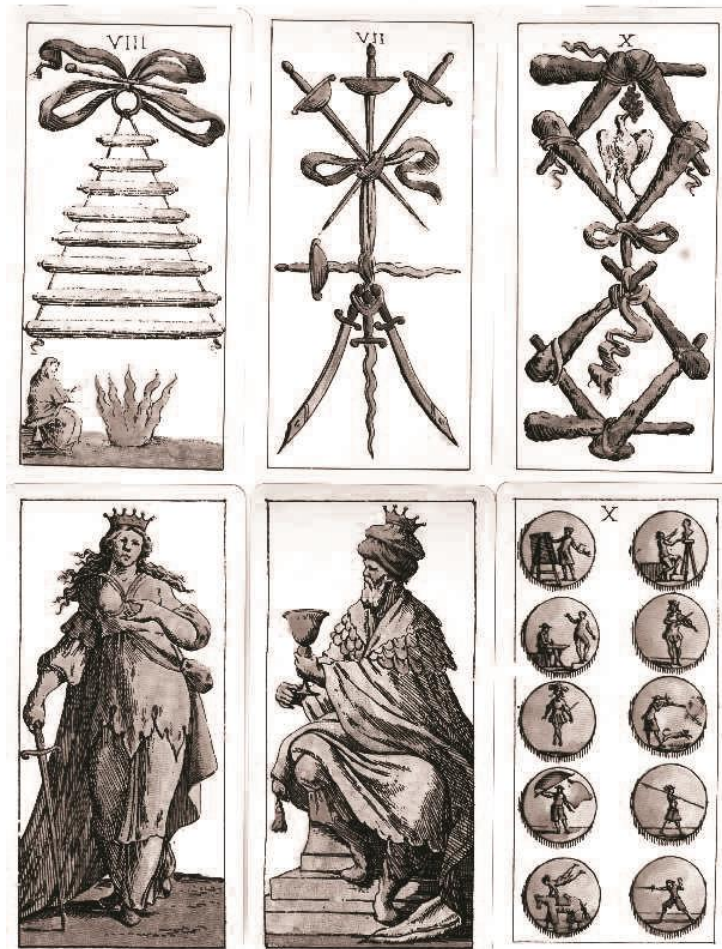
In all cases but one, the card designs resemble those of corresponding cards from the 17<sup>th</sup> century form of Bologna's Tarot. The exception is the Devil, for which the design is completely different from those of subsequent decks. This considerable resemblance confirms these cards of *Rothschild/Beaux Arts* are the most ancient surviving examples of the standard model of Bologna's Tarot.

It is also worth noting that in 1459, Bologna, a theft of 'unum cartarum a triumphu' was reported, while in 1477, a fiscal register indicated the cost of 'carte da zugare depinte et stampede', which indicates that Tarot cards cost more than playing cards, (if only due to their greater number).

Bologna's *Tarocchini Montieri* printed by Lelio Della Volpe in 1725 and the cards, *Al Leone* of 1770 are remembered for their unique beauty. *The Twins* were mentioned beginning in 1543 (Pietro Aretino, *the speaking cards*) as a typical Florentine adaptation of Bologna's Tarocchino, though their origin was likely decades older. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the name (and category) of *Minchiate* has had great success and an enormous circulation both nationally and internationally.



*Tarocchini Montieri* of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century



*Tarot Conceived by Giovanni Mitelli, XVII Century*

With regards to Bologna's Tarot *Montieri*, it is necessary to revisit a particular incidence. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the geographic and heraldry types of Tarot decks, (known as *didactic*), had enormous popularity, due to the information they imparted. Only in the upper section of the card was a name or title shown, while the body of the card was filled with useful material. In 1725 Canon Luigi Montieri of Bologna produced a deck of Tarocchini (of the geographical kind, just described). Once the deck caught the attention of the Papal Legate, Cardinal Ruffo however, he bitterly criticized how it described Bologna as having a 'mixed government' (*governo misto*) and henceforth diminished the circulation of these cards.

We must take into account that the city was under the government of the Papal State, while also enjoying a certain amount of autonomy. The whole enterprise was nearly finished with this deck when it was publically burned and the Canon Montieri and everyone involved with its production were arrested. This was officially decreed by Cardinal Tomaso Ruffo, by means of the document of December 12, 1725 when he accused the card maker Montieri of thousands of irregularities and of improper ideas and condemned the production as a most suitable example to be publicly burned and completely prohibited from commercial use. However the Papal Legate soon realized that to continue to proceed against the Canon

Montieri on this delicate matter would arouse deep resentment in a city so proud of its ancient liberties. He therefore had the prisoners released, but to save face demanded that the 'four Popes' be replaced in the deck with 'four Mori', and the Angel be exchanged with a Lady (*Dama*). The first modification was accepted, though the second demand was ignored; and so this pack was reissued with the *4 Mori* (Moors) instead of 4 Popes (*Papi*) and together with the Angel, emphasized that in Bologna a mixed government was still in force. The *Mori* were henceforth used in all Bolognese Tarot packs.

Other particular themes relating to the story of these cards include that of the *Appropriate Tarot* which were still being used in Bologna far longer than elsewhere, and not always strictly in verses (as was the traditional way of playing this game). Lodovico Frati, in a manuscript list of 1668, recorded: *Some of the ladies were identified with the tarocchino game cards. Donna Cristina of Nortumbria was baptized as the Angel, while the Countess Palmieri Fava as the Devil.* Entertainment was assured in this game by the definitions and sayings, which were often very 'inappropriate' regarding the vices and virtues of those present (and those absent).

Furthermore, this was shared regarding: *The Trumps of Appropriate Tarocchini, each with a Bologna Lady*, (composed of two different parts: the first listing the correspondence between the Trumps and the ladies, and the second part, contributing in prose an explanation of the proposed correspondence, which was often merciless); for example, the Devil was awarded to the Countess Baldi 'because of her frightening deformity, and ugliness'. This unpleasant remark is preserved in manuscript forever and was undoubtedly written before 1725, since it included the four Popes among the Trumps.

Another Bologna example appears in a satirical sonnet, with the play of Tarocchini of Michele Tekeli Ribello. Following the template of Bologna's Tarots of the last decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this manuscript used the names of all Trumps in sequence, except for the fact that there was only one Pope. This sequence was intended to convey protest against the Hungarian traitor, Imre Thokoly (1657-1705), who had fought alongside the Turks against the liberation of his own homeland.

And lastly, we note two other manuscripts, dated after 1725, which were *Trionfi de Tarocchi e motivi latini appropriati a ciascuno dei canonici di San Pietro and Trionfi dei Tarocchini* ('Trump of Tarot and a Latin motto appropriate to each of the canons of St. Peter and Triumphs of Tarocchini') respectively. The first contains a list in three columns, where in the first column is written the name of Trump cards, and the second that of a Canon and in the third column, a Latin motto (ancient saying). The second manuscript is a list of Bolognese ladies, with corresponding Trumps.

More recently, that is to say, towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the manufacturers of Bologna's cards began the practice of numbering the 'Tarocchino Bolognese' but only the Trumps from 5 through 16 and moreover, with a different numeration system (card order). Specifically, they added Arabic numerals from card 5, but in this deck that card is actually the Lovers (not the Pope) and likewise, card 16 in this case is the Star (and not the Tower).

Meanwhile, the four higher Trumps and the five lower were left without numbers. This numeration is presented in a single group on which the Trumps are numbered by hand; the so-called Tarot of Charles VI,

which presented a great similarity with cards of Bologna. In 1831, in the *Memoir of the History of Chalcography*, Count Leopoldo Cicognara described a sixteenth century classical Tarot deck that was composed of sixty-eight cards (sadly, now lost) with the illustrations of six cards, four Aces, the Lovers and the Sun, which were similar to those of the decks currently in Rouen. Only the Fool was different, since in the image, on the ground there appeared a drunken man holding a wine barrel with the word Moscatello written on it.

There are many texts which explain the rules for an 'enjoyable game of Tarocchini'. The more ancient of these is the work of R. Bisteghi, *The Practical Game*, of which many editions were printed. Its first edition was published anonymously in Bologna during 1753. The following year a monographic report which was more detailed and the work of Carlo Pisarri, was also published anonymously. In these publications it was taken for granted that there were no numbers on the Trumps and that the players had to learn their order by heart.

In Bologna the game played today appears quite similar to that of the past, such as the assignment of marks and rules of playing in groups of four or in fixed couples, like in Bridge.

Between 1760 and 1780, when the court cards, the Aces, the Trumps and the Fool had double heads, Bologna's Tarocchino was one of the first forms of the deck to suffer this transformation. This change was distributed with difficulties and in England it was accepted only from 1860, while in the USA not until 1870. This confirms a particular traditionalism on the part of the players, but also their sense of beauty.

Little time passed after this innovation, which the Bologna's Tarot accepted, and which had already been in use in other decks of Tarot; that is to say, the presence of numbers on the Trumps. The numbers from 5 to 16 were added to the Trumps including the cards between the Lovers and the Star. In 1826, when the state's fiscal stamp was introduced to the game cards, the Ace of Coins' image was reduced within the usual round space to leave room for the stamp. Apart from that, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century did not bring any changes to the deck, which continues to be used both in Bologna and nearby areas with the incentive to maintain one of the most important histories of the past.

### **1st Hanged Man: of St. Petronius**

#### **An Iconic Tarot Image in History**

The Major Arcana: XII card; the Hanged Man, relates to a fresco by Giovanni da Modena, depicted in 1410, which *hangs* in the Chapel Bolognini, inside the Basilica of Saint Petronius.

The fresco shows a vision of Hell, where two men are each hung by one foot and suspended from a branch of the same tree. One of them can be seen from the front, while the other from behind. Their heads are above the damned also dwelling in the netherworld and immersed in waters up to their chests while looking up at the faces of the Hanged.



Their sin is decreed in writing: idolatry, while other writing appears on the damned: *Ninusrex*, which refers to the gravest form of idolatry, which is that of *Nineveh*, the city where the majority of people practiced *sacrilegious rituals* (Nineveh was the center for the worship of Ishtar – the ancient fertility Goddess). Some esotericisms also interpreted the position of the legs of these hanged men, as looking like the cross (or the number '4' upside down), however, it is also necessary to consider that this position was meant to be more painful for the punished.

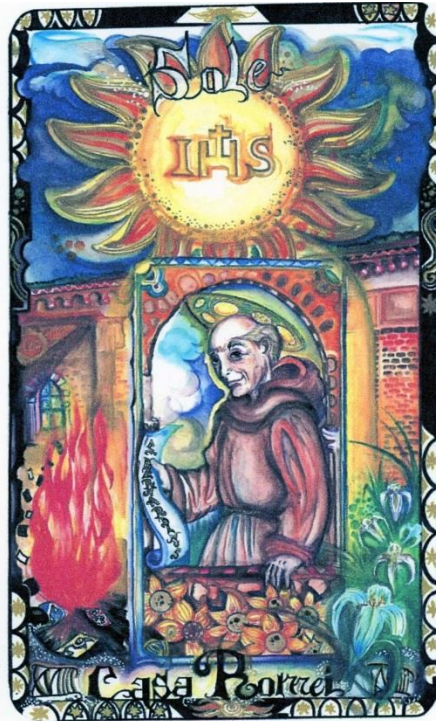
In conclusion, the Hanged Man image became synonymous with pain and suffering; a characteristic still presented in the interpretative analysis of this Major Arcana card.



*Giovanni da Modena, Chapel Bolognini, St. Petronius, XV Century*

**Basilica of Saint Petronius**  
Piazza Galvani, 5, 40124, Bologna  
[www.basilicadisanpetronio.it](http://www.basilicadisanpetronio.it)

## St. Bernardino of Siena



*St. Bernardino: XIX Sun Card, found in Tarot of Ferrara*  
[www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm](http://www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm)

Another particular series of events relates to the historical figure Saint Bernardino, who made explosive public tirades against the Tarot. These rants were eventually carried out to such an extent that in 1423 a so-called 'stake of the castle of the Devil' rally was organized, in Maggiore plaza. This was an actual public bonfire in which all the Tarot in the city were set ablaze in the town square, so citizens could understand the harsh reprimand of their 'evil ways'. In fact, Bernardino in one of his sermons stated:

'Poi (il diavolo) volse fare i cardinali, e sono quelli che vendono le baratterie. Vescovi sono chi compra le baratterie, e anco barattieri e giocatori. El vicario si sono i bari e la berta...le pievi son le taverne e i postriboli. I popoli so'li briachi che vanno a tali chiese contrari a Dio.' - Bernardino da Siena, from *Le prediche volgari del* in 1425, Siena.

Translation: 'Then he (the devil) turned to the Cardinals, as the ones that sell 'barratries' (fraud & deception). Bishops buy the 'barratries', and remain swindlers and players. The vicar himself is a cheater... the churches like taverns and brothels. The people who go to these churches are intoxicated and turned against God.' - Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari del 1425* in Siena, ('Sermons popular in Siena')





*IHS, Symbol of St. Bernardino*

After such sermons, people brought gaming paraphernalia – such as dice, backgammon, cards, etc., to the town square in front of the church of Saint Petronius, to add to the growing flames.

Furthermore, there were many accounts which add layers of meaning to the occurrence, such as the document of the *Acta Sanctorum Bollandista* which contains three different versions of the life of this saint. In the first, among the objects destined for the bonfire, 'Triumphales Charticellae' are on the list, which is to say specifically, Tarot cards. In the oldest documentation however, there are only *naibes* mentioned on the list, which means regular playing cards, together with dice and backgammon. Also in his sermons, Bernardino referred to card games, but not to the 'Trumps', specifically 'reges atque reginae (King and Queen), milites superiores et inferiores (soldiers of high and low ranks)', showing an awareness of the four figures for each suit. It is necessary to consider that card games were very popular and therefore there were many factories which depended on the printing of these cards. The legend goes, that one of these factory craftsman complained to the above-mentioned Saint Bernardino, that he did not know what other work he could do, after the bonfires. The saint then suggested he replace the icon of the Sun (card XIX), with the homonym 'IHS', meaning Jesus. The craftsman followed this suggestion and was so successful that it appears a new tradition of holy saint cards was born!

### **High Priestess Mummy of Bologna**

St. Catherine of Bologna and the Visconti-Sforza High Priestess

In Bologna, the echo of female Holiness is linked to the image of St. Catherine de' Vigri who, on November 13th, 1356, together with a group of Clarisse nuns arrived from Ferrara, taking possession of the old convent of St. Christopher.

The young founder of the monastery was an ascetic woman who dabbled in painting and music. Her daily disciplines included a special vegetarian diet, which according to the researches of the Papus indirectly favored the mummification process.

Today her unaffected, 'mummified' body is still visible within the current church of Corpus Domini. She is referred to as a saint and can be found resting in the realms of eternity on a throne.

Her body still unaffected after all these centuries was until recently, proceeding in its subtle expressions of life, while needing to be cared for by the nuns (trimming her nails and cleaning her regularly).

The phenomenon of mummification was already studied by the famous esoteric researcher Papus, who addressed part of his research on the processes used in Egypt for the preservation of bodies. According to his theory, the Kha is considered the material shell, (also called a double or astral body). It comes from the physical body and returns, just as the astral body does. The Kha governs the body and would be found in the anatomical area of the nervous system connected to the Grand Simpatico. If you consider all the capillaries, arteries, veins and organs innervated at this point, you have a double of the physical body (the branch of the nervous system with blood coursing through the body).

These studies show that the Egyptians with their practices, immobilized cells of the physical body through mummification that also held the astral body or double, with a series of rituals that were implemented before the mummy was sent to the grave. Through this spiritual spell they kept the double of the mummy under constant supervision while preventing the process of astral evolution and as such, part of the spiritual evolution. In this manner the spirit performed all the functions on the divine plane, while the reincarnation phase had long departed. This allowed the spirit a deeper evolution through celestial spheres, without returning immediately into the physical and material planes.

For the mummification process preserved in Corpus Domini however, the explanation may be different and could even allude to the concept of a miracle and consequently to the will of divine spheres which, may have protected this particular body.

From a rational standpoint, there may be another explanation linked to the nature of the earth itself, and the presence of well-established waves of energy, studied by modern bio geology. These layers of energy would form a sort of cross-linked field underground. It would cross the land far and wide, while energetically uploading some points of condensation. Such places would have a real concentration of energy which would produce a natural level for the mummification process. This procedure was used by the ancient Egyptians as well.

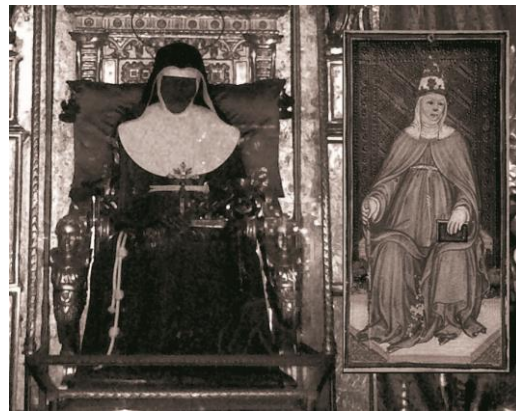
These points of intersection would have been derived from groundwater and would not have been a random collocation. Often they corresponded most powerfully to places of worship that were particularly revered or were a sacred pilgrimage.

This also suggests a subtle correspondence between the higher spheres and that of earthly existence. In this energetic context, the intrinsic value of such a miracle would take on a deeper meaning than one handed down by tradition, because the energy from the earth itself would arise as if to block the state of

decay of this body, while being focused on the double, thus allowing an elevation level that was higher than normal.

Andrea Vitali speculates that this holy woman (and her mummified body) could also explain the iconography of the High Priestess in the historical Pierpont Morgan Visconti-Sforza Tarot Deck. Is it possible that Bonifacio Bembo was inspired by the images of Chiara of Assisi and the Clarisse nun? From 1429 there was a convent of this order in Cremona, and the Clarisses nuns were held in high regard by St. Catherine de' Vigri. The iconography of the High Priestess is consistent with the symbolic elements that Clarisse nuns wore on special occasions during the Renaissance era of northern Italy, with something similar to the papal staff, called a Ferula, along with a miter (holy tiara). Another secret to add to the great mystery!

St. Catherine's shrine is located in the chapel of Poor Clares, near Corpus Domini Church in Bologna.



*St. Catherine de' Vigri and the Visconti-Sforza High Priestess*

## **Symbols in St. Stefano**

### **Cult of Isis, Templars, and Holy Grail**

This story begins with analysis of a small temple dedicated to the worship of Isis in Bologna, the city that welcomed the Goddess, along with her husband-brother - Osiris and their son Horus.

Isis, the Great Egyptian Mother Goddess represented for the first time the religious concept of salvation for people who had no property, nor rights, and who had always been excluded from the possibility of being part of the cosmic cycle of events. The cult of Isis spread abroad with ease, because the Goddess represented continuity with other female deities much venerated in the Mediterranean basin, such as Cybele, Astarte, Demeter, Venus, Artemis and Hera. She came to represent them all and to incorporate herself as part of the attributes of other deities.

The myth of Isis included two main holidays: *Navigium*, (the vessel of Isis and Osiris) and *Inventio*, (brother-sister of the bride Goddess). These holidays were celebrated following the rhythms of nature. The first took place at spring equinox, and was linked to the fertility of earth and the onset of navigation. The second was celebrated during summer solstice to rejoice the discovery of Osiris, whom tradition tells us had been killed and dismembered by his envious brother and scattered in all directions. These two sacred times served to mark the course of the year as well as the rituals practiced twice daily to divide the day in two.

Another important feast was celebrated in Alexandria, Egypt on December 25th, (around winter solstice), which involved displaying the virgin Isis and her son Horus. That this date coincided with the Christmas of Christians created a superposition of symbols and rituals.



*Basilica of St. Stefano, Via Santo Stefano, 24, 40125, Bologna*

Over the centuries the worship of Isis was forbidden but devotion to her continued in secret in caves and caverns lit only by the soft light of candles, which slowly over time led to the natural blackening of such sacred statues dedicated to the Goddess, which now present themselves as the Black Madonna, still worshiped in many parts of Europe.

On the grounds of St. Stefano Basilica, the river Aposa flows (now underground), which probably descended from the heights of St. John in *Monte*. Tradition tells us however, that this river was sacralized with that of the Nile and its symbolic lure has roots in ancient myths, which have always found in this element the origin and vehicle for all forms of life, and for purification and regeneration as a central point of existence. A need to build a sacred place on the grounds where such a channel was present became clear for these reasons. This tradition was later passed down to Christians and cultivated through the

ceremony of baptism, (commonly linked to ritual purification). The water is also connected to ablutions (religious cleansing), from the root word 'rising of the mud', meaning 'taking away earthly impurities' in order to access the divine.

The temple dedicated to Isis was composed of twelve marble columns positioned in a circle, with the center being where the sacred water flowed. These twelve columns represented the boundaries of this magical realm. The number twelve also recalled the essence of life with its organization into twelve months of the year through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. Even Christian symbolism used this type of, allargando number (the number three of creation times four of time/space, makes twelve: as the world realized).



*Isis Temple 2nd century, Bologna*

Given the limited space available in the Stefano Complex of Bologna, the dimensions of the temple were probably reduced. Where the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher currently operates, used to be the Naos with the source of the Nile adjacent to it, (i.e. Aposa sacralized by blending waters from the Egyptian river).

What is called the *Martirium* ('Martyrs') today, is where *Ecclesiasterion*, the hall of the mysteries stood, (to the east), while in the opposite direction, where the square is currently found, was the Pronaos (living quarters for priests and traveling pilgrims, surrounding the building, and including the part of the church with the Crucifixion, as well as Saints Vitale and Agricola).

In St. Stefano a legend tells of the presence of an oak tree venerated by the Celts, and probably planted by the Gauls. According to tradition, Saint Petronius, a bishop of the city during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, built the basilica over the temple of the Goddess Isis. The saint wished to have a building that recalled the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

Petronius decided to use the columns of the ancient temple of Isis to build a place of worship (420-450 AD). This structure was erected near the existing Basilica of Saints Vitale and Agricola around 390 AD.

The entire settlement, which included the Rotunda Stefaniana (*Petroniana*), the church of Saints Vitale and Agricola, the area called the Valley of Josaphat and the hill of Mount Oliveto, (currently St. John in Monte), was later called, Holy Jerusalem, representing the West counterpart to East Jerusalem.

The complex offers a dedication to St. Stefano, the first martyr killed for his faith. *Stefano* in Greek means 'crown of victory' and refers to a gift from above.

In 1019 Martin, an abbot of the Benedictine Order built the crypt to preserve the bodies of the first martyrs, Vitalis and Agricola. In 1042, in Jerusalem, Emperor Monomakh (around 1000-1055) was preparing to rebuild the Holy Sepulcher after the damage inflicted by the soldiers of al-Hakim in 1009.

The result was that in both reconstructions, these places appeared almost identical to each other; with regards to the Martyrs, the place of their sacred relics, the Holy Garden, in the central part, which led to the Anastasis. This route would ideally present the three stages of human evolution, so we can also connect them to the three basic stages of the alchemical process.

The first stage is *Nigredo*, the Black Opera (Work), the obliteration of matter, a symbolic manifestation that is found in the place of the Martyrs, where the body is destroyed in order to reach spiritual union. This release allows one to proceed to the *Albedo*, White Opera, which describes the rise of a spiritual breath that separates from the body on upwards. This development, in the alchemical process, is through distillation, when the steam rises steadily to rejoin the cosmos in a harmonious outcome. This place corresponds with the Holy Garden as a transit point of meditation.

The last stage, *Rubedo*, or Red Opera, is the synthesis of the Alchemical Opus. It is experienced in the Anastasis – a place of passion for the man – Christ, who rejoined the Christ of God through the dispossession of their essence in order to exist in union with supreme reality, and thus complete this great spiritual design.

The similarities with Holy Jerusalem were discovered as early as 881 with a document that defined Bologna as a holy place: *Sancti Stephani que dicitur Santa Jerusalemme* (Saint Stefano called it Holy Jerusalem) to emphasize the importance of this connection.

The most important work of this portion of the itinerary can be described beginning with the *Martyrium* (early Christian martyr mausoleum). It was the site of martyrs and their relics; and as such was a point of great concentration of devotion. So much so that Bologna became a place of spiritual pilgrimage. The relics were shown to devotees from the outside terrace, (to the left of the church, near the Crucifix). At the entrance, engraved over the door, still appears the ancient sign 'Sancta Sanctorum', thus designating it as the most sacred place in the city. This wording also emphasizes an attribute of sacredness that is present in the East where, due to the presence of a sacellum (small shrine), exists the highest sanctity of the place. In other words the area which preserved holy artifacts was deemed a sacred sanctuary.

Today this section is completely rebuilt and left bare. There are only faint traces of frescos from 1300 and a beautiful Romanesque Centre (XI-XIII) formed by four sirens known as 'bicaudate' (look like mermaids with two tails that intertwine).

The siren, a symbol linked to the cult of the Great Mother became for Christians a warning not to become ensnared by illusions, or forget to follow the righteous path. It was no coincidence that this mythological figure appeared to them as a monstrous and dangerous thing. Despite having a beautiful shape she was viewed as something terrible that lured weary travelers with a soothing, melodic voice in order to confuse them and disturb their route. The *bicaudata* is also a symbol of cosmic magnetic currents that vibrate in a holy place, thus making it particularly responsive to earth energies.

The pilgrimage continues through the Holy Garden, known as Pilate's courtyard; an ancient square with a *concordance* (an index listing Biblical words alphabetically), as mystical and esoteric as the medieval could envision. The square represents the earth; the material world as conceived by *man*. The concept is actually a numerological factor, accomplished by examining the shape of one's existence in the square combined with the circle of sky which, united in Stefano Complex, represents the cosmos in symbolic form.

At the center of the courtyard stands the famous *Catino* (looks like a huge Grail), which is linked to the history of the life of Christ, when Pilate washed his hands of his fate.

However this *Catino of Pilate* takes on another symbolic meaning. It is in the center of the courtyard, and therefore the center of existence and the water that fills it represents the ideal of a vivifying force and supreme power and of the deep knowledge of our mysterious cosmos. In the courtyard, other emblems depicting the life of Christ can be found. The rooster (from XIV century), near the Bartolomeo Cesi's chapel (1556-1629) is a symbol of the sun but also reminds us of the time it ominously crowed three times announcing the betrayal of Peter.

The restoration of Edoardo Collamarini (1896-1902) in the early 1900s aspired to perpetuate a symbolic language of ancient Freemasonry that was confirmed during centuries: XI-XII-XIII.

Movements on a chessboard of white and black (or red) represent opposing forces that cause struggle throughout life. Like a maze which becomes the representation of the path of the adept with a hidden center, symbolizing the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.



*Catino of Pilate*

With stars in five directions, which, when pointed upwards, represent humanity with all its imperfections, trying to rise up and become purified. While stars with tips pointing downwards depict the projection of the divine on earth and all creatures. The six-pointed star represents the elevation of humankind, our balance ('as above so below') and accomplishments. Labyrinths and X-shaped symbols are related to immortality and the rosary beads are like the wheel of life and of destiny. Solar cups recall the sovereignty of the cosmos and are a symbol of the Holy Grail and the pursuit of spiritual perfection. Many crosses of different shapes beyond the appeal of classic Christian symbolism are linked to the ancient pre-Christian tradition of esoteric, philosophical alchemy. These symbols appear as part of a hidden, mysterious alphabet, arranged in an orderly disorder, yet not randomly. To indicate, without disclosing, cryptic messages engraved in stone, lost to time. Not to mention that these symbols were also part and parcel of the epic Templar history, also connected to the Grail.

Inside Cesi's Chapel we can also admire some interesting, bizarre and unique embellishments inspired by the wall paintings of the *Domus Aurea* in Rome (Golden House built by Emperor Nero in the heart of ancient Rome after the great fire in 64 A.D.)

We now find ourselves in the *Anastasis*, where the headquarters of Stefaniana Rotunda exists; and the place of the sacred relics of Petronius, the heart of the Holy Sepulcher; and an energy center from which radiates a powerful message to the outside world.

The ancient tomb includes, (among other symbols introduced later) the four animals of the Biblical prophecy of Ezekiel; the Lion relates to the Fire element (the primordial one that generates life). Taurus or the Bull connects to the Earth element, which is interpreted as conservation and continuity through stability. The Eagle relates to the element of Air, meaning the movement of ideas, thoughts and messages. And finally the Angel is in close communion with the element of Water, which is the creative principle (and the perception of the purification of an event). The representation of these symbolic animals relates to the XXI World card symbolism. In this instance, they are divided so that two form on either side. It is worth noting that the edge which divides them turns to the East, or the orientation of ancient sacred temples and the point where the sun rises in the direction of Jerusalem.

On the floor, in the direction of the Sepulcher, there is a depiction of a skull, the symbol of time passing. This seal was incorporated into Christian symbolism as a contemplation of death, but also as a symbol of the wise, of sage hermits and initiates. Combined with the cross it is connected to eternal life, and the death of Christ in Golgotha, which etymologically means 'place of the skull', (where Adam's skull was supposedly buried).

The outer walls of this place have an octagonal shape, typical of temple structures and of the Cistercians. The octagon recalls the baptismal fonts that are raised on round structures, connecting to the resurrection, eternal life and also to the processes of the Templar initiation.

This was a place of pilgrimage and of great devotion. Johann Fichard (1512-1580), a famous German jurist present in Bologna in 1536, noticed that the two steps before the shrine were completely worn down due



to continuous genuflections by the faithful. This was because inside the tomb Petronius had made a wall from pieces of the tomb in Jerusalem with pebbles and sand collected in the Holy Land.

Moreover, Petronius would leave the Holy Land with one of the most important relics in the world: the 'benda' of the Madonna. This was a strip of cotton that women wore in the Middle East on their foreheads as a sign of mourning (as Mary would have worn to honor her son's death). So this relic was unique and precious.

But speaking of the Virgin/female creator with child, in this place rituals were performed. The door of the tomb was opened for one week a year and it was then possible to 'crawl' in to venerate the sacred relics of the saints. During that period, pregnant women of Bologna were accustomed to walking thirty-three times (one for each year of Christ's life) around the Sepulcher, entering it at every turn, in order to pray. At the end of the thirty-third rotation, they would go to the nearby church of Martyrium to pray in front of a fresco of the pregnant Madonna. It should be emphasized that this ritual was similar to those practiced in the Neolithic temples dedicated to the Mother Goddess, to propitiate fertility.

Inside the *Anastasis* we conclude the sacred path, but there is one other step to consider when entering the Church of the Saints Vitale and Agricola.

In this place the tyranny of time and especially of men has dealt heavy blows through renovations; dismantling and even totally burying this ancient place of worship. Nevertheless, the expressive power of this Romanesque-Lombard remains strong and more tenacious than time itself. Erected around 390, it had the name of two men, Vitale and Agricola, one the master and the other, his servant; both of Jewish *descent* and martyred in 304 during the persecution of Diocletian.

At first it was dedicated to St. Peter, since it was discovered as an early Christian tomb with the inscription 'Symon'. People thought it to be the tomb of Simon Peter (St. Peter). This attracted many pilgrims, much to the detriment of Rome. The pontiff solved this problem by filling the church with soil and leaving it that way for about seventy years. It was finally reopened for worship with the promise of a different dedication. But due to that extreme measure, the holy place was completely ruined.

There remains only faint traces, like in the center of the compound, which is located immediately to the right upon entering the apse, and which had belonged to the pre-existing Pagan temple of Isis (2nd century AD), and another hub of late Byzantine style, which is located to the left of the apse (from V-VII centuries), and the two sarcophagi of Vitale and Agricola, located to the left and right of the altar respectively. These tombs have very interesting sculptured adornments.

On the sarcophagus to the right of the apse, two animals are depicted. This particular custom is rooted in many pre-Christian traditions and shows the subtle, secret communication between two different entities. The animal on the right is a lion; a solar symbol tied to the passion of life, and creation. While the animal on the left is a deer, which is an emblem of renewal, (while also being a solar symbol), and represents existence and creation. The latter, because of the antlers is also connected to the cosmic center or axial reference point of the branches of life. This animal is already present in pre-Christian symbolism, but over the centuries has become a representation of Christ and his struggle against evil. The message transmitted

from animal to animal is in the connection to the creative force and regenerative aspect of life, which in sculptural representation at the center becomes the laurel wreath.

The symbolic nature of the laurel wreath invades all Greek-Roman mythological stories including an influence on the iconography of Tarot; while the XXI - World Arcana depicts this crowning triumph. On the tombstone, in the center of the crown can be found an angel; the personification of a radiating power and creative force that comes from the celestial spheres, as the symbol of natural laws that take place in the eternal cycle of life.

The other sarcophagus, to the left of the altar, shows two peacocks with a cross in the center. This animal is linked to the concept of immortality, resurrection, love and longevity. When the peacock opens its tail it naturally forms a wheel design, which indicates the cosmic totality. When the tail is 'closed' it represents nothingness. Therefore the peacock symbolizes the beginning and end of experience.

Even this animal through the centuries, has become a Christian symbol representing the hundred eyes of the church, which relates to the outline of oval shapes on the tail, (indicating the supervision of the clergy over everyone). The peacock is also theoretically connected to alchemy because of its colors that match all the stages of transmutation.

The church was renovated in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and even today offers a powerful mystical vision thanks to the bare bricks that cover the walls, the power of the center and the rough bricks covering the floor which previously had been mosaic. In the central part of the apse is an altar formed by a large stone slab, the back of which rests on two sandstone sarcophagi in which, (tradition has it) were buried the relics of St. Isidore (from about 560 - 636), the bishop of Seville and of the Holy Innocents.

Symbols related to alchemy are also present. Stepping just outside this church one can admire two panels at the sides of the arch of the portal, which describe a particular story. In the tile to the right are two carved figures of imaginary animals, one above the other. The top animal could be a griffin, for this Solar bird naturally symbolizes the earth and sky, while the docile animal below could represent the bull - a symbol of the land and of building. This connects to a specific phase of the alchemy process in which the so-called Fixed, (i.e. the material element and the ground), must be subservient to the Volatile (flying), or Air element and this is understood as sublimation and ascent to the celestial spheres. In fact in the last stage, the griffin, or Volatile, subdues the bull, which represents the Fixed stage. On the left side of the same tile appears twelve heads. The section on the left shows two dragons, one linked to the other, indicating the dual nature of every action. A man sits astride these fanciful creatures. The dragon signifies the ouroboris, alchemist cooker within which the Great Work occurs. It is also the guardian of the treasures, (if we think back to the mythological story of the Garden of the Hesperides); but also represents the traditional enemy fought by the Saint-warrior who, once eliminating it, acquires strength, value and wisdom.

In esotericism as in alchemy, we must not destroy evil but instead channel it in such a way that the negative energies become converted into positive. Nothing is created and nothing is destroyed but everything changes and the wise know the forces that govern life and realize that each of these has its

function and nature. For this we need to harness and mold them in order for a transformation to occur. Therefore the man sitting on dragons is not eliminating their strength, but rather wants to know their messages, to use them as tools for growth. In order to grasp the secrets of the animal he slips a hand into the mouth of a dragon, (i.e. oral transmission and communication of the occult).

We continue on our path, following the original route while going over to the courtyard of Pilate to reach the Benedictine cloister. The shape is square which honors the medieval style.

At the center of the cloister is a sandstone well from 1632. It is said that this water was sacralized with the River Jordan and had miraculous effects to the point that it became a place of pilgrimage for the sick and infirmed. This well has another symbolic meaning though. Dante Alighieri had set his Divine Comedy in Jerusalem and to descend into the underworld (of his epic poem) it was necessary to go through this kind of *shaft*.

Since the Stefaniano Complex has always represented West Jerusalem, this cloister could well be considered an allegorical portal to the underworld; recalling that a more complete elevation only happens when one goes to the maximum depth, while purifying negative energy and thus, through this process, returning with more vitality, strength, and a renewed belief.

Many pre-Christian rites of initiation envisaged the entry for humankind in this way (ritually buried in an underground dugout, only to be reborn to a new life with renewed energy).

It has been said, that Dante found inspiration for his own Inferno (vision of Hell) from the grotesque anthropomorphic figures located on the columns above the cloister. One of the more interesting is a human figure with a head turned backwards. This image evokes the soothsayers, driven by Dante's Hell (*XX Canto*), with the conviction to walk continuously with the head turned backwards, (so as not to see the future, which might require a bold self-examination of life).



### *Symbolism in St. Stefano*

Staying within the cloister of Stefaniano Complex, another tile that probably inspired Dante appears, of a man with legs crossed in an X position. The poet relates the cosmic nature of this posture, as among other things, being similar to the concept of infinity (as noted by the Templars). This form not only evokes the symbolism of Templar immortality, but also connects to the concept of the intersection. The X-shaped cross

was already an esoteric sign in the innermost, secret prehistoric caves and then with the intersections of two triangles it evoked the union of two deities, male and female, and in many mythologies this measured the fate of the universe.

From an alchemical standpoint however, among the Greeks and their successors, the medieval letter X was the crucible for melting, which the potters marked with a small cross (*crucibulum*) as an index of good manufacturing and solidity.

Next, we enter the Church of the Crucifix, which is now completely modernized. It dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and its structure is Lombard. It has a nave with a vaulted roof truss and presbytery that rises above the crypt.

On the left, we can admire the Lamentation by Angel Gabriel Piò (1690-1770). It is a complex and original sculpture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that tells a unique tale. This unusual piece was made from papier-mâché using playing cards and Tarot cards found confiscated during the period when gambling was forbidden.

We next enter the crypt, composed of five naves, and marked by a forest of columns that recall the axis mund (center of the world). The symbolic union between earth and sky. It is impossible not to perceive the secrets hidden here. Only silence can communicate and reveal the deep and resonant mysticism held between these ancient columns. One in particular would testify that the height of Jesus was about five foot seven. But surely this could only be legend, for no one at that time was so tall!

Be sure to visit the Museum which contains precious objects of worship, reliquaries (shrines), robes and works of art previously in the Church. A panel from the Lombard period in high relief, representing Jesus among Saints Vitale and Agricola also deserves mention. Things worth noting are: stories of the life of St. Petronius, attributed to Michele di Matteo (XV century), the reliquary of the head of St. Petronius, jewelry crafted by Jacopo Roseto from 1380, the Madonna and Child with a young St John by Innocenzo da Imola (XVI century), a fresco of the Massacre of Innocents by members of the Lucca school from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the decorative dome of the Holy Sepulcher.

We return to the square once more, but are not yet at the end of this incredible journey where every stone has value and a tale to tell...in this case a brick. One brick amongst the rest has an image of a bird carved in it. This was a secret hermetic expression of Freemasonry; in order to share the mysterious language of the birds, seen as angels and connected to an unwritten arcane tradition that was transmitted orally from initiate to initiate. This is the mark of an anonymous master mason; a discrete trace without the need for identification or notoriety.

It is remarkable that the Guild of Master Masons was present in a representative manner in Bologna and is assumed to be a phalanx of the Order of the Temple. After the 1257 separation of the Masters of Masons and the Carpenters, this association of craftsmen spread throughout the city. In the early years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century it had headquarters in the Archbishop's Palace of the church of Saint Peter, via Pescherie Vecchie, 12.

The Charta of 1248 is a document of utmost importance that confirms the presence of this association in Bologna, before any other place in the world. This charter dates back to the meeting place in Bologna, near the church of St. Proculus.

This area where the church of St. Proculus in Bologna stands was also the ancient meeting place for *Ultramontani* (foreign) students. For this reason it is quite possible there could have been cultural exchanges between Freemasonry members and academics, including various scholars, doctors and artists. Among subjects for study of artists were grammar, geometry, philosophy, poetry, music, arithmetic and astronomy. Symbolism contained in these various disciplines was also an integral part of the work of Master Masons who translated astrological, philosophical and numerological values in architectural works from which Tarot also gained inspiration.

## **Triumph of Fame and Death**

### Saint James the Greater

Following the construction ordered by the Bentivoglio family, (Lords of Bologna), the entryway of the church of St. James adhered to the Tuscan style during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. This unusual Bolognese lordship greatly enriched the church and in addition to the entryway, endowed it with a chapel dedicated to the family.

During their dominion, the temple dedicated to St. James became their private chapel, which was further dignified by Lorenzo Costa with a painting of the Bentivoglio family next to the Virgin. One can find two more paintings by the same artist, in the Bentivoglio chapel of St. James: the *Triumph of Death* and the *Triumph of Fame*, both of which were envisioned by the astrological perceptions that inspired the Triumphs of Petrarch. They were influenced by the artists of Ferrara who also produced important work in Bologna.

Allegories of the two paintings are modeled on complex symbolism in which a relationship between Heaven and Earth is a reflection of a lively cultural debate that animated the study of this city.

The Goddess of Fame is shown advancing at the head of a procession of famous people, holding in both hands a trumpet, with which she is the messenger of both truth and deceit. Between these two realities, the trumpet becomes an instrument of a reverberation that covers the voices of the multitudes crowded together under the Chariot of the Goddess. The ancient Hebrew shofar (ram's horn trumpet) engulfs the crowd, becoming a subliminal reverberation of the parade. These are melodies with which Knowledge and Wisdom are meant to be elevated, and which Life promotes itself, at its own relentless pace. The chariot is pulled by elephants, (symbolic of royal power and stability, due to their longevity). These images represent overcoming Death.

The large four-legged animal, as an analogy with the four elements, supports a great body, often spherical, which signifies the manifested world as well as the universe. In the language of alchemy, the animal is in a state of earthly resolve, waiting a breath in order to rise to spiritual perfection.

Above the Goddess can be seen the work of creation by the Demiurge. It is the magical moment when *man* takes shape upon the earth. His materialization initiates the process of the dissolution of perfection, which will eventually lead to sin. In his very nature man's innate essence is dualism, in which good is opposed to evil. In other words, the chaotic matter is opposed to the universal order of life and in this central circuit one can recognize the workings of an individual existence in which Ego rises to fame and fortune, etymologically as fate or destiny. This allows man to meet inclinations in the course of his earthly pilgrimage that stars have destined for him in life; accepting the struggles and conflicts with the serenity of those who have an awareness of their abilities and the strength to reach their desired goals.

In *Tarot-speak*, this process is highlighted by the 21st Major Arcana, the World card, which represents the order life bends towards. It is the promethean spark that allows humans to grow and make their own way based on innate skills; while being put to the test by destructive agents they should resist.

In *Triumph of Death*, the unspeakable skeleton of Death carries people towards judgment including those who ascend towards the glory of fame. "Knowing how to die," said Oswald Wirth, "is the great secret of the initiated [...] the subject is intended to provide the raw materials of the philosopher's stone, or in other words, the profane admitted to initiation, is also condemned to death".

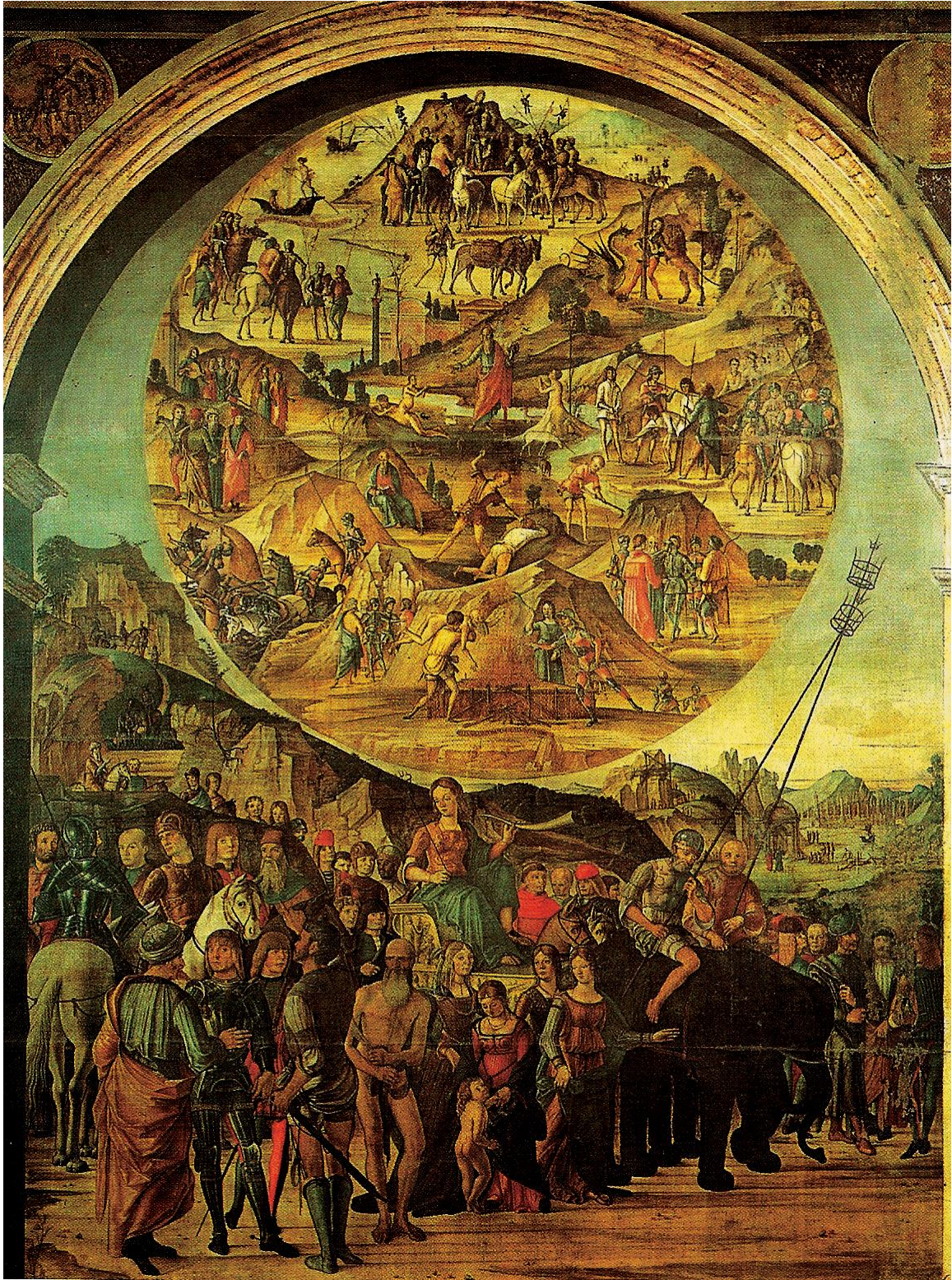
The best color to represent this state of evolution is black, and two black bulls lead the macabre dance of death, as a symbol of change and transformation, which brings renewal to all things. In Mithraism the black bull was believed to be the origin of creation.

The coat-of-arms in this parade is also black which has the aura of rebellion and a subversion of external agents, (such as atmospheric agents), that are revolting against solar heat and thereby producing a warm, fertile rain, which regenerates the soil. This rain makes the ground moist and due to humus, will develop to benefit humankind, while casting a divine light that permeates the backdrop of the sky. It is described as a path of renunciation and deprivation. In Gnostic imaginary, it is comparable to the liberation of spirit from unclean and impure matter of which humankind is often bound.

When comparing the two paintings, the *Triumph of Fame* is 'the creative force', where the Goddess is the feminine essence of divinity that can be felt and heard; the so-called 'Soul of the Universe', or the essential fire that blazes in our hearts. This fire, through the movement of time, is represented by an elderly man near the Goddess's chariot, and Fate is portrayed as the child embraced by a lady next to the elder (in other words, constantly being revitalized, so as to realize the 'Great Work': Rubedo).

In Alchemy it stems from a cyclical progression between the Fixed or material component and Volatile or spiritual element, which are transformed into each other and join together. Many alchemists theoretically believed this should be repeated many times in a succession of gaseous and solid states, until the completion of Quintessence, (the substance that synthesizes and unifies the four elements).





*Triumph of Fame, Lorenzo Costa*





*Triumph of Death, Lorenzo Costa*



The four elements are present in this painting and form the basis of life and as described by Aristotle, (whose theories were borrowed from the imaginary world of Alchemy): the base of the hierarchy of nature would have raised the raw material to the shapeless state. For this reason it has the potential to transform into an infinite number of material forms. The work of the alchemist should then be to reveal this raw material and attempt to extract it, melting metals in order to recover the primordial essence of its substance. Working with this amorphous element was thought to hold the power to transform raw metal into gold and silver.

### **Poggi Museum's Card Players**

The headquarters of the Bologna University Museums are located in Palazzo Poggi and were purchased by the Bolognese Senate in 1711, which established the Institute of Sciences, founded by Luigi Ferdinando Marsili, who donated valuable collections so they would have a safe and proper place for people to enjoy and study.

In this prestigious place for Science, important artistic traces of relevance to us can also be discovered. To beautify the ground floor of the palace, Giovanni Poggi called on Pellegrino Tibaldi, by commissioning a series of frescos depicting the adventures of Ulysses. The theme was not chosen at random, but in relation to the travails of the Homeric hero, who could be identified in the tribulations of the political and ecclesiastical career of Giovanni Poggi. We find the imprint of the Roman school derived from Raphael and Michelangelo in these frescos.

The paintings on the main floor were entrusted to Nicolò dell'Abate. In Bologna he had already produced other works after having achieved some notoriety. Between 1550 and 1552 Nicolò frescoed the room called *Concerts and labors of Hercules*, composed from the interchange of four scenes of court life and four scenes with the mythical hero.

The same grace that pervades the poem by Ludovico Ariosto surrounds the ladies and gentlemen who enjoy the music playing in an idealized representation of the courtier environment while alluding to the pleasures and adversities of such virtues. The scenes take place behind a banister adorned with flowers from which the characters seem to throw fleeting glances and the refinement of their features; the richly detailed robes and grace of their gestures are fully expressed with great skill from the brushstrokes of Nicolò, who knows intimately the works of Dosso Dossi, Correggio and Parmigianino.

The themes of the frescos are: *Concert with a singer accompanied by harp, lute and wind instruments; Concert with musicians of viol, lute and spinet* (early keyboard); *Offer of a cup of wine; Hercules killing the lion of Mount Teumesso; Third Labor of Hercules, the Ceryneian Hind; Hercules killing sons of Boreas, Zetes and Calais; Hercules and Cerberus and the Game of Tarot.*



*Game of Tarot, Niccolò dell'Abate, Palazzo Poggi*

Card playing was so popular among the patrons of taverns, as well as in the hands of these young courtiers that depicting this social ritual removed any suspicion of impropriety while giving it the same dignity as the musical instruments that present the concerts depicted on these very walls. This fresco by Niccolò is commonly known as, *The Game of Tarot*, however Andrea Vitali noted that in the painting “The Six of Pentacles and Swords and Four of Wands, are easily recognizable but there is a lack of Trump images, so we do not know for certain if this was actually the Tarot”.

Two centuries later, the *Venetian*, Bartolomeo Crivellari (1716-1777) faithfully draws from the fresco of the Game of Tarot, a detailed engraving, included in the illustrious book, *Le pitture di Pellegrino Tibaldi e di Niccolò Abbati esistenti nell' Instituto di Bologna*, written by author and painter Giampietro Zanotti, (long active in Bologna), and published in Venice by Giovanni Battista Pasquali, an esteemed publisher of cultural and social interests.

The success of playing cards from people of all walks of life, regardless of social status or income is amply demonstrated by the arts; from literary texts and the pages of Aretino, and the rhymes of Giulio Cesare Croce; all sprinkled with references to this popular pastime. Several painters have represented men and women of various ages intent on the game, while emphasizing a morally ambiguous character on the scene (imagine paintings of the Flemish Baroque, or the famous Cardsharpener of Caravaggio and how these instances illustrate the pleasantness of time spent in the company of others; such as *The Card Player*, created by the young Goya).

In this place an echo of astrology also resonates. In fact, part of the Museum is the Specola - an Astronomical Observatory. It is not exactly known when the teaching of Astronomy began at the University of Bologna, but certainly it was connected with the studies of astrology. The 13<sup>th</sup> century

marked the presence of Guido Bonatti, an astrologer who disputed the beliefs of Friar Giovanni Schio of Vicenza, (who maintained a non-scientific basis of astrology).

Another significant character was Cecco d'Ascoli (? -1327), who won fame and glory as well as the suspicion of the Inquisition. He was accused of sins against faith and sentenced to be burned at the stake in Florence. The importance of this man is described by Prof. Achille Crespi, (the most eminent scholar and researcher on the theory and work of Cecco d'Ascoli):

*Poor poet! He believed in his astrology, was the court physician, was called master and perhaps felt the anguish of poverty to buy books, and so studied them with zeal, and divulged them from the 'chair'; also believed to be a priest of great ideas such as unifying every science and every faith. And now the disconsolate bitterness of having lived and suffered in vain and the fatal passion was that he trusted students and friends who betrayed him, this failed disciple of death.*



*Astrologist Cecco D'Ascoli: Star in Magic Bologna 'Al Top'*  
[www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk27.htm](http://www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk27.htm)

Since 1334, astrology has routinely been commissioned by the city of Bologna, becoming one of only nine subjects recognized with this claim. It should be noted that back in those days, Biagio Pelacani da Parma (1347-1416) was teaching astrological study as part of the medical faculty. His ideas, while strongly

distrusted by the Church, earned him the nickname *diabolicus* (devilish doctor), with an insinuation of ties to magic. His concepts on optics vision (theory of knowledge and cognitive perception based on vision), space and perspective also influenced the great humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), who was often in Bologna, in the wake of the papal curia.

In 1476 the astrologist Girolamo Manfredi, along with other astrologers, restored the Bolognese edition of *Cosmography of Ptolemy*. Girolamo Manfredi was the greatest exponent of medical astrology in 1400, Bologna, and between 1475 and 1476 wrote the first printed *Tacuinus*, (a type of almanac that used to share astrological predictions regarding the city).

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luca Gaurico was another astrologer who worked in Bologna. He predicted the fall of the Bentivoglio family of the city. When the prophecy came true, as his reward he was given five lashes, prison time and then exiled. He had to take refuge in Ferrara, where he was received with the greatest of honors, becoming a major player at the University and reaching high ecclesiastical offices.

Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576) was a typical Renaissance magician, versed in astrology, natural magic, mathematics, law and medicine. How many of his time (Paracelsus, Della Porta, John Dee), were interested in occult sciences and yet also helped to develop various aspects of modern science?! After traveling widely throughout Europe, in 1562 he managed to obtain the chair of medicine at Bologna University, which for him was a goal long pursued. Though sadly, he had to leave the city nine years later, accused of religious skepticism and the practice of magic.

Proceeding on with this research, it is worth mentioning Giovanni Antonio Magini, a professor of mathematics in Bologna who, in addition to the study of cartography, astrology and alchemy, showed particular interest in the optical system that uses reflective surfaces and deals with the reflection of light. He applied ancient teachings concerning the construction of special mirrors and published a theory on these concave spherical mirrors. These objects had magical purposes as well as followed the dictates of common refraction and were also valued by the alchemist Emperor Rudolf II in Prague.

Magini published among other things, the Italian version of the *Tablets of the First Mobile*, dedicating it to Rudolph II. Magini, wrote *Ephemerides Coelestium Motuum* (a table giving the calculated positions of a celestial object at regular intervals throughout a time period) based on the work of Copernicus. The estimation of the professor of Bologna and Joannes Kepler became known to such an extent that Kepler was called to Bologna, while Magini was requested in Prague to complete the compilation of his last ephemeris.

At the time of his appointment in Bologna, he was chosen over the young Galileo Galilei to occupy the chair of mathematics at the University, though Galileo was someone with whom he maintained a correspondence, as evidenced by their exchanges relating to each other's research. He was also interested in pursuits which today would be considered pseudoscientific. A strong supporter of astrology, he defended its use in medicine in his *De astrologica ratione*. Magini practiced judicial astrology, (forecasting), despite suffering serious insult when he brought up the issue of paternity of a mare, and



presented data as if the findings were based on a person. He was hurt by the mockery, responding that Astrology remained his passion, even though he no longer felt trusted to practice it.

The successor of Magini was Bonaventura Cavalieri (1598-1647), a friend of Galileo Galilei. This important scholar was responsible for the spread of Galilean thought in Bologna. The purpose of the study of Cavalieri included the commitment to devote time to both astronomy and astrology. He may be, more than any other, the most fitting to conclude this chapter on astrological history because he represented the transition between the studies of astrology that related to astronomy, which from this period onwards was the prevailing zeitgeist.



*Ancient Tarot of Bologna*

## Ferrara: Golden Age of Tarot

### Magic of Tarot in Ferrara



*Parisina & Ugo: VI Lovers Card in Tarot of Ferrara*  
[www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm](http://www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm)

The first document which certifies such a game existed at the Court of Ferrara appears in 1422, which subsequently, would become one of the most important historical sources related to the birth of Tarot in Italy. Bernardino da Siena preached relentlessly against the use of Tarot and from his words we can gather details (such as that the structure of the deck was 4x14 numbered cards).

At the Este court in 1423, Parisina imported eight 'Emperor cards' from Florence. On September 18th 1424, Parisina wrote from Portomaggiore in Ferrara, requesting two decks of 'cartiselle di quelle di docena' (cards of Docena).

Most likely the game was meant as an entertaining distraction for the maidens of the court, although the pleasures of Parisina soon had a tragic ending. That same year, due to the plague scare in Ferrara, Nicholas, the (much older) husband of Parisina, sent his young wife along with his young (illegitimate son

of the same age), Ugo to Fossaldalbero near the Po. During their stay, a forbidden passion erupted (between 'stepmother and stepson'), that once discovered, led them to be imprisoned and beheaded!

In the years 1424 -1425 the Michelino deck appeared. In 1425, the 'triumph' of Filippo Maria Visconti marked the birth of the Trump card.

After that the *Karnöffel* deck appeared in the south of Germany, in Nördlingen. From 1427 to 1431, there also emerged precious German cards, which to this day are passed down and treasured. In the meantime, *Cary-Yale* Tarot also came on the scene as well as the *Rothschild*, *Guildhall* and *Goldschmidt* cards.

Eight Rothschild cards belong to the Edmond Rothschild collection and can be admired at the Louvre Museum in Paris, while an additional card also exists there, which according to the hypothesis of Stuart Kaplan, would belong to the same deck (found in the Archive of the Library of Bassano del Grappa). The size of these cards is 18.9 x 9 cm (7.4 x 3.5 in). Some of these are Court cards, while only one or two are Major Arcana. According to the hypothesis of Michael Dummett, one would be the Emperor, while the others, according to Kaplan, are the Pope, the Hermit or the World. The card presented in Bassano del Grappa would be the Knight of Swords. According to ongoing research, a theory has been proposed by Luciano Bellosi which has deduced, that these cards were depicted by Florentine Giovanni Del Ponte, who died between 1437 and 1438. If this turns out to be true, this deck would be even more ancient than the Visconti Sforza Tarot (currently considered the oldest known deck). This possibility comes from a comparison between the works of Del Ponte and a specific triptych where it appears St. George killing the dragon looks remarkably similar to the Knight in the card in the aforementioned Bassano del Grappa. A characteristic of this deck is the images are painted on woodcut designs.

So it is possible this deck could be the prototype of the first Tarot ever printed and the same kind of cards of which Dick, Rosenwald and Cary are among the most important examples and would certainly attest to the spread of this popular pastime.

The importance of the court of Ferrara was so apparent that still today we refer specifically to a distinguished line of cards, including the deck, *Tarot of Alessandro Sforza*. Fifteen cards remain, including 4 Trumps, 2 face cards and 9 pip cards painted on parchment. It may have been painted between 1450 and 1460. The images follow the traditional Tarot iconography, except for Temperance, which has a naked woman on a stag.

The *Charles VI Tarot* was given this name in error, due to the mere mention of him in a book (1392). In fact, it is much more likely this deck was made at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Ferrara. The iconography of these Trumps is quite similar to the deck of *Alessandro Sforza*, as well sharing a similarity in size along with other structural details.

However, the only deck definitely made by the court of Ferrara was *Tarot of Ercole Id'Este* where the coat of arms of the Este and that of Aragon are clearly shown. These details can also be considered related to the marriage of Duke Ercole with Eleonora of Aragon, which occurred in 1473. Sadly only 16 cards remain.



More indeterminate attributions are linked to four numbered cards in the Museo Correr in Venice; fragments of the Trumps are guarded in the National University Library of Turin and two other cards are proudly displayed at the National Museum in Warsaw and Kestner Museum in Hannover.

The Tarot cards said to belong to the *Mantegna* deck are placed in a separated category and considered 'didactic cards' (educational tools). It has become common knowledge that they were not envisioned by a famous artist, but rather by a painter at the Venetian school or of a Ferrarese artist's circle, and were depicted sometime between 1470 and 1485.

These 50 cards are subdivided into five categories of 10 cards each. In the first group the symbols of the planets are represented, which follow Aristotelian philosophy; in the second group are issues concerning virtues and the sciences; in the third category are the Liberal Arts; and in the fourth, Apollo and the Muse; and finally in the fifth group are the social classes.

From the Social Classes there appear: the Beggar, the Manservant or Knave, the Craftsman or Goldsmith, the Merchant, the Gentleman or Noble, the Knight, the Duke, the King, the Emperor, and the Pope.

From the Arts we are graced with Calliope, the muse of heroic poetry, Urania of Astronomy, Terpsichore of choral lyrics, Erato of love and lyrical poetry, Polyhymnia of sacred chants and dance, Thalia of comedy, Melpomene of tragedy, Euterpe of lyrics and flute melodies, Clio of history and Apollo.

The Liberal Arts are represented by Grammar, Logics, Rhetoric, Geometry, Arithmetic, Music, Poetry, Philosophy, Astrology, and Theology. Cardinal Virtues and Sciences include Astronomy, Chronology, Cosmology, Temperance, Prudence, Strength, Justice, Charity, Hope and Faith. From the Planets & Heavenly Spheres there are the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Eighth Sphere, the Prime Mover and the Prime Cause.

Such cards give evidence of the passion for this theme to which famous artists and masters of miniature art dedicated themselves, such as Andrea Mantegna, Alessandro di Bartolomeo Quaresana, Don Domenico Messere, and Giovanni Di Lazzaro Cagnola.

Another fabulous example of Tarot is the copper engraved, Sola-Busca deck, created by a Tarot Master of Ferrara's School around 1470-80, and which were originally kept in Vienna, in the Albertina Collection and are now housed in the Museum of Brera in Milan. Sola-Busca appears to be the oldest full deck of 78 known cards, and was inspired by historical (military) figures and biblical characters.

Count Matteo Maria Boiardo also worked with Tarot, while creating a poem (1460-1494), which has the framework of the 22 Trumps in a series of 4x14 cards (four suits of fourteen cards each, and a fifth suit of 22 Trumps).

Being the oldest reference to this type of structure, it may have been Count Boiardo who invented this form of Tarot game. The Minor Arcana of the deck have unusual suit elements: Fear, Jealousy, Hope and Love:

*Quattro passion de l'anima signora  
Hanno quaranta carte in questo gioco;  
A la più degna la minor dà loco,  
E il lor significato le colora.*

*Quattro figure ha ogni color ancora,  
Che a i debiti soi officii tucte loco,  
Con vinti et un Trionfo, e al più villoco  
È un Folle, poi che l'folle el mondo adora.*

*Amor, Speranza, Gelosia, Timore  
Son le passion, e un terzetto han le carte,  
Per non lassar, chi giocarà, in errore.*

*El numero ne i verse se comparte:  
Uno, duo, tre, fin al grado maggiore:  
Resta mo a te trovar del gioco l'arte.*

Four passions of the soul, my lady,  
Have forty cards in this game;  
The lesser grants place to the worthier,  
And suits reveal their meaning.

Each suit has four face cards,  
Which rank their due roles, as in office,  
With 20 + 1 Trumps; and in the lowliest place  
Is a Fool, because the world loves folly.

Love, Hope, Jealousy, and Fear  
Are the passions, with a tercet (verse) for cards,  
So as not to leave the player in error.

The numbers in the verses run:  
One, two, three, but to the greater degree;  
It now remains for you to find the art of the game.

(Capitoli Del Giuoco Dei Tarocchi Di Matteo Maria Boiardo Con La Illustrazione Di Pier Antonio Viti Da Urbino)

(Boiardo's Tarocchi Poem with an illustration of Pier Antonio Viti Da Urbino)

## St. George and the Dragon

### Myth Between Alchemy and Tarot

In the Ferrara Cathedral Museum (the former church of Saint Romano), can be found the doors of the church organ painted by Cosmè Tura (in 1469). He was a singular artist who represented the grandeur of 'Officina Ferrarese' (the Center of Art), but at the same time, left behind an important esoteric imprint from which the iconography of Tarot has drawn many inspirations.

Cosmè Tura was already active in Ferrara by 1451, as the creator of frescos, decorated flags, banners, tournament helmets, shields and costumes for pageants, and as a designer of tapestry, embroidery, small cabinetwork and silverware; all done for the Court of Este and especially for Duke Borso, who appointed him court artist in 1458.

Other works worth noting of his are found in various museums including, the sole surviving independent portrait by Cosmè Tura, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, (depicting an unidentified member of the Este family), and his gorgeous Goddess of Spring, Primavera (1460), displayed in the National Gallery of London, and the Pietà, (1472) found in the Correr Municipal Museum, in Venice. He also took part in the colossal creation of the *Hall of Months* astrological frescos in the Schifanoia Palace, Ferrara.

The doors of the cathedral organ, were placed at the center of the main apse and remained there until 1470, when they needed to be moved, although they remained in their original position until the removal of the organ itself, (during the 18th century).

Cosmè Tura's use of esoteric symbols and his love of astrological symbolism is legendary and this magnificent masterpiece continues to conceal cryptic secrets. With doors open, it reveals Cosmè Tura's tranquil depiction of the Virgin of the Annunciation. With doors closed, the painting exposes the power struggle between St. George and the dragon, with the victory going to the hero, who defeats the beast using strength and skill. On a higher level the dragon, considered as Ouroboros, (alchemical symbol that designates the great work of the transformation of raw material), is subservient to the spiritual powers of the courageous saint.

This fantastic creature in the West appears as a representation of the guardian of the Garden of the Hesperides, (mythical place with trees full of golden apples).

The power of the dragon becomes irresistible because it governs and protects the Opera (alchemical work of supreme transformation).

The fiery beast is also the alchemist cooker, which heats up matter so that a thin portion becomes separated from the crude. For this feat, only a person of great spirituality can capture the secrets of a dangerous dragon. The Saint's spear is pointed towards the dragon's mouth; (place of the 'word' and therefore, mysteries not communicable). In other words, the starting point of fire, which must be controlled and channeled in order to not destroy vital material.

St. George has the strength of a warrior and must combine his spirituality with the active force of thought, which together become action. This concept is linked to the color red, which is painted in thin brushstrokes which drape the musculature of the horse, (supporting St. George).

Above him appears the branch of a sacred oak tree. In Rome the oak was dedicated to the sky god, Jupiter, ruler of the cosmos. The tree was also an emblem of sovereignty. A wreath of oak leaves was the symbol of the god of the oak. Together these become a badge of strength, protection, durability, courage, truth, and immortality (due to the wood's density and texture).

This sacred tree was also associated with the bloody ritual described by James G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, which took place around an oak forest of Nemi, where a man was walking with his sword drawn, evoking the image in this Saint-Hero painting. Tearing off the *Golden Bough* from the oak, meant removing roots and thus making defenseless a celestial being who was also a priest-king (this King of the Wood personified the tree on which grew the Golden Bough. Hence, if that tree was the oak, then the King of the Wood was the personification of the oak spirit).

Renaissance artists often used the oak tree as a symbol of strength and endurance, of heroic virtue, loyalty and even hospitality. It was the allegorical form of life and prosperity in the fortress. The branch of the tree, the fruits that fall near the skull-shaped flask, reveal the symbolism of the plants as the cucurbit (gourd/container) for the alchemist and the classic alchemical Opus.

Five fruits remain hard and green, while one is ripe and depicted as white. The green color is assimilated to the *Nigredo*, (or alchemic first stage), that is related to the passage through which the elimination takes place (on the part of raw material), so that the thin, spiritual portion can then rise to the top, creating the *Albedo* layer, which relates to the white color, (of fruit portrayed in the image as already ripened). Another reference linked to the Opus is the head of Medusa depicted on the shield of St. George, as an element related to Mars. It has a connection to the Greek hero Perseus, who, in mythology, having cut the monster's head off, killed the sea dragon in order to free Princess Andromeda.

The image of the Princess was deprived of all the usual graces typically portrayed in female personifications of this sort and instead emphasized her abject terror, which further stressed the drama of the scene. At her feet are a calcified skull and bones, representing the banquet of the dragon and a clear, literal example of the legend of St. George taken from the 13<sup>th</sup> century collection of the *Golden Legend*, by Jacobus de Varagine.

This book represents one of the sources from which to draw the life and legend of St. George and in this collection it shares the lives of Saints Jacopo, and Dominican Genovese. It was completed towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

This work commemorating the lives of the saints became a method of scanning the yearly calendar, since each day was a recurrence, based on the date of the death of a saint. The cycles of time were separated into phases based on a complex division between lunar and solar calendars.

In this book, St. George reaches Silena, (in the Libyan province), where he finds that a dragon is terrorizing the population, while polluting the air with its foul breath. Each day in order to appease the mighty beast; two sheep are sacrificed to it. When they run out of animals to sacrifice, the villagers resort to giving up their own children, (regardless of race or social class). It is therefore fate that determines who will be sacrificed to this demanding monster.

One day, the king's daughter is the unlucky winner of the deadly lottery. Sadly the Princess is taken to be sacrificed. There she meets St. George, who having heard the terrible situation, wants to help. And so, St. George bravely stabs a spear into the dragon's weak spot, seriously injuring it. The Princess offers her belt which is wrapped around the dragon's neck to subdue it. The monstrous beast thus becomes tamed and is dragged off to town where it is presented and killed in front of the frightened citizens. It is cut to pieces and taken away by four oxen, and twenty thousand people become baptized on this celebratory day. In the story, the part about the belt of the Princess taming the wounded dragon means metaphorically that she is released and thereby becomes a spiritual being and part of the celestial kingdom.

The particular hairstyle of this Princess is similar to the High Priestess. She appears as a sort of 'Prisca Theologica', or 'Sophia', (symbol of Egyptian wisdom). This hermetic emblem finds its counterpart in the shape of a sphinx, in the scene of the Virgin of the Annunciation. The sphinx is the guardian of the forbidden threshold; keeping watch on the border of eternity. This also indicates the mystery and inscrutability of fate and alludes to how it is also a paradox. According to the concept of Pico della Mirandola, it was the divine revelation that cannot be divulged; a notion that appears in the first chapter of *Pymander* by Hermes Trismegistus, where it states:

*... No other reason for the Egyptians, with all their temples, had they to erect the Sphinx, except in wanting to assert that divine things do exist; while writing suitably, under enigmatic veils and poetically concealing their cover.*

*(Pico della Mirandola, De hominis dignitate etc., ed. E. Garin, Florence, 1942 p. 581)*

When Marsilio Ficino translated from Greek, the *Pymander*, (in 1463), as commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici, the hermetic books brought from Macedonia by Monaco Leonardo soon became widespread, both in their vernacular version and in Latin; while disseminating ancient symbolic precepts which soon became subjects of inspiration for many artists of that era, including Cosmé Tura.

In this regard, the revelation of ancient Egyptian wisdom was placed on the same level as Mosaic (Judaism); creating a dialectic, from which many esoteric subjects found fresh inspiration.

The scene of St. George fighting the dragon to save the Princess is inserted into a surreal landscape where the mountain becomes sacred to the initiate who must cross three circles of walls, (designed as a symbolic feat), in order to reach the summit.

The mountain works both as a symbolic axial, and as a link to the central point on which the departure of all energies of life are focused; and is understood to represent ascension from the bottom upwards. In this way the idea of stability, immutability and also purity are expressed. The small town at the top of the

mountain appears as a clear reminder of the sacred fortress (presented in *Picatrix* - a book of talismanic magic), where the symbolic city of Hermes Trismegistus is described:

*On top of the castle was raised a tower thirty cubits high, above which was placed a lighthouse whose color changed from day to day for seven days, after which it returned to the first color and thus the city was illuminated. There was also plenty of water, rich with many species of fish. Around the perimeter of the city were placed carved images arranged in such a way as to protect the inhabitant's virtues and keep them safe from evil and danger.*

The city wall is the protection that encompasses the world and defends it, while preventing from entry, negative forces. While these defensive walls represent the limit of a zone, they also lead to an internal defense, allowing free access to celestial forces. On the mountain top is the lighthouse, which can be accessed only after having implemented an initiatory path fraught with trials and peril.

The walls have a triple function, signifying the need to cross the three states that represent life in a *vertical* (or ascending) direction. While the horizontal direction is represented by the number four, and the four cardinal points (North, South, East & West) and the four elements (Fire, Water Air & Earth); the vertical path is identified by the number three, which represents the three states of existence: animal, human and divine and past, present and future.

To ascend the summit, one must first go through an intermediate stage represented by the Hanged Man depicted before the triple walls. This character indicates the necessary detachment which has taken place with respect to the material world, (to make the spiritual journey). Even the Norse God Odin, before receiving lightning, hung in a sacred tree for several days and after which, entered into direct contact with the upper echelons of the heavens.

This connects to the XII Hanged Man Trump card, which represents the evolutionary process that leads to a transformation of patterns. It indicates the abandonment of securities, both real and false and the venture to a new location. It imposes a direction diametrically opposed to that which had been previously pursued. The metaphor of the man hanging, acts as an intermediary stage between the state of transition and that of nirvana.

At the foot of the mountain, on the left, appear a series of characters recognizable as Moses, Plato and Zoroaster, (ancient Persian prophet who founded the first world religion), while on the right are: Orpheus (musician, poet, and prophet from ancient Greece), Virgil (ancient Roman poet), Plotinus (Greek philosopher), and Pythagoras (Greek philosopher, mathematician). At the center, emerges as the balance, the thrice great Magician, Hermes Trismegistus in meditation.

This mythical character, as initiator of the mysteries of Alchemy, was tied to the Egyptian esoteric culture. The symbolism that characterized him permeated the studies in Ferrara, with one of many sacred principles being that the language through which to express any form of art had the strong need for dual symbolism. One of these had to be accessible to all and translatable (exoteric); however, the other was directed only to the initiates. In other words those who were repositories of ancient wisdom (esoteric).



*Doors Closed, Cosmè Tura's St. George and the Dragon*





*Doors Open, Cosmè Tura's Virgin of the Annunciation*

Hermes therefore, represents the transition from one world to another, where the group on the left (Moses, Plato, Zoroaster), would indicate the exoteric knowledge, or those who related to the dissemination of ideas and concepts, which potentially could be translated into reality; while those on the right (Orpheus, Virgil, Plotinus and Pythagoras), would be in relation to esoteric energy, which is the untranslatable mystery, (that has links to these characters in various forms).

With doors open the organ shows the Virgin of the Annunciation and towards the top of it, we can see a draped cloth full of fruits: lemons, pears, quinces and pomegranate. The lemon seems to have a connection with the pinecone due to Semitic rites in honor of Dionysus. In Christianity it depicted fidelity in love, while in Jewish symbolism it meant the harvest and was held in the left hand to represent the feast of Tabernacles (symbolizing the restoration process). The pear evokes fertility and prosperity. The pear was sacrosanct to Hera, Aphrodite and Pomona (wood nymph goddess of fruitful abundance of ancient Rome). Justice, good governance, wise judgment were other attributes associated with this fruit.

The pomegranate is a symbol of the exuberance of life. For the Israelites, pomegranates were a symbol of blessing, originating from their covenant with God. In art, Coptic meets this tree as a symbol of resurrection. Painters of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries often put a pomegranate in the hand of baby Jesus, when he was with Mary, alluding to new life offered by Christ.

Its numerous seeds, enclosed in a juicy pulp, are suggestive of fertility, while the whole fruit was a symbol of Goddesses like Phoenician Astarte (Ashtoret), Demeter and Persephone (Ceres and Proserpine, as the return to earth of spring and fertility), Aphrodite (Venus), Hera and Athena.

Finally, the lemon, pear and pomegranate as a whole constitute spiritual fruitfulness and the receptivity of the Virgin, as well as indispensable elements through which generate the concept of the Annunciation (announcement made by angel Gabriel to Mary that she was going to bear a son, even though she was a virgin).

From an alchemical point of view, the fruits indicate the vessel of the Opus is at the peak of fertility and therefore ripe enough to generate the new divine creation through which the Great Opera (transformation) can be carried out.

The bird is in relation to the fisherman below and although it is not easy to identify, evokes a crested cormorant, probably during the changeover period, since the color of the plumage does not correspond to this species. In any case, two important symbols are combined; Air, evoked by the bird and Water, represented by the fisherman with this type of bird. Air, as a symbol of subtle communication, joins the fertility of the Water sign, which is apparent in the element of fertilization (present in Virgin Mary).

These three figures are turned to the right, or in other words, to the side of reason and communication, (both active and creative). They have two identifying marks: the ruby on the head of the angel, and the 'horn' of Mosaic Law shown as revelation on the head of the sphinx.

Near the top, appears an almond tree branch that represents the essential concept of the Opera, (alchemical work) which is hidden by what is superficial and connects to spirituality veiled by doctrines

and external practices. For this is the secret of living in the shadows and we learn to discover it by eating (by experiencing).

The mystical symbolism of the almond is of Christ, whose divine nature is concealed in the human body of the Virgin Mother.

The dormouse has always been considered symbolically as a hermetic mystery of existence and as a magical animal; able to retain much astral light, while condensing it inside its wee body and then sending it back out, enhanced and purified.

Continuing with this analysis, we focus on the representations of the planets present in the background of the scene of the Annunciation, which in turn relates to the scale of metals and their evolution through the cosmic spheres.

Behind Mary, appears the representation of the Sun as the golden eagle, (golden symbol par excellence). The strength of the Sun connects action, reason and realization. The metal that binds to the planet is gold, which is the sum of the power of alchemy and the ultimate realization which can elevate humankind.

The next symbol shows Venus, depicted with a Phrygian cap on the head, which recalls the ancient mystery cultures related to Mithraism (Mithras - a pre-Zoroastrian Persian deity worshipped throughout Persia and the Roman Empire during 1st - 4th centuries. Known as a 'soldier's god'. This religion was popular with Roman military in the 1st century, rivaling Christianity for a time.) It is also a symbol of initiation and freedom. Venus is connected to the power of love and understood as active energy and relates to the metal copper.

Saturn appears next, traditionally seen as feeble and archaic, indicating the enduring strength of time. Everything that represents the feeling of quenching; resulting in trials and burdens aimed at growth and production. The metal to which it binds is lead, which is, materially speaking, the first step from which the alchemist reaches the (*philosophical*) gold.

And next the *Primum Mobile*, appears (medieval and Renaissance astronomy: a version of the Ptolemaic system where an outer sphere is supposed to move around earth over the course of 24 hours, carrying the inner spheres along with it). It was seen as the place from which all life forms derived. This figure could also be the stratosphere of Fixed Stars, but his disheveled hair would tie him to the first concept, as it was depicted in the so-called Mantegna Tarot, by an anonymous artist from Ferrara, (engraved around 1465). In this regard, it should be noted that the Annunciation in the second set of the Tarot of Ferrara, displays a precise consistency with that of Cosmé Tura.

Behind the angel appears the iconography of the Moon with a raised scythe, as representative of the star, which indicates a contrast from the active force of the Sun; focusing instead on the inner world, through which everything is metaphorically thinning.

Finally, there is Mercury in the depiction of the androgyny, closely connected to Alchemy and metal of the same name.

In the box below, Mars appears with his warrior armor, representing the strength of condensation, (the energy that results is real and its metal is iron).

And lastly, just behind the wings of the angel is depicted a Jupiter blessing, indicating expansion and the strength of germination. Jupiter is the astrological planet connected to the supreme deity of the Greek pantheon, and in the Kabbalistic Jewish culture, is the Tau, or seal, and the last letter of the alphabet. It is the mark that God put on creation, or in other words, the search for the divine spark in our material world.

In short, from the section in the image with the Angel, the following is the subdivision of planets:

MOON	MERCURY
MARS	JUPITER

While in the area occupied by the Virgin, we find:

VENUS	SUN
PRIMUM MOBILE	SATURN

So the planets linked to the angel create the following equation: Luna equals Mercury and Mars is like Jupiter. That is, the irresistible force of the night (Moon) is condensed into Mercury as an active part of everything and then Mars is in the necessary position to result in the potential for germination (Jupiter).

This concept is the basis of the Annunciation, which is symbolically the preparation of the alchemist that combines with the Opus in order to reach the sublime transmutation.

Conversely, the planets that are linked to the Virgin create the following equation: Venus is to the Sun, as the First Mobile is to Saturn. That is to say, the movement of Venus, (with the Phrygian cap) indicates the magical power of nature becoming active and tangible as a star brighter than the sun. While the Primum Mobile, from which begins the energy of the stars, combines the elemental force of Saturn, creating the new focus, that of the so-called Lapis, (which was also recognized as an allegorical figure of Christ).

This tetrad (series of four lunar eclipses in a row) is no coincidence in the area occupied by the Virgin, and is intended to alchemically represent a sacred vessel in which there exists the Great Opera (alchemical process).

Turning now to the panel with the Virgin; there is a small bird whispering in her ear. This wild creature communicates in the mysterious language of birds, which means correspondences with the oldest esoteric messages. On a symbolic level, it would be the language of the chosen ones or at least the secret language of the initiates, (since birds would be seen as a representation of angels).

The dormouse can be seen nearby, whose energy force is not free but rather linked to specific purpose, through a red cord (lifeblood color), which then connects to the column near the right hand of the Virgin.

The column is a clear sign of stability, evoking the primordial tree or connection between earth and the heavens. Therefore it indicates that the action, as well as a creative force must be subservient to a single cause, starting from the depths of earth and rising toward the highest peaks. On the Madonna's knee is an open book; a symbol of science and of a communicated mystery revealed.

Back in the section where the angel appears, we notice on his head the precious stone, ruby; (following the symbolic order of stones, also called the 'eye of the dragon').

This symbol refers to the concept expressed on the doors where St. George defeats the dragon. The material beast, subjugated by the Saint-Hero, has morphed, while rising in an exalted manner and thus, enunciating the great mystery of Mary. Or in other words, conception without carnal contact.

Even the Princess that appears on the closed doors is at last freed from the material world of the dragon and of her own passions, while transforming into light. The fine layer has thus been freed from the thick, as occurs in Alchemy, and the same transmutation accomplished through a higher transcendent reality.

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### **Treasure Chest of Schifanoia Palace**

Palazzo Schifanoia is a Renaissance palace in Ferrara built for the Este family. The name Schifanoia is thought to originate from 'schivar la noia', meaning literally 'escape from boredom' which accurately describes the original intention of the palazzo and the other villas in close proximity to where the Este court relaxed. Highlights of its decorations are the allegorical, astrological frescos with details in tempera either by or inspired by Francesco del Cossa and Cosmè Tura and executed between 1469–70. They remain a unique treasure of that era.

The palace had its origins as a single-story structure without wings, built for Alberto V d'Este (1385), as a modest retreat, intended for relaxation and diversions (delizie), in the nature of a banquet hall with a cosmopolitan entrance and garden. Comparable to a suburban Roman villa, although the Palazzo Schifanoia had long predated the first pleasure villa designed in Renaissance Rome, (that Belvedere built for Nicholas V).

In 1452 Borso d'Este received the title of Duke for the imperial fiefs of Modena and Reggio Emilia bestowed by Emperor Frederick III. The occasion for the cycle of frescos was the expected investiture of Borso d'Este as Duke of Ferrara in 1471 by Pope Paul II. The subtext of festivities embodied in the fresco series is the proper ordering of humankind and nature under the good government of the Duke, (thus guaranteeing peace and prosperity in the Este dominions).



*Borso d'Este, IV Emperor in Tarot of Ferrara*  
[www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm](http://www.arnellart.com/museodeitarocchi/msdk38.htm)

In the Salone dei Mesi ('Hall of Months'), there is a Pagan series of the months that presents the cycle of the year as an allegorical pageant with appropriate Olympian Gods presiding on their fanciful chariots, drawn by the proper beasts for each deity, with suitable personifications of the constellations of the zodiac. The frescos were realized between 1469–70 by artisans of the d'Este household. The larger figures are based on drawings by Cosmé Tura, and the vignettes of seasonal labors and activities of the Ferrarese court were supervised under the watchful eye of Borso d'Este, with the astrological figures designed by Francesco del Cossa and Ercole de' Roberti. The elaborate theme of the allegorical presentations must have come from Pellegrino Prisciani, the court astrologer of the immediate Borso d'Este inner circle, with some details drawn from Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum*. In the nearby Sala delle Virtù ('Hall of Virtues'), the sculptor Domenico di Paris painted the stucco reliefs in a *frieze of putti* with symbols of the Cardinal and Theological Virtues, under a compartmented ceiling.

The façade was originally decorated with a cornice (ornamental molding) of feigned battlements; its surface smoothly stuccoed and decorated with geometric designs of colorful imitation marble, which has since been lost, lending a somewhat dour public façade to Palazzo Schifanoia that was not what Borso d'Este had intended. The rich white marble entrance door survives, though its faded colors have since weathered away and art historians disagree on whether it should be attributed to the painter-designer Francesco del Cossa or to Biagio Rossetti. Above the arched door, flanked by pilasters, the Este coat of arms is proudly displayed along with the unicorn – a symbol of the Duke's benevolence and a source of patronage (Este court *spirit animal* or mascot). In 1493 the terracotta cornice was added to designs by Biagio Rossetti, who was also commissioned by Ercole I d'Este to extend the palace. At one time the visitor passed directly from the Salone dei Mesi into the gardens reached by a monumental staircase from the summer veranda, but sadly such structures were demolished during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When Palazzo



Schifanoia came into the possession of the Ferrara community during the aftermath of World War I, only seven of the months in the Salone remained legible.

The lower section of the fresco was dedicated to the city, with tributes to Borso d'Este. Here the courtly events appropriate to the particular time of year were depicted. In the middle section, Zodiac signs were represented by three figures of the *decani*.

In the top sphere, the Olympian Gods were painted in the order established by the Astronomicon of Manilio. They reproduced the traditional planetary deities, as well as the writings of Marsilio Ficino. He listed as the protection of every sign of the zodiac twelve Olympian Gods.

Aby Warburg was the first scholar to take notice of this cycle of frescos. He gave an astrological interpretation and noted a similarity with the Mantegna Tarot.

In Schifanoia, astrological figures create a mysterious connection between rational symbols and the magic from the Hellenistic culture. The divine images don't have personal power but are subject to the laws of Fate. They must follow the laws of destiny.

Greek Olympus and Eastern demonology live in perfect magical harmony. The deities emanate their influence through the signs of the Zodiac and fixed stars, which are replaced by the decani. Tradition dictates that the decani be powerful astral ancient forms of divinity. They determine and influence the individual's destiny. They have Egyptian origins (IX and X dynasty, XXII-XXI century B.C.) They occupy a space above the planets and have their own powers and characteristics. They have an amplitude of  $10^{\circ}$ , 3 for each of the 12 zodiac signs. In this Palace, there are only 21.

Warburg explains this with a Greek astrologer, the Sphaera Barbarica of Teucro. He completed the stellar catalogue of Aratus that came from Babylon and Egypt. This work came through Persia to Albumasar, by an Indian astrologer. His book arrived in Spain and then spread to Europe.

To be clear, a reminder of the meaning of *Decani* and *Facies*: the zodiac is constituted by  $360^{\circ}$  and divided into 36 equal parts of  $10^{\circ}$  each, which are called 'Deans' (*decani*). Every *decano* is influenced by the planet and zodiac sign in which it is located. The astrological chart indicates the position of the individual decano and division of other smaller subcategories called *Facies*. Etymologically the word *Facies* means the 'look' or 'appearance' and describes an association of characteristics that differentiate one celestial body from another.

The *Decani* can be considered as *Facies* ('faces/personas') since they take their images from the seven planetary deities. The first decano of Aries, is *Vir Niger*, behind which Perseus hides. This decano was known in India too. A double sided ax, turban and scimitar are represented on the Bianchini Table.

*Vir Niger* is Perseus, and its constellation is not far from Aries. He holds the sword in his right hand while holding the head of Medusa in the other. Mercury's winged shoes, the helmet of Pluto, the bag (*Kibisis*) to accommodate the Gorgon's head, the shining shield of Minerva are among his other gifts. This representation comes from the legend of *Cepheus and Cassiopeia*, who were the parents of *Andromeda*, (the girl rescued by Perseus). This story was recounted by Manilio in the Schifanoia cycle of the decani set

in the middle band of the first section and could refer to the expectation of sacrifice. Vir Niger is portrayed killing the monster to free humanity from primordial shadows.

The top sphere of frescos is connected to the mythology of Gods and influenced by symbolism of Eastern demonology. The animals have a magical rather than mythological relationship with deities, (Picatrix, a manual of astrolatry, from Mesopotamia). The people worshiped the prophet Hidris, the Egyptian equivalent of Hermes Trismegistus.

The great talisman on the wall of Salone dei Mesi holds a mysterious magnetism handed down by the lapidary of Alfonso X el Sabio and also the King of Castile (1260). The precious stones were regarded as the earthly reflection of stars from heaven that send out their light and energy. The stars and stones form a principle unity, where every stone has its twin star; the same color as well as same vibration.

The Schifanoia cycle represents a sort of artistic amulet, where the demons of the 'decani' are acting on the fate of humankind, although their strength is controlled by a greater Demiurge, the wise magician or astrologer, who is able to turn potential into positive energy.

### **March**

Dedicated to the sign of Aries. It has the protection of Minerva. The images of these decani are Mars, the Sun and Venus.

The top layer is elevated by the triumph of Minerva, the protectress of March, with sword and book. She is proudly followed by lawyers and humanists of the University. The women who weave represent the Renaissance ideal of the feminine, but also the special dexterity (needed to weave wool) of those born under the sign of Aries.

In the central portion there is the sign of Aries and below him is the Sun.

The decano, Aries and the Sun are inscribed in an *isosceles triangle*. This shape evokes the Deltoton constellation, placed under the figure of Andromeda, and above the head of Aries.

The first figure on the left Facies of Mars is a young and energetic male with a rope around his waist, which he holds with his left hand. It should be a male figure, according to written tradition, holding the double ax in his hand.

The Facies of the Sun (central figure), is a regal-looking woman sitting while wearing a sumptuous, loose-fitting red gown. Represented is the pattern of *Cassiopeia*.

The third Facies of Venus is on the right. A blond, well dressed young man holding an arrow with his right hand and a circle with his left. The arrow represents the rod, which is an attribute of the Enioco, Auriga constellation, where it appears as either a whip or a spear.

It has long been claimed that those born under this constellation could conduct and coordinate chariot horses, while concentrating their energy in a circular conversion, like the Enioco chariot moving across the heavens. The ring would connect with Via Lactea, which was considered the only ring visible in the

celestial orb, as mentioned by Hyginus (De Astronomy, III, 12). In the lower section is Justice, (as directed by Borso). The word IUSTICIA alludes to the Este Palace.

## April

Corresponds to the sign of Taurus. Venus protects this realm. The decani are Mercury, the Moon and Saturn.

At the top of the fresco Venus, presiding Goddess of love and the season of rebirth, is carried in triumph on a lovely carriage pulled by two graceful swans. She is adorned with roses while young lovers struck by Cupid, play music and embrace in her garden *amore*. At her feet Mars kneels. Aby Warburg identifies him as *Lohengrin*, the legendary knight of the swan. The fresco is full of fertility symbolism and also depicts the Three Graces in the background.

The first figure on the left is a Mercury Facies; a blonde woman with a child. The woman could relate to Pleiades of the seven daughters of Atlas and the nymph Pleione Oceanid (since through the union of Jupiter with one of these girls, Maia, was born Hermes (Mercury), the decano of this Facies).

In the center (Moon Facies) there is a naked man wearing a large turban. He holds a big white key in his right hand. He is the guardian and his color recalls the brightness of Sirius.

The Saturn Facies is another vision of Vir Niger. He has boar tusks and holds a winged snake in his right hand and an arrow in the left. A white horse and dog are behind him. The dog looks a bit like a hare, and along with the horse Pegasus, would represent Orion, the great hunter.

In fact, the constellation of the Hare relates to Orion and Sirius. In this case, Sirius is connected to Venus through the hare, and is a classic symbol of love. In the top sphere of the fresco, where Venus and love reign, are many rabbits and hares. The winged snake is the constellation of Eridanus, which is located next to the hand of Orion. Picatrix has described a talisman that represents this same figure.

The tusks of a wild boar reference *Hyades*, the seventh star over Taurus, also called *Succulae*. This name translated into Latin, means pig. The arrow may refer to Aldebaran, the brightest of the Hyades, according to Ptolemy.

In the lower section, Borso smiles to mock Scoccola while giving him money. There are two falconers: one who observes a hawk fall and the other with a red hat as his aid.

In the top strip a race depicts an event held in Ferrara at Saint Sabastian church to honor and celebrate Saint George.

## May

Corresponds with the astrological sign of Gemini and has the protection of Apollo. The images of the decani are Jupiter, Mars and the Sun.

In the upper sphere, Apollo sits in his mighty chariot, drawn by four horses of different colors, connecting to the four times of day. In the right hand he holds a globe and in his left, a bow. The chariot is driven by the

Goddess Aurora. At his foot there is a lute, (symbol of music) and near his head, two birds (one being a swan, the symbol of poetry).

Above, can be found winged Pegasus and nine Muses, the source of *Castalia* (a spring on Mount Parnassus in ancient Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses, and believed to be a source of inspiration). On the other side, are a group of poets in the countryside with a tripod covered with Python skin and four sparrow hawks, which were sacred to Apollo.

The first decano on the left is Facies of Jupiter. He appears to be a nobleman standing with a stick in his right hand, while the other hand blesses a page, (a sign of kindness and protection). This gentleman could be the 'great charioteer' and the page, the 'little charioteer' of the sky.

The decano in the middle of the Facies of Mars shows two naked men. One is kneeling and has hands crossed over his chest. The other plays a flute with one knee on the ground. This constellation is Hercules who traditionally was depicted naked, kneeling with his right knee on the ground, with a club in his right hand and a lion skin in the left. While the other man, Apollo's twin brother, plays the flute, (rather than the lyre). Also according to Ptolemy, the two stars placed above the head of Gemini, Castor and Pollux, were Hercules and Apollo.

The man of the third decano Facies is of the Sun, and wears elegant attire. He holds in his hands a bow and arrow while carrying the quiver on his left side. *Albumasar* (ancient astrologer, astronomer, and Islamic philosopher) also described just such a man.

In the lower, now destroyed section, it had shown Duke Borso receiving gifts from a peasant on his knees, which probably indicated a connection with the three parts of the fresco: Borso receives the benefits of Apollo, mediated by the royal figure of the first decano of Gemini, whose page is on his knees in reverence.

## June

Corresponds with the zodiac sign of Cancer and its protector is Mercury. The decani are Venus, Mercury and the Moon.

In the upper tier of the fresco is the triumph of Mercury, the God that protects commerce, who holds the *caduceus* (ancient Roman herald's wand, typically with two serpents entwined, carried by the messenger God) and the lyra (constellation), and stands on a chariot being pulled by two eagles. On the right are shops with customers, while on the left are bearded merchants, dressed in an *Oriental* fashion.

In the bottom section, young people dig a grave, and we can also see Argo has been beheaded. While nearby are a wolf, a dog and a monkey (representing various forms of commerce, from dependability to thievery).

The first decano on the left is a Facies of Venus; a young half-naked woman with the central portion of her body surrounded by a leafy branch. According to *Albumasar*, she is connected to *Satyrus*, as well as in the *Sfera Barbarica of Teucro*. *Satyrus* is the first decano of the Cancer sign. He could be related to the transformation of Orion, who was drunk and used violence against *Merope*, (daughter of Enopione). From this comes the connection between *Satyr* and Orion.

The second decano of the central part of the fresco has Facies of Mercury, which shows two elegant women. The first lady is standing with hands crossed over her stomach, while the second sits on a bright white pillow. She holds a stick with her right hand and wears a *diadem* (jeweled crown worn as a symbol of sovereignty).

Albumasar confirms they are two of the three virgins, of the Three Graces, where one half of the figure ends with the shape of a dog (Sirius) and the other half is on the *Boreal Donkey* (northern hemisphere); the central accesses of the sign of Cancer. Avieno, on the other hand, identifies them as Isis and the dog as Anubis. Ceres holds the ear in his hand burned by the heat of Sirius. The words *Nephele*, *Phatne* and *Nebula Praesepe* correspond to the white star cluster, at the center of the sign of Cancer, between two stars called Asellus Borealis and Australis.

Moon Facies, the third decano on the right, is represented with monstrous features. This man has webbed feet and claws and attacks a dragon-winged snake. His left foot is on the stern of a ship full of gold and silver (moon Facies).

Varahamihira describes a man covered in the coils of a snake climbing in a sailboat, as corresponding to the constellation of Argo's boat. Albumasar also agreed with this assessment and interpreted the webbed feet as typical of a tortoise, and as reference to the ancient Egyptian decano Sit, typically shown with one or two turtles. The snake is a part of the Hydra constellation.

## July

Corresponds with the sign of Leo. Jupiter has the protection of Cybele. The decani are Saturn, Jupiter and Mars.

In the upper sphere, Jupiter appears on a chariot pulled by two lions. He is holding a thunderbolt and lotus flower; symbols of power and goodness. On the opposite side of the chariot is Cybele (Earth Mother Goddess) and on her head is a tower-shaped crown. She has a scepter and keys, both symbols of earthly treasures. On the left is an image of the marriage between Bianca, (sister of Borso) and Galeotto della Mirandola (in 1468). Pico's brother was a harsh critic of the Arabic doctrine of decani. Above, there is a chapel with a priest praying at an altar, while people talk in the courtyard and others return from harvesting.

On the other side appears a cluster of singing monks, while behind them are knights who reference the help given by Borso to Pio II in the crusade against the Turks. According to Aby Warburg, the two groups of knights and monks were meant to disguise the Renaissance attributes of Cybele, (or rather, the Gallic people), the singing priests with their tympani's, cymbals and drums (the dervishes of the Muslim period) and Korybantes agitators with swords. In fact, above on the left, in the midst of a rocky landscape, you can see deer and on the right, a mutilated man lying on the ground who represents Attis, (who punished himself for his failing loyalty to Cybele). The area to the right would be the interpretation of the *Carme* by *Catullus* (Latin poet).

The first decano on the left, the Facies of Saturn, is a man sitting on a tree with thick roots, together with a dog and a bird with black feathers. According to Varahamihira, portrayed in this decano is a tree, a

vulture, a jackal, a dog and a man; which together create the combination of the Egyptian deities: the God with the head of a hawk and the depiction of *Hellenistic Chnubis*, the imagined dog-head and coiled leontocephalic snake. It is possible that from this snake's body the Tree of Jesse is derived. The dog's head has transformed into an entire animal and the falcon-headed God has split in two and takes the form of vulture and man.

This decano corresponds to Hydra, which runs from Cancer to Virgo, on whose backs are placed the constellations of the Cup and Raven. These constellations recall the astral myth when Apollo sent a raven, his sacred animal, to retrieve sacrificial water from a cup. The raven rested while eating from a fig tree, thereby delaying return. He brought water to Apollo, but was late and so the God punished him by forbidding him to drink during the period of fig maturation. The Crow and Cup were placed on the back of the Hydra while the Raven tried to drink from the cup.

In the center is the second decano, Facies of Jupiter, showing a man with an unusual nose and a white wreath on his head, an arrow in his right hand and a bow in his left. He has a lion-style ensemble and is kneeling. Varahamihira describes just such a man with a hooked nose and as fierce as a lion. This image recalls Sirius, according to the Greeks. The *crown of myrtle* (Little King) would be *Regulus* (Alpha Leonis), the star that shines in the heart of the Lion of heaven.

The majesty of this sign correlates to Jupiter and his Facies. The protection of Jupiter-Cybele is evidenced by Manilius. He says that *Phrygia*, a region devoted to the cult of Cybele, is dominated by the sign of Leo.

The third decano on the left Facies of Mars is a monstrous looking *Vir Niger* holding in his left hand a leg of meat which he eats, while on his right side hangs a sword from his belt. Albumasar describes the man as; swarthy and repulsive, seeming worried and anxious. He has both fruit and meat in his mouth, and holds a jar. In the bottom panel, appears Borso d'Este with his courtiers, while on the left is the *retting of flex* (food and fiber crops).

## August

Corresponds to the zodiac sign of Virgo. Ceres is the protection. The decani are Sun, Venus and Mercury.

In the top section is the triumph of Ceres in the chariot pulled by two dragons, which may help the Goddess search for her daughter Persephone. She holds ears of corn and her hair is similar to the style worn in the courts of the North, (two horns covered with a veil). Ceres is surrounded by folks in their finery. On the left, is a rural scene and in the background, a noble figure contemplates the landscape from a cliff, while being followed by a young page. On the right, a group of merchants look to discard grain. Above them is Pluto abducting Persephone on a chariot drawn by dragons.

The first decano on the right, Facies of the Sun, shows *Virgo Inetra* (Persephone) with long blond hair. The woman stands with her right hand holding a bundle of corn, which appears as an attribute of Demeter and Ceres in the upper section of the fresco. With the left hand she holds a pomegranate, (which relates to Persephone who dwells with Pluto in the underworld during seasons when the earth hibernates). In the hands of the heavenly Virgin were placed two blue stars: *Spica* (Alpha Virginis) in the left and *Vindemiatrix* in the right. *Spica* alludes to Demeter-Ceres, and the other star is connected to the Bacchic



myth of *Erigone*, (harbinger of harvest). Aratus identifies the Virgin *Astraea-Dike*, as the Goddess of the mythical Golden Age.

The second decano, in the center Facies of Venus, is an Eastern man, with mustache, beard and turban. On the right appears a tablet with some numbers visible and a white stylus. He appears seated while floating in space and wears a large flowing robe that leaves his left shoulder bare. His features are reminiscent of the Eastern Nabu, the Babylonian God (like Hermes-Mercury), who 'wielded a stylus on the tablet of destiny'. The iconography of this deity makes him the patron of scribes and astronomy and can also be found in the great astronomical treatise of astrology by Michael Scott, (written from 1243 to 1250 for Federico II di Svevia).

The third decano on the left Facies of Mercury is a woman kneeling in prayer, dressed in a monk's habit. Varahamihira describes such a woman with bucket and ladle, who went to temple. These two tools are a variant of the *sistrum* and *situla* (attributes of Isis). The temple corresponds to the *Atrium of Teucer* (the first decano of the Virgin who was also identified with the Temple of Isis).

In the lower section of the fresco are scenes of court life with Borso advancing on horseback towards a building (perhaps Belriguardo, painted by Cosmé Tura). We also notice horses stepping on sheaves made by the farmers.

### September

Corresponds to the sign of Libra. Vulcan is its protection. The images of the decani are the Moon, Saturn and Jupiter. It appears to be the apotheosis of Lust seated on the chariot, depicted as an immoral woman displaying her body. The chariot is pulled by monkeys.

The connection between Vulcan (the God of fire and son of Jupiter and Juno, and husband of Venus) and the monkeys was clarified by Aby Warburg. Apparently Boccaccio erroneously interpreted a sentence by Servius, who claimed that Vulcan had fallen from heaven to the island of Lemnos, and was brought *simiis* ('monkeys') instead of *sintiis* ('Sinti', meaning the inhabitants of this island).

To the left of Vulcan, a boy emerges from a flaming cloud, bearing a crown with his right hand raised, which is probably referring to the crown of Ariadne, forged by Vulcan and placed in the sky by Bacchus.

On the right, Venus and Mars are shown in love, and the background is a city with towers and a group of cherubs. The first decano on the left of the moon Facies is alluding to a man who wears a vest by moonlight (moon Facies). The man blows into a long flute with his right hand held up, while holding a bird upside down, tied to a stick with his left hand.

Albumasar identifies him as depicting the constellation of Bootes. The upside down bird could be the crow, whose tail is raised in this decano, (the final part of the Hydra). In Picatrix and Lapidary of Alfonso X of Castile, there is a transformation with the man holding a spear in his right hand while on the left, an upside down bird.

The second decano in the center of Saturn Facies shows a man kneeling. His face and the palms of his hands are facing upward as if he is attempting to fly. The same is presented by Albumasar.

The third decano on the left, Facies of Jupiter, is an archer who seems ready to pierce a victim, represented by a man with hands clasped in a gesture of despair. Both Albumasar and Varahamihira identified this image as the ancient constellation of Centaurus. Even the decano of Schifanoia represents the same constellation and that of this victim. In fact, the beast is the *lupus*, a term with which the translators called the corresponding Arabic constellation. The victim represented in the Hall of Months fresco however, is not the lupus, but a strange metamorphosis of Ariadne asleep.

In the upper sphere of the fresco, the crown of Ariadne is depicted, forged by Vulcan, and this symbol is also present in the descriptions of Teucer and Albumasar. The posture of Ariadne asleep, with his arm resting gently behind his head, has turned into a posture of despair, typically of a victim, (such as in this case of the Centaur).

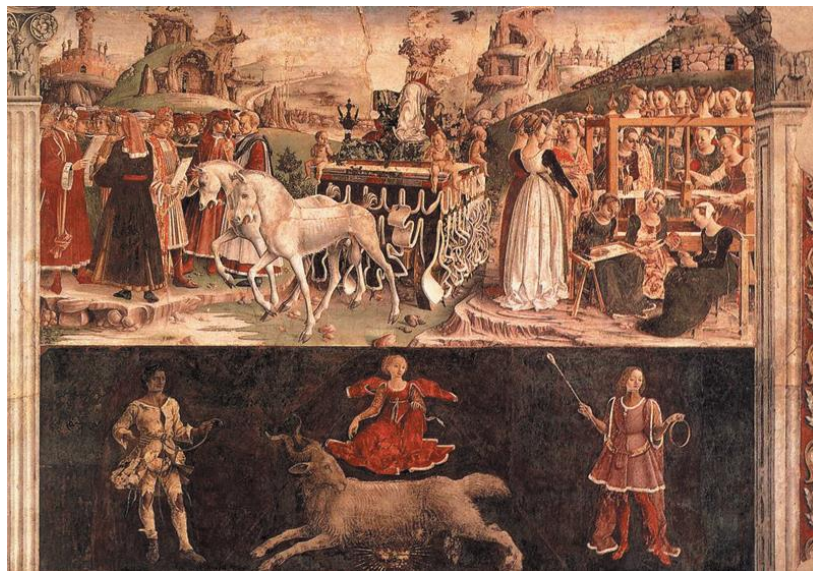
At the bottom is shown a historic meeting of Borso with the Venetian ambassador, Paolo Morosini. He went to Ferrara to come to an agreement on the issue of the borders of Polesine of Rovigo. Knights guard and peasants appear intent on harvesting.

### Palazzo Schifanoia Museo ~ Schifanoia Palace Museum

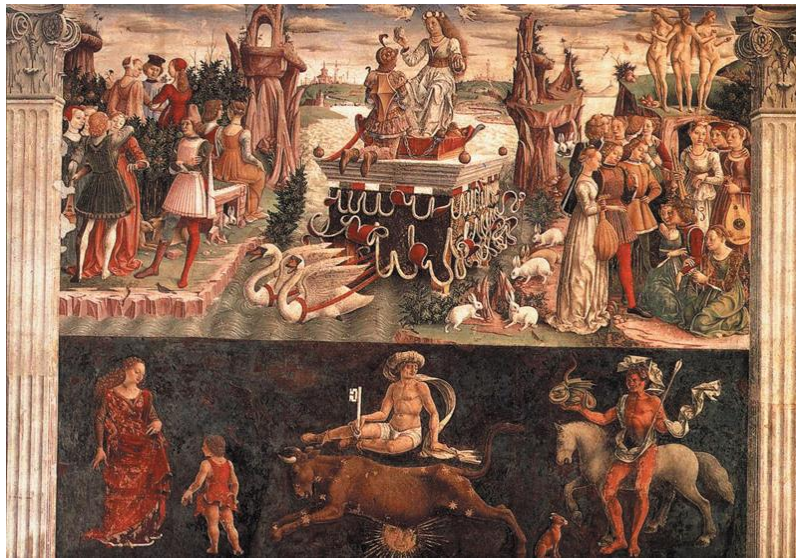
Via Scandiana, 23, Ferrara

Hours: 9:30 AM to 6 PM, Closed Mondays

[www.artecultura.fe.it/159/museo-schifanoia](http://www.artecultura.fe.it/159/museo-schifanoia)



*March, Palazzo Schifanoia*



*April, Palazzo Schifanoia*



*May, Palazzo Schifanoia*





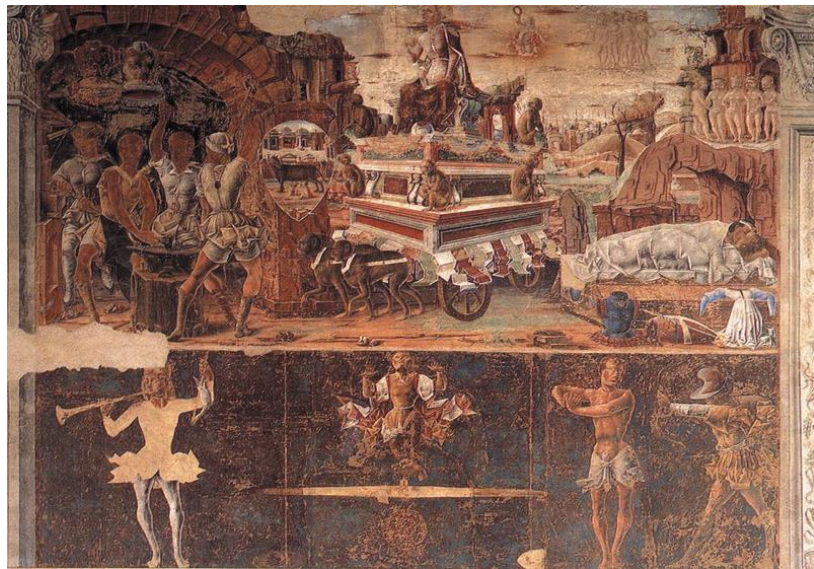
*June, Palazzo Schifanoia*



*July, Palazzo Schifanoia*



*August, Palazzo Schifanoia*



*September, Palazzo Schifanoia*



## Museo dei Tarocchi in Riola

The founders of the Tarot Museum, director Morena Poltronieri and Ernesto Fazioli met in 1992 and have been collecting, reading and studying Tarot since the early 1980's. The concept for the museum took root in 2005 and with much sweat and toil has transformed from a 400 year old, abandoned general store into an enchanting, magical gallery full of incredible, unusual art.



*Museo dei Tarocchi, Interior*

The museum houses an impressive collection of international decks from the very rare to the bizarre and most popular with beautiful and moving imagery from many decks displayed in every nook and cranny. Their attention to detail is astounding. There are tree trunks that part to reveal hidden shelves of cards and tiny doors with lit windows hidden in stone walls that open to display precious miniature artworks. Unusual sculptures, paintings, stained glass and countless international decks populate the large, three story museum, showcasing works from the rare and obscure to the most prized.

The Hermetena publishing house opened in 2001 and has produced important books on Goddess history and various esoteric arts and international and metaphysical tour travel (mostly in Italian) as well as lovely and intriguing, limited edition decks, which are available in the bookshop. In 2014 an additional publishing branch, Mutus Liber was opened.

It is apparent from their dedication in all that they do; the publication of limited edition decks, the cataloging and housing of a vast collection of art and texts, the hosting of international tours and projects,



exhibits, workshops and conferences, etc., that they are very passionate about preserving the history of Tarot and hope to share their great collection and resources with us and future generations. In January 2015 they held a conference on Tarot art history at the University of Bologna with a panel of experts, including a special catalog and month long exhibit of Tarot art, which drew a huge crowd and was the first time such an event had occurred there since the Renaissance era. Some of the most important Italian Tarot scholars and noteworthy speakers to present aside from Morena Poltronieri and Ernesto Fazioli were Andrea Vitali, Giovanni Pelosini, Girolamo Zorli, Alberto Beltramo and Biancastella Antonino.



*Museo dei Tarocchi, Interior*

Beloved Tarot historian, Mary K. Greer shared this after a visit to the Tarot Museum, on the 2011 Tarot Art History Tour (hosted by Morena Poltronieri, Arnell Ando and Michael McAteer):

“Yesterday’s (blog) picture was from the Museo dei Tarocchi in the mountains near Bologna. Morena Poltronieri from the Museo has been our amazing guide. It’s an unbelievable place filled with original tarot artworks. We had a party there with Hermann Haindl, his wife and several Italian tarotists. She knows so much about the history of these places. We’ve been to the Schifanoia Palace in Ferrara to see the Hall of

the Month's frescos. In Bologna we saw several 'triumphs' in the church of San Giovanni and an ancient temple of Isis in the Church of San Stefano. Today we are stopping by the Science Museum to see a late 15th c. fresco of Tarocchi players. The Castello Sforzesco and Osvaldo's shop in Milan were equally fabulous. It's really hard to express every wonderful thing we are doing..."

**Museo dei Tarocchi - International Tarot Museum**

Via Palmieri 5/1 - 40038 Riola (Bo)

Museum: [www.museodeitarocchi.net](http://www.museodeitarocchi.net)

Bookshop: [www.mutusliber.it/tarot.html](http://www.mutusliber.it/tarot.html)

For Reservations E-mail: [info@museodeitarocchi.it](mailto:info@museodeitarocchi.it)

**Directions to the Tarot Museum** (in the village of Riola), coming by Train: from Central Station, Bologna (West Platform), board train to Porretta Terme. Departures are every hour (only 2nd class tickets are available). Arrive to Riola in just under an hour. Walking distance is roughly 10 minutes.

**By bus**, the Stop is: Borgo Riola Vecchia. Distance from the bus stop to the Tarot Museum is around 5 minutes on foot.

**By car**: Take the Autostrada del Sole towards Florence. Recommended exit: Sasso Marconi (the nearest exit is actually Riveggio, but to reach Riola it is necessary to travel over mountain roads with many curves.) Afterwards, follow the directions of State Road 64 to Riola.

## Siena

### Siena Cathedral's Philosophical Symbols

Take Capitano Street to get to Piazza del Duomo (the Cathedral Plaza), where you will find one of the greatest examples of Romanesque-Gothic architecture in all of Italy. It was built between the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on the site of an earlier church, (which had existed since the 9<sup>th</sup> century) and as was tradition, was erected over an even more ancient temple, dedicated to the Goddess Minerva, (also known as Athena and as Pallas) of Etruscan origin and embraced by the Romans as the protector of crafts. Later she became the patron and guardian of intellectual art and of every city. The cathedral was consecrated on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1179, although its construction was never completed and we do not know exactly how it looked before this period. It owes its construction to the deputation of the Opera di Santa Maria, in close connection with the town and whose existence is documented since 1190.

The façade of the Duomo is facing the Hospital of Saint Mary della Scala; a powerful and ancient organization which was initially only a hospice, but became a hospital during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The site was used to accommodate pilgrims. It was not owned by the Templars, although the Knights intervened on important decisions. The organization is home to pilgrims of *Via Francigena*, (both the poor and orphaned), as well as being a hospital for cures for the terminally ill. For this reason there are renowned doctors in residency. In practice, the hospital followed the same intentions of monastic orders of chivalry, (such as the Jerusalemites), and the Teutonic Knights Templar; caring for the body, but most especially the soul.

Work on the Duomo from 1258 continued, thanks to the monks of the Abbey of Saint Galgano; while completion, including various works of art, occurred over time. Giovanni Pisano (c. 1250 – c. 1315), a sculptor, painter and architect, began work on the façade of Siena Cathedral and provided its sculptures. Each of the cardinal points (west, east, north, and south) has their own distinct vision; but the west façade is by far the most impressive. Acting as the main entryway to the Duomo, it boasts three portals. The central one is capped by a bronze Sun. The upper section has Gothic gables and the statues were born from the inspiration of prophets, philosophers and patriarchs. Three large mosaics on the upper gables of the façade are the crowning jewels. The large central mosaic (created by Luigi Mussini) shows the Coronation of the Virgin, while smaller mosaics on either side represent the Nativity scene and the Presentation of Mary in the Temple and these were created by Alessandro Franchi.

The exterior and interior were constructed of marble in alternating, contrasting stripes symbolically linked to the black and white horses of the legendary city's founders, Senius and Aschius (not unlike the black and white horses of the VII Chariot card). In reality the city was founded in the Etruscan age and later developed by Romans as a military post during the reign of Octavian Augustus. Adjoining the Cathedral is the Piccolomini library, which has colorful frescos from around 1500. The ceiling is covered with painted panels of mythological creatures. Pagan and early Tarot symbolism can be found in the imagery. In the center of the library is a statue of the Three Graces (Roman version of a Greek original), also tethered to Tarot symbology.



*Façade of Duomo, Siena*

### Mosaic Floor

The entire floor of the cathedral is covered with inlaid marble mosaic tiles and is one of the most ornate of its kind in Italy. This undertaking continued from the 14<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Around forty artisans and craftsmen made contributions. The floor consists of fifty-six panels in different sizes (same number of Minor Arcana cards).

Most panels have a rectangular shape, but later ones, located in the transept, are hexagons or rhombuses. These represent the sibyls, scenes from the Old Testament, allegories and virtues and include a lot of ancient symbolism that we also find in early Tarot. Most are still in their original condition. The earliest



scenes were made by a graffito technique; that is, drilling tiny holes and scratching lines in the marble and filling these with bitumen or mineral pitch. In a later stage, black, white, green, red and blue marble intarsias were used. The technique of marble inlay also evolved over the years, finally resulting in a dynamic contrast of light and dark, giving it an almost modern, impressionistic composition.

Artisan, Domenico Beccafumi (1486-1551) mainly worked on these and executed thirty inlays from 1517-1547. The earliest panel was probably the *Wheel of Fortune* (Ruota della Fortuna), which was laid in 1372 (restored in 1864). The Four Virtues: *XIV Temperance, Prudence, VIII Justice* and *XI Fortitude* (Temperanza, Prudenza, Giustizia e Fortezza) and *Mercy* (Misericordia) date from 1406. The uncovered floor typically can only be seen for ten weeks per year, including September. The rest of the time, much of the floor tends to be covered with only a few precious tiles on display.

The first panel of the nave shows Hermes Trismegistus in the act of sharing science with the Egyptians. This work by Giovanni di Stefano dates back to 1488. This inscription reads: 'Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus Contemporaneus Moysi', (*Demonstrating a Similarity with his Contemporary, Moses*). It is actually quite remarkable, when considering the presence of the Magician Hermes is in a Catholic place of worship, and this has certainly raised a few eyebrows over the years. St. Augustine, considered it an era when people worshiped idols and demons. Here then, is the mythical Hermes Trismegistus, aka: *Thrice-Great Hermes*, the so-called creator of art, magic and alchemy; (naturally from these come astrology and tarot). Some identified him as the Egyptian god Thoth, the inventor of hieroglyphics, medicine, astronomy and theosophy. The Greeks called him Hermes, or Mercury; Messenger of the Gods, representing knowledge.

His symbol is the *caduceus* (iconic winged staff with two snakes wrapped around it), and he is seen as protector of trade and production, but also is a psychopomp. In other words, one who guides the dead through the symbolic journey and thereby is a purveyor of life and rebirth.

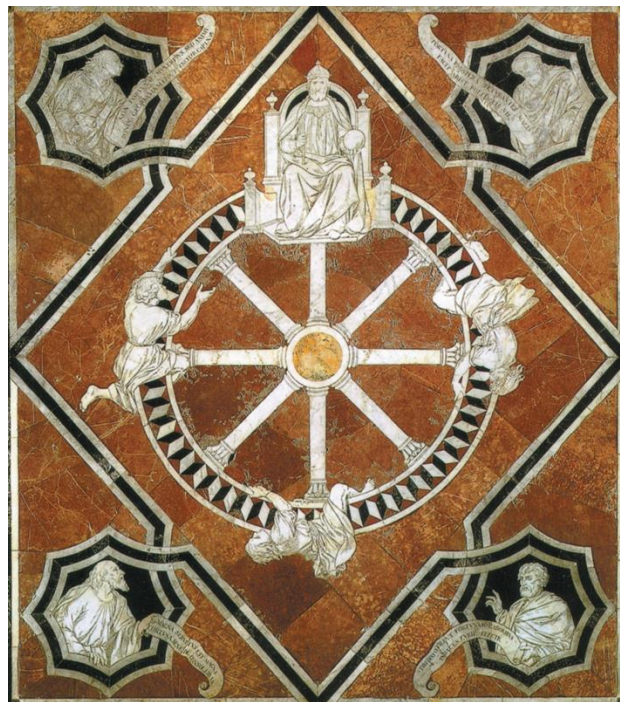


*Hermes Trismegistus, Mosaic Floor*

For this reason he was regarded as one who guides the initiation; the transition between the metaphorical material life, death and spiritual awakening. Hermes Trismegistus is also credited with writing the *Emerald Table*, the *Ruby Table* and the *Pymander*. The text of the Tablet is considered the cornerstone of the theory known as 'Hermetic wisdom' and was thought to be originally written between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries AD.

It is the single most-quoted alchemical text in the Western tradition, (of this field) and as such, is often incorporated into the works of other writers. It claims to reveal the secret of the 'primordial substance' and its transmutations, (or in essence, the cryptic formula for the *philosopher's stone*). However, mainly due to Papal interference, most texts concerning the Hermetic Tradition were condemned to flames. It was not until the Renaissance that many of the esoteric works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were rediscovered from Byzantine sources. Spearheading this revival was a work entitled *De Potestate et Sapientia Dei*: a series of thirteen tractates translated by Marsilio Ficino and published in 1471, to the delight of Cosimo de Medici's court, while opening the way for the hermetic symbolism of the Renaissance.

This tablet is supported by two inlaid marble sphinxes – representing the secret doctrine of Egypt, with tails entwined, as an alchemical symbol of *Ouroboris* (depicting a serpent eating its own tail and illustrating the perpetual cyclical renewal of life and infinity). The sage Hermes gives two people, (often interpreted as Eastern and Western traditions), the laws and letters of Egypt, (according to *De Natura Deorum* by Marcus Tullius Cicero).



*Wheel of Fortune, Mosaic Floor*



His clothes follow the style of ancient Egypt, and consistent with analysis made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Alfonso Landi, the two bystanders are a 'nobleman' and a veiled woman. Not everyone agrees with this however and various interpretations compete. Philosopher Frederick Ohly, while recalling vivid Masonic symbolism, saw in Siena's Cathedral a temple built by King Solomon with Hiram the builder. Following his theory, the two characters would be Moses and his brother Aaron, both initiated into the secrets of *Corpus Hermeticum*, (i.e. astrological, alchemical and magical knowledge). And lest we forget, Moses seemed like a Magician to the Egyptians, able to transform a stick into a snake.

The aisles are filled with ten sections depicting various *sibyls* (oracular women believed to possess prophetic powers) with inscriptions from the book, *Song of Sibille* by Varro (1<sup>st</sup> century BC). Here they are presented as a magical procession; the Delphic Sibyl, the Cimmera, the Cumana, Eritrea, the Persian, the Libyan, the Ellespontica, Phrygia, the Samia and Albunea. The creator of this cryptic cycle was the master mason, Alberto Aringhieri. He was from a prominent family. His father had an interest in magic, as demonstrated by various epistles. He passed this on to his son who became the '14180 worker' of the cathedral, which in practice meant the managing director of an immense treasure of symbols. It was a risky astrological reference. Since 1484 was considered a bad year due to the negative conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Scorpio, (a sign linked to death); perhaps the sibyls were meant to warn the world of nefarious disruptions.

Many scholars argue that Aringhieri obtained his astrological knowledge through Luzio Bellanti, a noted astrologer in Siena, made famous in a debate that had him at odds with Pico della Mirandola on the subject of divining astrology.

In other panels appear the Virtues. And a mysterious female figure atop a hill, sitting on a squared stone throne stands out from the opposite side of Hermes. This work was made in 1504-6 from a design of Pinturicchio. Next to the woman appears Socrates, (defender of truth even in the face of death), to whom she gives a palm tree, the symbol of victory but also of martyrdom. On the opposite side Crates, the cynical philosopher of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, is depicted below, throwing precious jewels into the water. And in this direction, a woman is portrayed protecting a closed book, symbolizing the Hermetic science.

Ten characters are shown heading up a mountain. They have different postures, while facing various difficulties, and meeting an assortment of animals along the way, such as lizards, snakes, turtles, snails and even a butterfly darting amongst the flowers. Only two seem focused on the goal of reaching the mountain top.

A naked female on an island, maintains a difficult balance, with one foot on a boat that seems about to sink, while the other foot is placed on a marble sphere, at the base of the island itself. With her left arm raised, she holds onto the sailboat filled with wind. She represents Fortune, also recognizable by the cornucopia she holds in her right hand.

The characters who attempt to climb the mountain are those who aspire to attain knowledge. The one with a closed book represents the act of facing an initiation. Some have interpreted the animals that crawl as the necessary elements to reach a goal or as humility or even as earthly challenges to overcome. While the

butterfly means the psyche but also the immortality of one's soul. Socrates embodies the principle needed to reach the summit, even with the sacrifice of life, (also seen as the jewels thrown overboard). This inlay can be approached with regards to the *Wheel of Fortune* tile, although that was created about 150 years before.

*Wheel of Fortune* represents the cycles of life and this concept is also present in card X of the Tarot and indicates fate in its manifestation and continuous movement.



*172 Pope Busts, Above Pillars Once Included (II-HP) Pope Joan*

Aringhieri died in 1504, and his plaque was placed at the entrance of the chapel of St. John the Baptist, patron Saint of the Order of Jerusalem, to which he belonged. He also came to be represented on the wall of the chapel as a knight of Jerusalem, (of Rhodes in the background, and as the seat of this Order). His image also appears in the neighboring Piccolomini Library, in a fresco showing the meeting between Emperor Frederick III and Eleanor of Portugal in Siena, during 1452. Truth be told, at the time he would only have been five years old, but it shows the symbolic relevance of his work. Moreover, he was courageous to have placed within the 172 plaster busts of Popes, along the top of the pillars, Joan (II High Priestess), as the female Pope, who proudly remained there until she was removed in 1600.

**Siena Cathedral - Duomo di Siena**

Piazza del Duomo, 8

53100 Siena

[www.operaduomo.siena.it/eng](http://www.operaduomo.siena.it/eng)





*XIX Sun by Niki de Saint Phalle*

## Tarot Garden of Niki de Saint Phalle

### An Artist Who Reinvented Tarot

Born in France in 1930, the painter and sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle grew up mainly in New York. She began her career as a fashion model and after marrying and divorcing at a young age and feeling quite disillusioned, went off in search of herself. She lived with Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely from 1960, (whom she eventually married) and through him became a member of the Paris group of artists who called themselves 'Nouveaux Réalistes'.

It was Niki's Nanas, (the first of which emerged in 1964), that gave her international recognition. The buxom, full bodied, cheerful female figures were first made of wool and yarn, then paper-maché and wire scaffoldings and later created from polyester. They were meant to represent happy, free women heralding in a new matriarchal era. The larger than life Nanas can still be found all over the world; for example on the banks of the river Leine in Hanover, where Niki had one of her first spectacular solo exhibitions.

Niki de Saint Phalle was a self-taught artist who collaborated with other artisans on her larger projects. In 1994 she moved to California on her doctor's advice to benefit from the mild climate. Many of her sculptures can be found all over San Diego where she lived the remaining years of her life. She died of emphysema on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2002.

In 1999 she had a Tarot themed solo exhibition at the Mingei International Museum in Balboa Park, (San Diego). This impressive showing was considered the most extensive representation of Niki's art ever presented in the U.S. She taught at UCSD and created a playful children's sculpture park in Escondido (the last park she ever made). Ironically it was the art which she poured her heart into that contributed to her chronic ill health. The materials that she used to make some of her iconic sculptures such as polyester, and fiberglass resin caused health issues that plagued her. But she led a full, vibrant life while traveling the world.

The Tarot garden is the largest architectural achievement ever designed by a woman and Niki dedicated it to the history and future of women of all cultures. It opened in 1998, after more than 20 years of collaboration. She famously dwelled inside the huge archetypal Empress Sphinx for years while building the rest of the colorful park of Tarot Trumps. One can't really get more Jungian than that – living and creating within the womb of the universal, eternal Mother Goddess. All of the Major Arcana sculptures of the Tarot Garden are meant to trigger profound reflection or joyful play. They overlook the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded by a rocky landscape that is graced with olive and oak trees in Capalbio, Tuscany. Niki lived her art and transformed Tarot to ever expanding dimensions that welcome everyone to explore and ponder their meanings in creative ways.





*III - Empress by Niki de Saint Phalle*

**Giardino dei Tarocchi ~ Tarot Garden**

Days and Hours: April 1st to October 15<sup>th</sup>

Open Daily from 2:30 PM to 7:30 PM

Garavicchio, 58011 Capalbio, Grosseto

<http://ilgiardinodeitarocchi.it/en>



## Mystical Bergamo

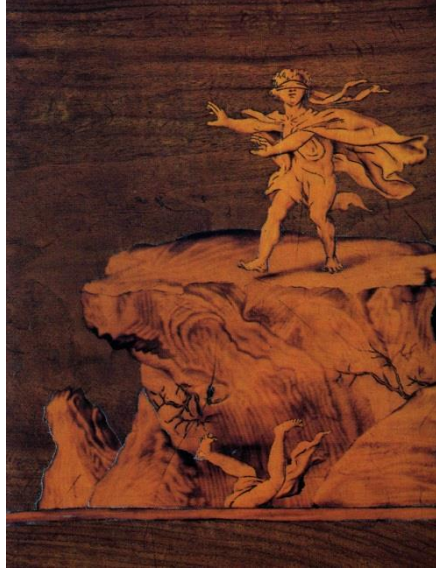
Beguiling Bergamo, home to distant heresies, is divided in two; an upper and lower city. Upper Bergamo is a lovely medieval town, surrounded by fortifications built during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the few remaining Italian cities whose historical center is completely surrounded by walls with their original appearance. In this part of town the Old Square can be found, along with a Cathedral, Baptistery, the Basilica of Saint Maria Maggiore and Colleoni Chapel, the Palazzo della Ragione and the Civic Tower; which has a bell that still tolls 100 times at 10 pm, that signals the closing of the gates, as it has since medieval times.

Inside Saint Maria Maggiore Basilica are inlays attributed to Lorenzo Lotto, as well as the tomb of Gaetano Donizetti.

Lorenzo Lotto (ca 1480 - 1556) was a great artist who steered his faith towards the mysterious and shimmering arcane realms, while at the same time, it appears he explored alchemy and the transmutation of raw metals into gold, (the symbolic philosopher's stone). This is apparent from the impressive esoteric marquetry of the choir stalls (of the above mentioned church), which were made by Giovanni Francesco Capoferri from original drawings by Lorenzo Lotto. As the official site of the Basilica explains:

*The symbolic images visually summarize the themes drawn from diverse fields of research during the Renaissance: Lotto developed a syncretism between religious themes and pagan archetypes, between spiritual concepts and secular themes, so that the biblical stories combined with metaphors of Alchemy, figures cherished by Hermeticism; suggesting Greek-Roman mythological concepts of neo-Platonic philosophy. These images were not designed to be easily decoded, but so as to create a sense of mystery that gives rise to a multiplicity of interpretations, even while in contradiction with one another. With his creative exploits, Lotto goes beyond the relativity of all subjective interpretations and undermines any presumption that claims to have found the ultimate answer and goes beyond conflicting explanations since the images must first evoke a sense of mystery linked to the ineffability of a divine presence.*

All this follows the metaphorical path that is found in the Tarot, and influenced by the same terrain that was planted in the mind of Lorenzo Lotto. The church of Saint Michael al Pozzo Bianco has preserved frescos with scenes from the life of Mary, also by Lorenzo Lotto (1525).



*Inlay by Lorenzo Lotto, Basilica of Saint Maria Maggiore*

Lower city Bergamo was created by the natural growth of villages along main roads. A table of Lorenzo Lotto called *Pala Martinengo* can be found in this part of town in the church of St. Bartholomew, St. Stephen.

### **Accademia Carrara**



*After Eight Years, Accademia Carrara Finally Reopened in 2015*

Accademia Carrara is situated in the northern, lower section of town, at Piazza Giacomo Carrara 82. It was founded by Count Giacomo Carrara in 1796. In this museum, 26 cards from one of the most precious Tarot decks of antiquity are guarded: the Pierpont Morgan, also known as the Visconti-Sforza. The latter's family crest appears in the cards: three interlaced rings and a hexagonal fountain. All the Trumps and figures on the court cards are painted on cardboard with wonderful backgrounds accented in gold. They have rounded corners and are approximately 173 × 87 mm (6.8 x 3.4 inches). The deck is attributed to Bonifacio Bembo (born in Brescia in 1420) even though six Trumps (Strength, Temperance, Star, Moon, Sun and the World) differ from the rest and are painted in a similar style to another artist, who is assumed to have been Antonio Cicognara and whose name is linked to a different Visconti Tarot, which was made in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Devil and Tower cards remain lost through time. It is the oldest known Tarot deck and is still in print. This was the first deck to have the series of Trumps that make up the current classic Tarot deck.



*26 Pierpont Morgan (Visconti Sforza) cards in Accademia Carrara*

The cards have no titles and are not numbered. A small hole appears on the top of each one. This detail may suggest the mnemonic use of the images, in connection with *Ars Mnemonica* ('Memorative Art' widely used for the creation of ideas). It was a practice with deep convictions during the middle ages, according to numerous analogs and magical references. In the pursuit of supporting human virtues, while overcoming flaws and challenges, mnemonic patterns helped one remember while associating symbols (this was regarded with suspicion by the mainstream but in actuality allowed one to reach hidden meanings that transcended didactic dimensions).

### **Accademia Carrara**

Houses 26 Original Visconti Tarot Cards

Address: Piazza Giacomo Carrara 82, Bergamo

Closed Tuesdays, Hours: 10 AM - 7 PM

[www.lacarrara.it/en](http://www.lacarrara.it/en)



*Rothschild Sheet, 16th Century*

## Masnago Castle's Esoteric Frescos

### Card Players and Frescos of Vice and Virtue

The complex built around an ancient tower from the 11<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the Mantegazza Park, on the hilltop of Masnago (within Varese City district). The castle is mainly known for the frescos in the *Hall of Leisure* (on the ground floor) and the *Hall of Vices and of Virtues*, rediscovered in 1938 and referring to courtly international traditions of the Gothic era.



### *Chastity Stands Between Lust and Vanity*

The Hall of Leisure depicts the pastimes of the court such as: a lady intent on playing the organ; a lady riding in the company of her husband, in the course of falconry; the boat trip of a lady and her maidens, and a group of gentlemen on the grass having breakfast. The opposite wall shows traces of the sinopia (earth pigment/underpainting) of a fresco dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The original work has since been stripped away and is now in a private collection in Rome.





### *A Particular Game of Tarot*

It depicts a scene from a voyage on the lake where three ladies in a tiny boat are intent on playing Tarot; showing again the popularity of this game by the privileged class. According to the Castello di Masnago history guide, this fresco was created between 1443 and 1453. This information is based on the royal family history as well as the coat of arms, dress style and coins shown in various frescos on these walls which were made by the same artist during this period.

The *Hall of Vices and Virtues* presents the comparison between negative and positive traits, which was a typically medieval philosophical and moral examination (from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century). Between columns of late Gothic style, there are seven scenes, each containing three women; a virtuous and great lady appearing in the center, crowned and surrounded by two vices on either side. They are as follows: Chastity between Lust and Vanity; Generosity between Greed and Extravagance; Attentiveness between Laziness and Sloth; Charity between Envy and Hypocrisy; Humility between Pride and Arrogance; Temperance between Betrayal and Excess; and Patience between Anger and Despair. There are also four isolated virtues: Hope and Faith in the west, and Wisdom and Justice in the east.



Vices, but especially virtues bring to mind an ancient game created in France by a monk for his clerics. *Ludus Regularis Seu Clericalis*, was the official name of this form of entertainment, considered a virtuous game of chance. It was developed during the 10<sup>th</sup> century by the Bishop of Cambrai, Wibold (? -965), as a kind of spiritual exercise played with three dice. When the three dice are rolled, there is a potential for 56 different outcomes (or possible combinations). Each result is then associated with a certain virtue and assigned a point value from 3 to 18. The goal of the game is to make certain rolls reach 21 with pairs of dice (out of three dice rolled), with each of the rolls matched to complimentary virtues, (twenty-one being the number of outcomes possible with two dice - as well as being the number of Trump cards.)

These 'unions of virtues' are not just meant to be winning rolls, but to illustrate ways that virtues work together. For example: Charity and Humility are combined as:  $3+18=21$

Some scholars consider this game an ancestor of Tarot as Jacopo Burckhardt (Swiss historian, 1818-1897), shared in his famous book, *The Civilization of the Century of the Renaissance in Italy* (1876):

*...Still around 979 the bishop of Cambrai Wiboldo prescribed to his clerics, instead of the game of dice, a kind of spiritual Tarot, with no less than 56 names of virtues represented by as many combinations of cards. Gesta Episcoporum. Cameracensium. Pertz, Scriptor, VII, p. 433.*

Thus the virtues and opposing vices join the great game of Tarot. However they appear as Justice, Strength and Temperance.

**Castello di Masnago, Musei civici di Varese ~**

**Masnago Castle Civic Art Museum in Varese**

Arrangements for Guided Tours in English Available

Hours: Tuesday through Sunday 10.00 AM - 6.30 PM

Closed Mondays and Lunchtime (12.30 PM - 2.30 PM)

Address: Via Cola di Rienzo, 52, 21100, Varese

## Clusone

### Dance with Death

In Italy the concept of the Dance of Death came rather late to the scene and was definitely influenced by foreign cultural experiences. One of the most famous and original frescos on this dark theme is surely the Dance of Death in Clusone; a small hilltop village near Bergamo.

On one of the exterior walls of the Oratory of 'Disciplini' building (of a medieval origin), is a striking fresco by Giacomo Borlone de Buschis, from 1485.

The *Brotherhood of Disciplini* practiced the discipline of self-flagellation, understood to be a form of atonement for sins.

Outside this building on the facade, various themes are painted including the Triumph of Death, who is portrayed as a great queen subjecting the world to her dark domain, while opening her arms to invite us all into her Kingdom of desolation. She is represented as a skeleton wrapped in a cloak with a crown on her head. Beneath her feet, lie the bodies of the Pope and Emperor, surrounded by snakes, scorpions and toads; considered emblems of pride and sudden (unexpected) death. This symbolizes the power and inevitability of death, as she treats everyone the same, whether they are powerful and rich or poor and desperate. No amount of wealth can save one from the reaches of the *Beautiful Lady Without Mercy*. It was said to be a subtle reminder that even the most influential (i.e. those who may think they are above the laws of common people), must also die like the rest. At the time of this artwork, there was much upheaval and suspicion about the government and the Pope's overreach in Rome. Death stands on a sepulcher surrounded by a cardinal, bishop, king and a philosopher, who all offer gifts (bribes). It is written on one of the fresco scrolls that Lady Death does not want your wealth, she only wants You.

This beautiful triumph (XIII Trump-like image) is continued on the left by a meeting of three living and three dead, represented within the same upper frame as the Dance of Death and also greatly detailed and placed in its own section below the main scene (a portion of the fresco is missing on the right). This work is also a confirmation of how dance did not have a prominent role in Italy, which was more fascinated by the theme of the triumph of Petrarch. The skeletons, as an allegory of death, are shown dancing with different types of characters: a woman with a mirror, (symbol of vanity); a member of the brotherhood of government; a farmer; an innkeeper; a soldier; a merchant; a man of letters and a magistrate.

The act of dancing with Death conceals hidden meanings, since dance was for the Church, an expression of weakness. In the Bible dance was a practice carried out by the foolish and victims of temporarily euphoric or irrational emotions. It was also considered a form of indecent and lustful manifestations of human desires. Therefore it was not rare during such times that dancing was entirely forbidden (and most especially during funerals).

It was even thought that Death danced in graveyards and could attract the living with her macabre, ghoulish movements and that they would then become dead themselves within a year after witnessing such a spooky occurrence.

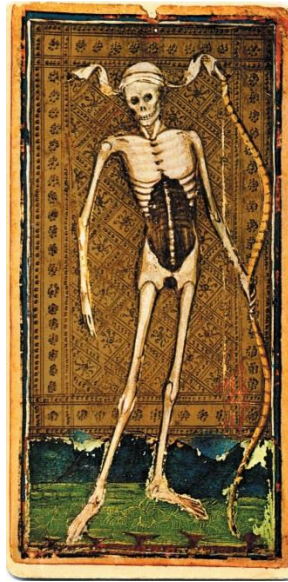


*Triumph of Death in Clusone*

In 1435 the Council of Basel forbade even more harshly such rituals and practices. Dance was thus allowed into popular culture only when it was *heavenly*, such as images of angels dancing in Heaven (which is not all that rare, compared to images of devils doing likewise in Hell). Dancing in a circle was especially sinful and vehemently forbidden and considered comparable to illicit ancient Pagan rites.

In the Dance of Death images, She is portrayed as a skeletal figure, (sometimes with shreds of flesh still attached).

This is an important example of the XIII Trump card of Tarot in its oldest known validation, the Visconti Sforza deck of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century which represents Death as a skeleton armed with a bow.



*Death in Visconti Sforza Deck*

### **Astronomical Clock Tower**

The Planetary clock in Clusone is an extraordinary piece of workmanship designed by Pietro Fanzago (watchmaker, hydraulic engineer and mathematician) and positioned on the tower in 1583. Amazingly, this sophisticated machinery still works with its original mechanism. Beneath this mechanical construction, the plaque reads:

*SYDERA VIX ALIJ OBSCURA RATIONE MOVERIFANZAGUS MANIBUS LUMINIBUSQUE  
PROBAT 1583.* 'I have put in place the knowledge acquired by astronomers in their studies, 1583'.

With a single hand this clock reveals (while three concentric disks rotate): the movements of the sun and moon, the time of day and duration of night, the equinoxes and solstices, the constellations of the zodiac, the lunar phases by months, hours, right down to the minutes. The antique mechanism is initiated by hand each day. The only stationary disk is the outermost disk for the hours (with a diameter of m. 3.50).

The astronomical clock tower is located in the highest part of town, along with Clusone's City Hall. The Dance and Triumph of Death frescos by Giacomo Borlone de Buschis are painted on the outer, front wall of Oratorio dei Disciplini and are within walking distance. There are many beautiful frescos all over town, making this a most colorful and charming place to stroll.



*Ancient Clock Still Tracking Time*



*Astronomical Clock in Clusone, 1583*



## Turin ~ Torino

### Piedmont's History of Tarot

It is important to consider regional Tarot deck sources as well, such as the Piedmont Tarot.

There appears fundamental proof, which confirms the presence of the use of Tarot in the Savoy family from 1401 to 1761; from the year the Royal Factory of Turin began production until the Unity of Italy (in 1861).

This presence of Tarot has different reasons, one of which is related to a long tradition of card playing. Apart from the fact that Piedmont represented the border passage of Tarot from the Po River courts to those beyond the Alps. These cards returned to Piedmont during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from France and had by then been quite transformed. Moreover in Montereale (currently Mondovì, in Cuneese) in 1565, the infamous speech of Francesco Piscina from Carmagnola on the card order of Tarot Trumps was published, which remains the most ancient evidence in print dealing with the analysis of the symbolism of Tarot regarding Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. The author defined the inventor of Tarot as a 'good and faithful disciple of Catholic and Christian faith, but also as an expert, very skilled in the customs of civilian life'.

This is because, in his opinion, the numeration of the Major Arcana could not have been ordered in a lackadaisical manner, but rather, was a precise order which allowed the cards to 'reveal a great deal of moral teachings while admonishing pestiferous customs, and showing how much the actions in contemporary life went against the laws and rules of honesty (integrity)'.

In 1579 Duke Emanuele Filiberto for the first time decided to tax card games. In 1586, a new decree of Carlo Alberto (successor of his father's throne in 1580) confirmed the opportunity to Giovanni Battista Ferrofino and furthermore specified that the latter should introduce 'the art and manufacturing of the aforementioned cards and Tarots to our States'. The first official news of Tarot decks being produced in Piedmont was published however, from the following century, which can be deduced from a letter of 1627 concerning the fact that Carlo Emanuele granted the privilege of printing Tarots to Francesco Porro.

In 1737, Jean-Jacques Bonnet, from Provence, was the first person to obtain permission to install a factory of Tarot in Turin, 'in an experimental fashion'. As far as Giordano Berti, (scholar and researcher) could decipher, this 'unleashed the protest of official 'offers' of taxation', one of whom wrote a document in which he explained that the factories existing in Chambéry, Oneglia, Borgosesia and Alessandria were already satisfying the local demand.

In February of 1761, a Regio decree of Carlo Emanuele III announced the founding of the Royal Factory, with which the Savoyard administration tried to ascertain a monopoly on the production of regular playing cards and of Tarot in their territories 'from the mountains to here'. A month later a state Manifesto specified the model to follow for how the decks would need to be produced; the specific characteristics of the packaging, including their wording, etc.



*Piedmont Tarot, from Around 1860*

On the wrapper there were official Savoy emblems with the inscription: TAROCS FINS followed by some further notifications: POUR LA COUR, POUR LE JEU PUBLIC, POUR LE PARTICULIERS, POUR TURIN, POUR LES PROVINCES, POUR MONFERRAT (For the court, for public games, for the individual, for Turin, for the Provinces, for Monferrat).

The Savoyard legislation remained in place until the French revolutionary army invaded Savoy (1792). In 1798, Piedmont was united with France and in 1815, after the post-Neapolitan restoration, the Savoyard government passed new standards on manufacturing and on the taxation of cards.

The manufactures were allowed to freely print new styles but with a condition that they must use a special kind of paper. And so began the so-called 'Golden Age' of Piedmont Tarot, which had no rival in other Italian regions. It is enough just to consider that in Turin during 1850, nine Tarot factories were in operation; while in the rest of the regions many industries rose, but what's more; in Borgosesia, Ghemme, Serravalle Sesia and Vercelli; and in Liguria, which became part of Savoyard during 1815, there were at least ten card factories!

## Lo Scarabeo Publishing House

Italian Tarot Publisher, Lo Scarabeo has published well over 100 decks since it opened its doors in 1987. The owners, graphic artist Pietro Alligo and sales manager Mario Pignatiello, along with a small but hardworking and effective team run the publishing house like a well-oiled machine. The company specializes in Tarot and oracle decks as well as divinatory accessories.

Lo Scarabeo is first and foremost a business; much more so than a creative environment; and thus has made strategic choices in the ever competitive marketplace such as the decision to team up with the U.S. based Tarot publishing house, Llewellyn, which is the exclusive distributor of Lo Scarabeo products in North America. Lo Scarabeo has enriched the tarot scene with their unique deck themes and their take on historical reproductions, but especially with gold printed editions with gilded edges and glittery accents that no other major Tarot deck publisher so far has been able to duplicate with the same level of consistent quality. Lo Scarabeo can be found in Northern Italy in the city of Turin (Torino), which is also an environment steeped in a long history of magic and lore. The publishing house does not as yet have a bookshop on the premises but for tours or special occasions, they will sometimes welcome customers to visit with advanced notice. [www.loscarabeo.com](http://www.loscarabeo.com)

## 'Le Tarot' Cultural Association

'Le Tarot' Association, founded by Professor Andrea Vitali in 1985, is an Italian organization of historical-symbolic studies formed by luminaries of national and international traditions. Among the many partners involved are the eminent Italian professor of medieval studies, Franco Cardini, (University of Florence), and Professor Rolando Dondarini (University of Bologna), Professor Michael S. Howard, and the former professor of Philosophy (State University of New York, Albany); Dr. Claudio Widmann, and one of the most distinguished Jungian analysts; Dr. Paolo Sabbatini, currently Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo; Dr. Alain Bougearel, the prominent French tarot expert; Dr. Giordano Berti, historian of esoteric thought; Dr. Ross S. Caldwell, and historic symbolism expert; Dr. Paola Amadesi, an author of numerous historical novels; Prof. Marco Bertozzi, a professor of theoretical philosophy (University of Ferrara), Prof. Paolo Aldo Rossi, scientific theory expert (University of Genoa), and Dr. Gerardo Lonardoni, expert on mysticism; among other esteemed colleagues.

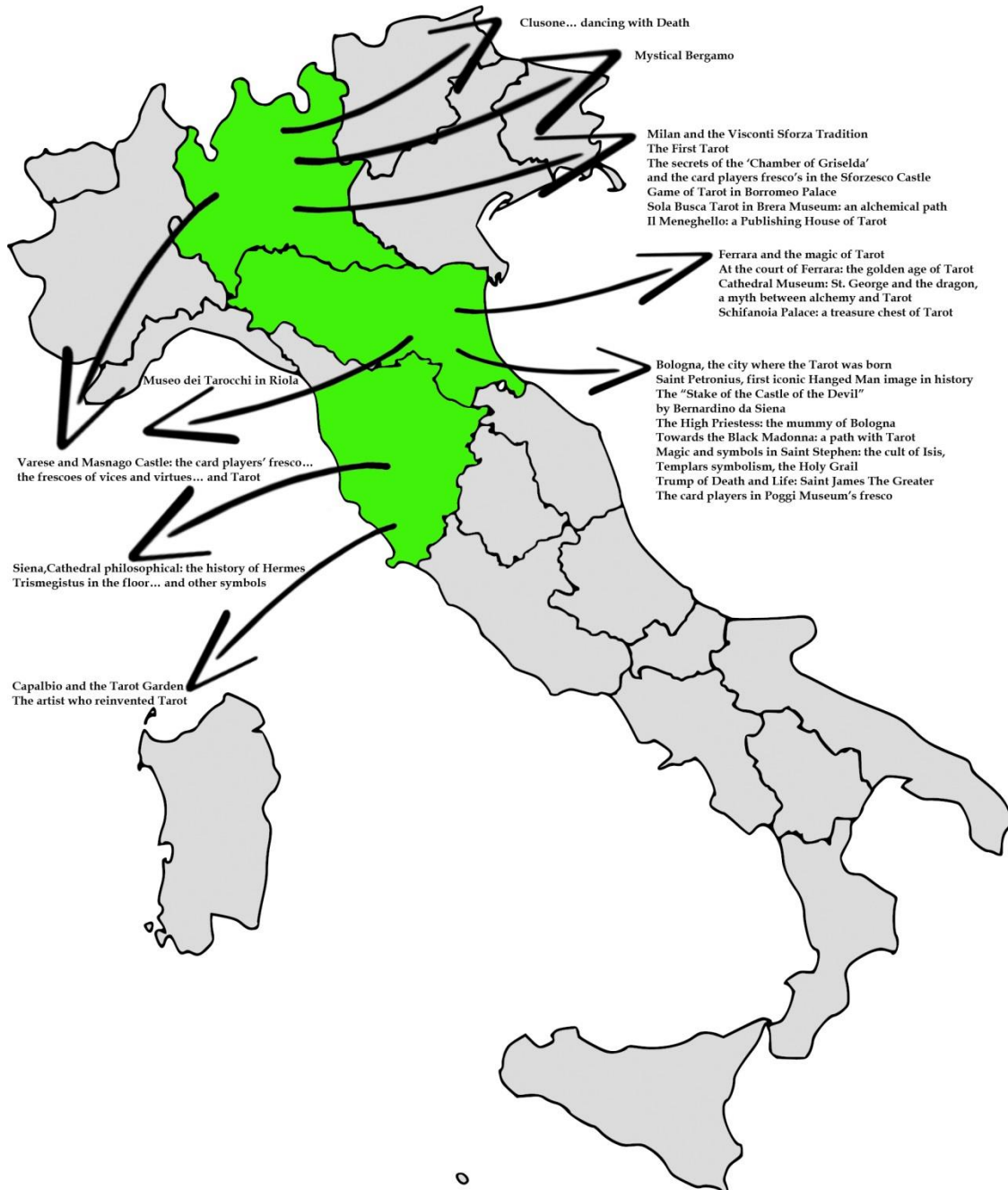
Professor Andrea Vitali, president of the Association and a historian of symbolism, has overseen important exhibitions regarding the world of Tarot, starting with *The Cards of Court Tarot, Game and Magic at the Este Court* (Este Castle, Ferrara, 1987), and subsequently, *Tarot: Art and Magic* (Archaeological Museum of Bologna, 1994); *Tarot: the Cards of Destiny* (National Museum of Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome, 1996); *Tarot: Cards of the Kingdom*, in collaboration with the Egyptian Museum in Turin, 1997; *Tarot: History, Art, Magic*, in Siena at the Government Building, in 2006, and following that in Malta, 2007, and the list goes on.

The discoveries made by Andrea Vitali in the areas of historical research have created a distinct and clear vision of the medieval collective consciousness imprinted on these playing cards, considered one of the most remarkable achievements of Italian humanistic thought. It is due to Andrea Vitali having interpreted (in an iconological manner) the most emblematic images of the Renaissance Triumphs or *Trumps* (Major Arcana); while having identified the historical documents that attest to the creator of the Ludus Triumphorum, Prince Francesco Antelminelli Castracani Fibbia, grandson of the famous Italian Condottiero Castruccio Castracani; and has also discovered the meaning of the word 'tarot', a term used in the Italian Renaissance to emphasize a crazy, irrational person, in addition to the reasons for which there is the inclusion of the Magician as the first card of the Trumps, as an expression of the shame that the Church at the time condemned as one of the greatest sins against Catholicism.

Andrea Vitali has written numerous books on the subject and more than 100 historical essays and 22 iconographical essays, available for free online, in both Italian and English, at the site of the Association: [www.letarot.it](http://www.letarot.it) which has also obtained the cooperation of major cultural institutions around the world, for its contributions in the field of history and has the patronage of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage of the Italian Government as well. Le Tarot Association is in Faenza (Ravenna), on Stradello Cappuccini, 14.

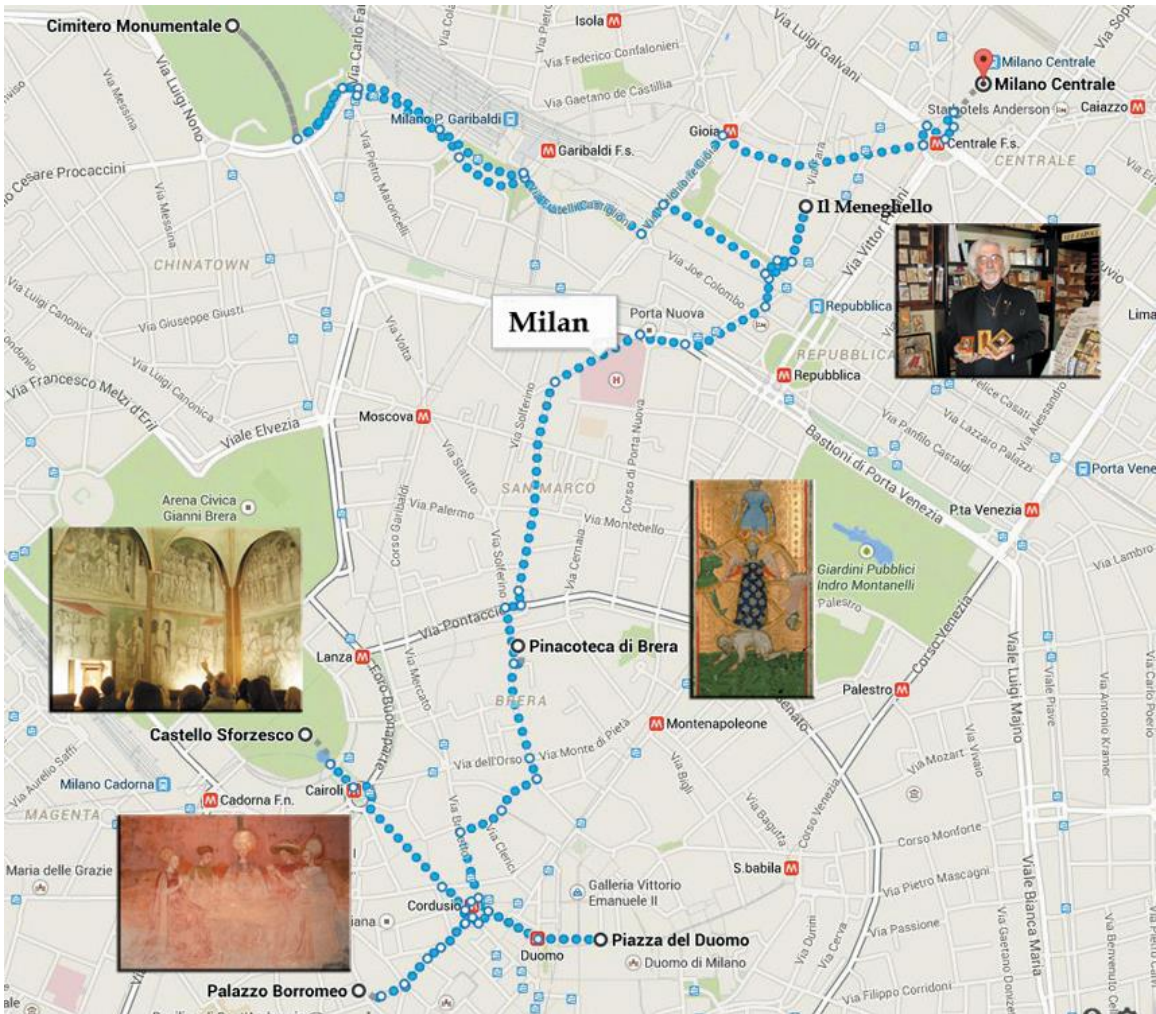
# RESOURCES

## Maps and Guides

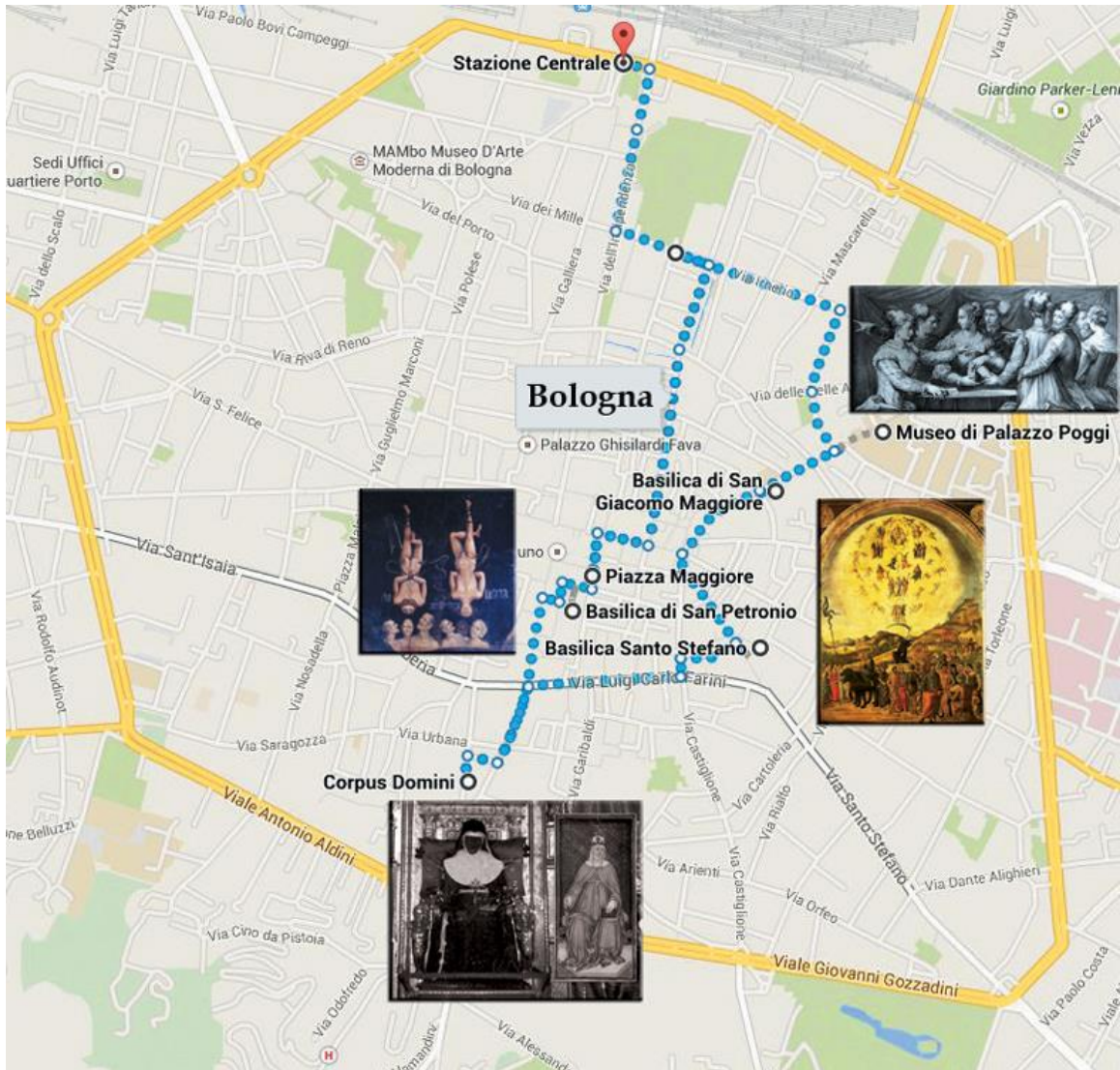


*Map 1: Tarot Art History Tour*



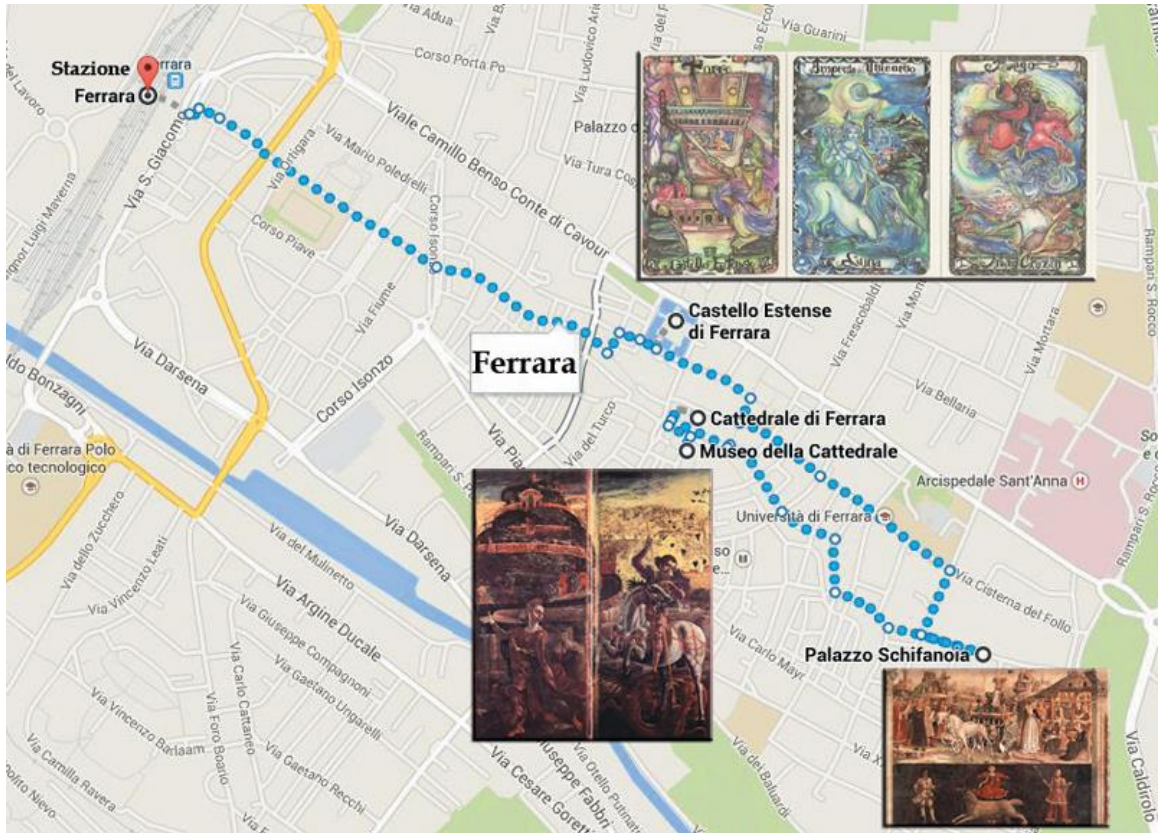


*Milan*

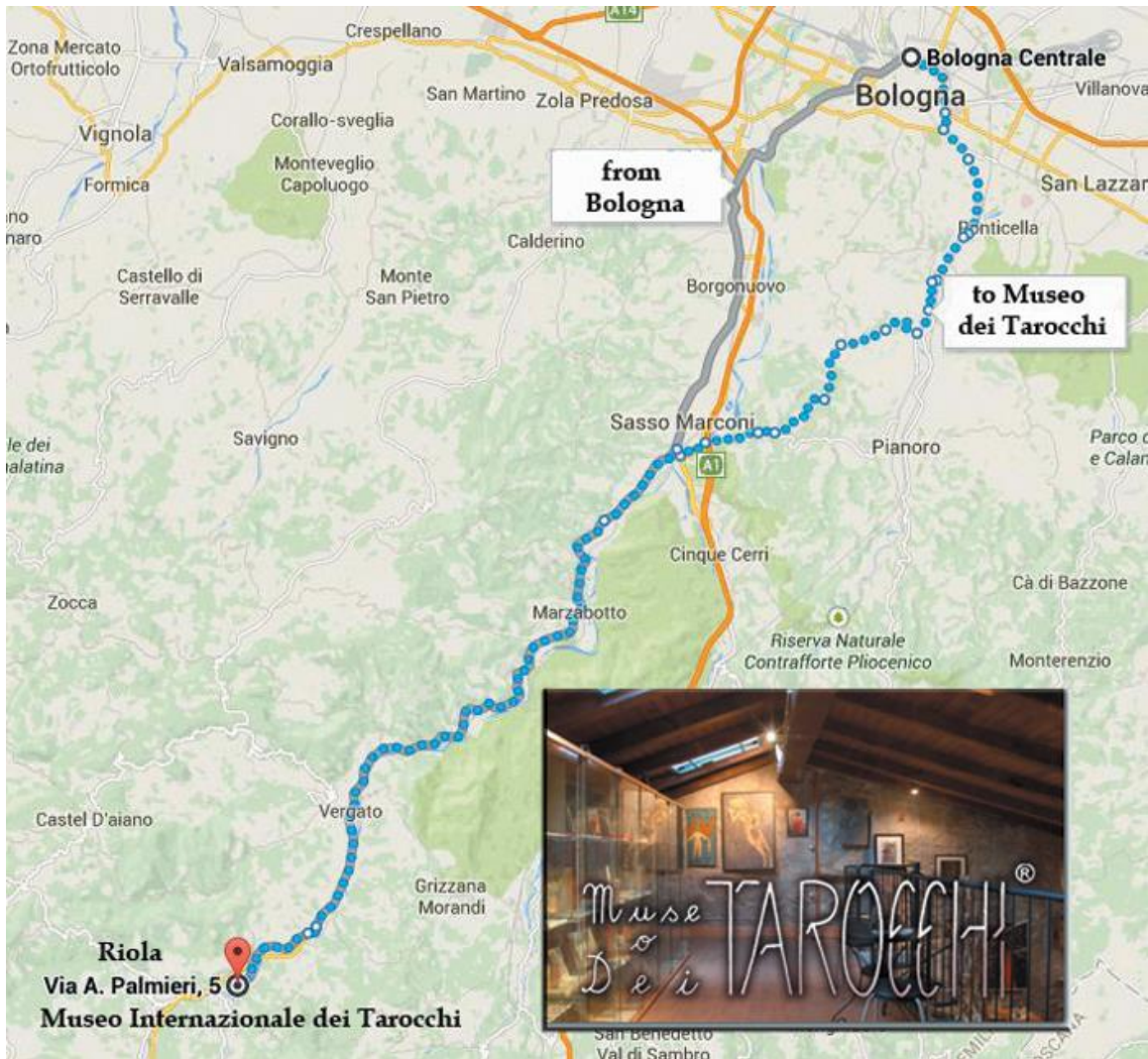


*Bologna*





*Ferrara*



*Riola: Museo Internazionale dei Tarocchi*

**International Tarot Museum**

Morena Poltronieri & Ernesto Fazioli

Via Palmieri 5/1 - 40038 Riola (Bo)

[www.museodeitarocchi.net](http://www.museodeitarocchi.net)

Reservations Required: [info@museodeitarocchi.it](mailto:info@museodeitarocchi.it)



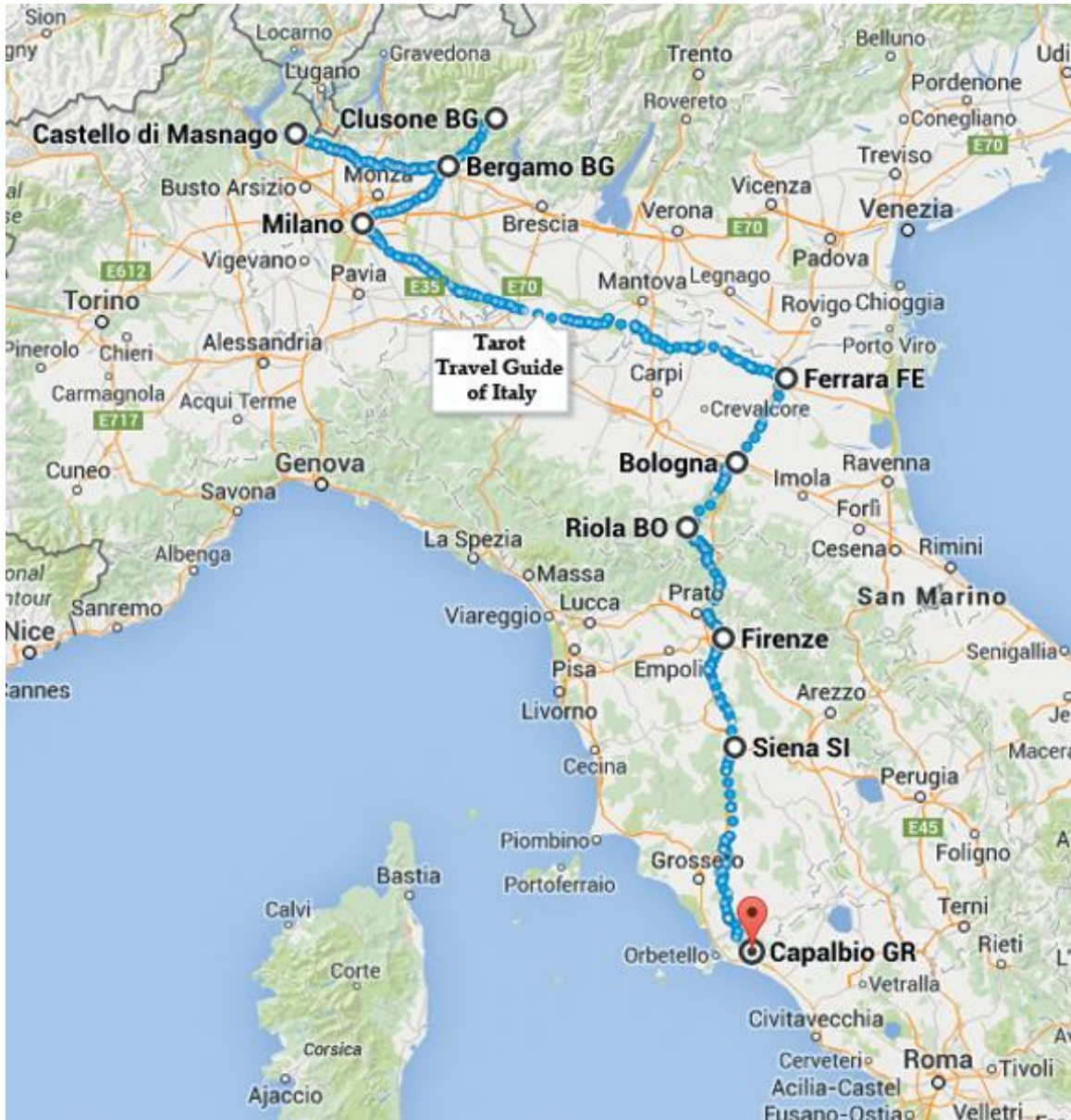


*Siena and Capalbio*



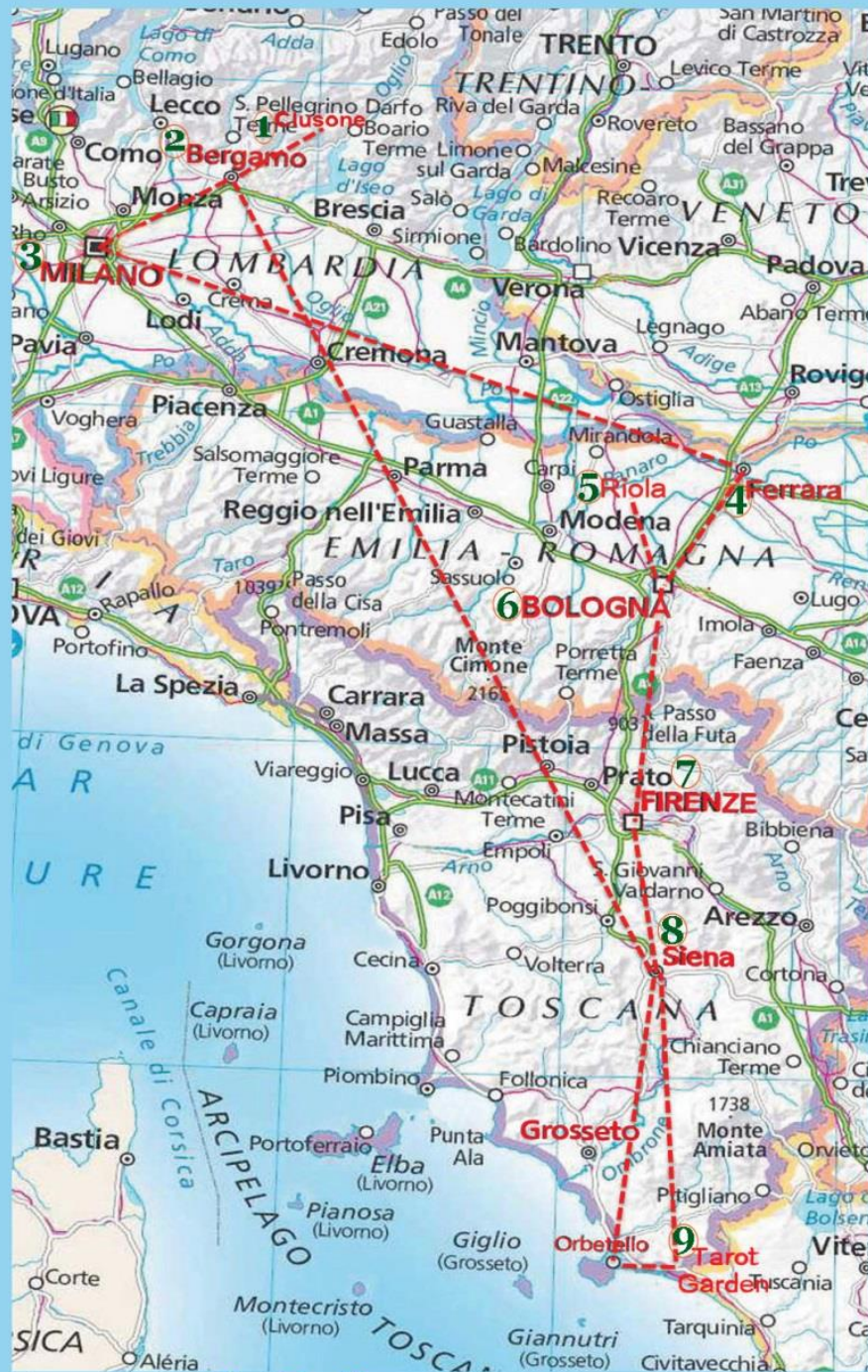
*Bergamo, Varese and Clusone*





*Note: Not Driving Maps, Strictly the Cities Visited*

## 9 Italian Cities on Tarot Art History Tours



**From Top (in Red): 1. Clusone, 2. Bergamo, 3. Milan, 4. Ferrara, 5. Riola, 6. Bologna, 7. Firenze, 8. Siena, 9. Grosseto (Capalbio)**

*Tour Map, 9 Numbered Areas from Top to Bottom:*



1. **Clusone:** Dance of Death and Triumph of Death frescos (1485). Working astronomical clock (from 1583).
2. **Bergamo:** Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (Lorenzo Lotto's esoteric works) and the Accademia di Carrara, which houses the original Visconti/Sforza Tarocchi Cards.
3. **Milan:** Osvaldo Menegazzi's il Meneghello Tarot shop, Sola Busca cards at the Brera, the Visconti/Sforza Castle with Griselda Fable (fresco with Tarot cards) and other artwork, Leonardo da Vinci's Vineyard - La Vigna di Leonardo: a gift for Da Vinci in 1498 from Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan.  
**Varese:** Castle Masnago Art Museum ~ Fresco of 3 Ladies Playing Tarot in a Boat and other esoteric art.
4. **Ferrara:** Palazzo Schifanoia: Astrological Frescos (1469-70), the Estense Castle, and the Cathedral Museum, with artworks by Cosmè Tura and Casa Romei.
5. **Riola:** International Tarot Museum ~ Museo dei Tarocchi, and nearby Rocchetta Mattei Castle (from 1850, Herbalist Cesare Mattei - esoteric, symbolic art & architecture from many cultures. Communicates in a cryptic code related to Tarot.)
6. **Bologna:** Basilica di San Petronio (tarot related art), St. Stefano with an ancient Isis Temple inside, and St. Catherine (HP-II) shrine in the chapel of Poor Clares (next to the Corpus Domini church).
7. **Florence (Firenze):** Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore, and art museums: Galleria dell'Accademia and the Uffizi Gallery (full of important, symbolic artworks from the Renaissance).
8. **Siena:** Duomo di Siena and the Piazza del Campo, with a nearby Civic Museum of Art (Museo Civico), which has artwork that inspired Pamela Colman Smith's work on the Waite/Smith Tarot (1909).
9. **Capalbio** (in Grosseto): the Tarot Garden of Niki de Saint Phalle ~ Giardino dei Tarocchi.

18  
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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
	6	7	8	9	10	11
Milan 12 Merry band Check-in Hotel Registration: 15:00 – 17:30 Pizza Night	Ferrara 13 Check-out il Meneghello! Lunch. Bus to Ferrara Hotel. Explore! Dinner	Ferrara 14 Schifanoia Palace frescos. Romanesque Cathedral. Free museum. Night	Bologna 15 Riola Bus to Bo's Basilica Explore. Lunch Tarot Museum Garden Party!	Florence 16 Exit Ferrara Bus to Bo. Isis Temple, St Cath Lunch. Bus to hotel in Free Florence. Night	Siena 17 Exit Hotel Optional - Art museums. Lunch Bus to Siena Hotel. Explore! Group dinner.	Siena 18 Cathedral Lunch. Palace or art museum Explore! Group dinner.
Siena to 19 Capabilo Bus to seaside. Lunch. Niki's Tarot Garden! Group Dinner	Siena to 20 Bergamo Hotel checkout Bus to Bergamo hotel. Explore. Group Dinner	Bergamo 21 Bus to Clusone frescos & Astrological clock, museum Group Dinner	Bergamo 22 Carrara Academy: view Visconti Tarot! Explore town. Group Dinner	to Milan 23 Exit Hotel Bus to Partita. Picnic. Masnago Castle museum frescos. Free Milan hotel! Night	Milan 24 Sforzesco Visconti castle frescos. Lunch Duomo, Plaza. Group Dinner	Milan 25 Fresco or Cimitero Monumentale. Lunch. Explore Group Dinner
Milan 26 Ciao, ye merry band! After breakfast Explore or Hotel check-out	27	28	29	30		

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*Tarot Art History Tour of Italy, 2015 Itinerary*

## Artists and Authors of Italy

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The journey of Museodei is that of a petite publishing house, but like all small things, it has great freedom, such as not having to adhere to patterns or expectations of any kind. Instinct tells the heart, through the analysis of symbols which strive to push us onward, to take this important journey. The one inside ourselves. Who cares if we see the world and all its differences if we cannot also perceive those aspects reflected within ourselves and experience feelings which are universal? It would be looking without seeing. So, to know a place through the language of symbols is to see the magic of creation at the very moment of inception. The call is then to carry on, helped by the symbolic heritage of the past, on the road of this daring voyage, to the mysterious paths of the future. Then, to open our eyes and discover ourselves as an integral part of the quest.

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*A Few of the 36 Handmade Talismans  
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### About the Authors:

Morena Poltronieri and Ernesto Fazioli have been working for over thirty years in the field of anthropological research of symbols, specializing in major art work and architecture, both in Italy and abroad. They have written numerous books on these and related subjects, and direct the International Museum of Tarot in Italy: [www.museodeitarocchi.net](http://www.museodeitarocchi.net)

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Tarot Travel Guide of Italy is an essential handbook dedicated to purveyors of this symbolic art form. Whether you aim to visit these mystical places on an enchanting adventure and witness firsthand this colorful evolution in the country of its birth, or you savor the study of the intriguing history of how the Italian Renaissance, intermingled with diverse cultural influences, created this multilayered realm of creative expression. This book is designed to share the fascinating world of Tarot, from its early roots to its natural development in Italy. With plenty of compelling images and helpful tips on how best to navigate a journey to many of these places so intrinsic to Tarot lore; with additional clues, including a map, marked with key locations and an actual itinerary from the Tarot Art History Tours conducted by the writers of this book; it makes the perfect study guide, travel manual and keepsake. New enticing details are revealed that elaborate the progression of this thriving art form, which continues to be interpreted by each artist who translates its symbolic code, while drawing upon the rich culture of its long heritage, from the royal courts of Ferrara and Milan, to the dazzling museum dedicated to the kaleidoscope of nuanced creations, to a Mediterranean garden of iconic sculptures, and every place in between, which shares tales & visions that inspire a personal voyage of self-discovery and an archetypal quest of this universal story, which continues to be written, expressed and explored.

Morena Poltronieri and Ernesto Fazioli have been working for over thirty years in the field of anthropological research of symbols; specializing in major art works and architecture, both in Italy and abroad. They have written numerous books on these and related subjects and direct the *International Museum of Tarot* in Italy. [www.museodeitarocchi.net](http://www.museodeitarocchi.net)

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