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Symbols of Urban Identity in Sicily: Transformations and Hybridizations of Civic Heraldry.

Annotation: This study examines the evolution of Sicilian civic heraldry from the Norman period to the contemporary era, highlighting how coats of arms reflect the island's complex historical, political, and cultural transformations. Through analysis of symbolic elements such as eagles, crosses, lions, and mythological references, the article traces the processes of formation, hybridization, and standardization of municipal insignia amid changing dynastic rules and socio-political contexts. The work also explores the modern institutional regulation of heraldry and emphasizes the importance of preserving this emblematic heritage as a vital expression of Sicilian urban identity.

Keywords: Sicilia, Sicilian Heraldry, Coat of arms of the cities, urban identity, cultural Heritage.

Symbole tożsamości miejskiej na Sycylii: transformacja i hybrydyzacja heraldyki miejskiej.

Streszczenie: Artykuł analizuje ewolucję sycylijskiej heraldyki miejskiej od okresu normńskiego do ery współczesnej, podkreślając, w jaki sposób herby odzwierciedlają złożone historyczne, polityczne i kulturowe przemiany zachodzące na wyspie. Poprzez analizę elementów symbolicznych, takich jak orły, krzyże, lwy i odniesienia mitologiczne, autor śledzi procesy formowania, hybrydyzacji i standaryzacji insygniów miejskich pośród zmieniających się reguł dynastycznych i kontekstów społeczno-politycznych. Praca bada również współczesne regulacje instytucjonalne heraldyki i podkreśla znaczenie zachowania tego symbolicznego dziedzictwa jako istotnego wyrazu sycylijskiej tożsamości miejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: Sycylia, heraldyka sycylijska, herby miast, tożsamość miejska, dziedzictwo kulturowe.

1. Eagles, Crosses, Lions

Sicilian civic heraldry constitutes an extraordinary tool for reading the historical, political, and cultural vicissitudes of the Island, offering a visual and symbolic testimony of the transformations experienced by urban centers over the centuries. In a territory strategically located at the center of the Mediterranean, contested by powers interested in its position and economic resources — particularly cereals — and imbued with the legacy of several important cultures, the transformations of civic coats of arms peculiarly reflect the changing powers, identities, and institutional affiliations.

This contribution aims to provide a preliminary historical survey of Sicilian civic heraldry¹, focusing especially on the period between the Norman Age and the Italian national unification (11th–19th centuries), analyzing the processes of formation, hybridization, and rationalization of municipal coats of arms, and focusing on recurring symbolic elements, exemplary cases, and the twentieth-century legacy of this ancient identity heritage.

The Norman conquest of Arab Sicily by Count Roger I of Hauteville, completed in 1091 with the capture of Noto, marks a historical turning point in the Island's history: not only for the return to Christianity and the establishment of a new dynasty, but also for the subsequent formation of the *Regnum Siciliae* as an autonomous political entity. From the kingdom's foundation in 1130 under Roger II, encompassing both the Island and Southern Italy, a royal and feudal heraldry took shape, employing simple and strongly symbolic figures: in the Norman age, silver figures on a blue field predominate, in deference to the austere and martial taste of shields that still had fully warlike functions, typical of the Norman style².

In parallel, a proto-civic heraldry emerged, initially connected to the birth and then to the consolidation of the *universitates*, the first municipal administrations. These civic coats of arms, conceived as signs of collective identification, initially used architectural elements — castles, towers, walls — to represent the fortress of the settlement and the military virtue of the inhabitants. The memory of the Christian reconquest of the Island is imprinted in the symbolism of many civic coats of arms: as in Messina and Noto, which adopted the cross as a distinctive sign, ideally recalling the crusading tradition. This element also consolidated with reference to the peninsular context, where heraldic crosses denote the civic identity of multiple urban centers, representing religious orthodoxy and membership in Latin Christianity, which in Sicily quickly replaced the Greek-Byzantine identity.

With the Hohenstaufen dynasty, particularly under Frederick II (1194–1250), royal heraldry was enriched with new meanings and imperial symbols. The eagle became the central emblem of Swabian power, evoking both the link to the Holy Roman Empire and the legacy of ancient Rome. This figure,³ laden with political and ideologi-

¹ See G.C. Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata medioevale e moderna*, in in G. Bascapè, M. Del Piazzo, *Insegne e simboli. Araldica pubblica e privata medioevale e moderna*, Roma, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali. Ufficio centrale per i Beni archivistici, 1999, pp. 239 ss.

² See G.A. de la Roque, *Traité singulier du blason, contenant les regles des armoiries, des armes de France et de leur blason, ce qu'elles representent, et le sentiment des auteurs qui en ont écrit*, Paris, Cramoisy, 1673.

³ On the significance of the eagle in heraldry cf. A. Manno (ed.), *Vocabolario araldico ufficiale*, Roma,

cal meanings, was progressively adopted also in the coats of arms of some royal cities, serving as an element of distinction and a visible sign of loyalty to the Crown. The end of Frederick's dream and the papal call for the Angevins provoked a deep institutional crisis, from which the *universitates* emerged strengthened, also beginning to draft the first codifications of *consuetudines*⁴. However, the cities poorly tolerated the harsh Angevin fiscal policy: the Sicilian Vespers uprising of 1282 led to the Island of Sicily, detached from the continental Kingdom, passing into the Aragonese orbit with the dedication to King Peter III of Aragon⁵.



Figg. 1-6. Coats of Arms of the sicilian cities (V. Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, Palermo, Visconti & Huber, Tipografia di Alessandro Mirto, 1871-1875).

Civelli, 1907, s.v.; Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata*, cit., pp. 203 ss.; F. Panvini Rosati, voce *Aquila*, in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, vol. II, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana Treccani, 1991.

⁴ On Sicilian *consuetudines* see most recently G. Pace Gravina, *Ius Regni Siciliae. L'esperienza giuridica dell'età normanno-sveva: alcune riflessioni storiografiche*, in *Oltre l'alto medioevo: etnie, vicende, culture nella Puglia normanno-sveva*, Atti del XXII Congresso internazionale di studio sull'alto medioevo, Savelletri di Fasano (BR), 21-24 novembre 2019, Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto 2020, and literature cited therein.

⁵ S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers. A history of the mediterranean world in the later thirteenth century*, London, Penguin, 1960.

The transition from the Angevins to the Aragonese was accompanied by a chromatic and symbolic turning point in Sicilian heraldry. Aragonese heraldry introduced gold figures on a red field — typical of the reigning house's insignia, the so-called *pali d'Aragona* or *barras de Aragón*, which in the Aragon-Sicily coat of arms accompanied the Swabian eagle — and made use of new figures such as the rampant lion⁶, appearing for example in the coat of arms of Corleone⁷. At this time, a new aristocracy emerged, formed from the encounter between Aragonese and Sicilian houses, reflected in the increasing heraldic variety and the diffusion of complex insignia, sometimes quartered, mixing Iberian and insular symbols⁸.

Under the monarchy of Charles V and the Spanish Habsburgs (16th–18th centuries), the imperial double-headed eagle was also used in civic contexts, as in the case of Castrogiovanni (today Enna). This created a kind of heraldic ambiguity: the different eagles — Roman, Swabian, Habsburg, and even the typically Spanish “Saint John” eagle — overlapped and confused, sometimes making it difficult to identify the specific symbolic matrix at the origin of the coat of arms⁹.

2. The Turning Point of the Modern Age and the Recovery of Foundational Myths

The spread of humanistic culture, between the late 15th and early 16th centuries, stimulated a rediscovery of the ancient and a renewed interest in the mythic origins of Sicilian cities, which competed to trace their roots to the classical world in order to ennoble their past with a Greek and Roman aura. This cultural movement is also reflected in civic heraldry, which tended to ennoble itself through the insertion of mythological references¹⁰ to classical antiquity and local legends. An example is the coat of arms of Caltagirone, where the eagle — traditionally an imperial figure — grasps in its talon a giant's bone, a clear allusion to the mythical Cyclopes and the Homeric world¹¹. Similarly, Girgenti (Agrigento)¹², in a blend of archaeological reality and civic symbolism, included in its coat of arms the Telamons of the Temple of Jupiter Olympius, monumental male figures embodying strength and support, which became emblems of moral solidity and civic dignity¹³. At Lentini, a lion's head is adopted, derived from one of the ancient coins of the Greek *Leontinoi*¹⁴. The coat of arms of Catania¹⁵ partly participa-

⁶ See Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata*, cit., p. 208.

⁷ A. Mango di Casalgerardo, *Nobiliario di Sicilia*, Palermo, Visconti & Huber, 1912, ad vocem.

⁸ On the Sicilian aristocracy of this age cf. P. Corrao, *Governare un regno. Potere, società e istituzioni in Sicilia fra Trecento e Quattrocento*, Napoli, Liguori, 1991.

⁹ A comprehensive collection of Sicilian city coats of arms is published in V. Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, Palermo, Visconti & Huber, Tipografia di Alessandro Mirto, 1871-1875.

¹⁰ Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata*, cit., *Figure mitologiche nell'araldica*, pp. 415 ss.

¹¹ See *infra*.

¹² On the history of Agrigento see G. Picone, *Memorie storiche agrigentine*, Girgenti, Montes, 1866.

¹³ On the temple and the function of telamons cf. B. Pace, *Il tempio di Giove Olimpico in Agrigento*, in *Monumenti Antichi pubblicati dall'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, XXXVIII, 1922, pp. 173-252.

¹⁴ On the history of Lentini see S. Pisano Baudo, *Storia di Lentini antica e moderna*, Lentini, La voce del popolo, 1898-1902.

¹⁵ On the coat of arms see M. Gaudioso, *Lo stemma di Catania: il simbolo A*, in *Rivista del Comune di*

tes in this context: alongside Saint Agatha appears the 'Liotru,' the ancient statue of the elephant carved in lava stone now mounted on the fountain of the Cathedral square, possibly once placed on one of the city gates with apotropaic function; according to the 12th-century emir Idrisi, it was believed to have magical powers to repel the lava flows from Mount Etna that threatened Catania¹⁶. Taormina also adopted a strongly symbolic representation, depicting in its coat of arms a female figure with a taurine (not equine) quadruped body, as in the cathedral basilica of San Nicolò di Bari, holding representations of the royal castle and the Castle of Mola, underlining territorial control thanks to impregnable fortresses, or in a bipedal form carrying classic emblems of power such as the globe and scepter, as in the 1635 fountain in Piazza Duomo: this is a mythic-archetypal evocation recalling the ancient form of the city's name (*Tauromenion*) and its Greco-Roman past¹⁷.

A particularly interesting symbolic category is represented by so-called *talking coats of arms* ('*armi parlanti*'¹⁸), i.e., coats of arms in which the figure represented directly alludes to the name of the city. The most evident case remains Corleone, which presents a rampant lion with a heart between its forepaws, a refined heraldic pun on the Latin root of the toponym: Cor-Leone (Lion-Heart)¹⁹.

Grouping the symbolic elements, the most widespread figure is the eagle, present for the reasons above in the coats of arms of Palermo, Castoreale, Calascibetta, Augusta, Castronovo, Castrogiovanni, Milazzo, Patti, Linguaglossa, Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, Santa Lucia, Syracuse, Vizzini; in some cases, such as Caltagirone, Noto, Mistretta, the crossed shield rests on the eagle's chest. Castles, towers, and fortifications are depicted in the insignia of Castronovo, Castrogiovanni, Mineo, Trapani, Acireale, Licata, Mazara del Vallo, Rometta, Troina, underscoring the fortress and nobility of the places; crosses (beyond those on the eagles) mark the coats of arms of Messina, Nicosia, and Vizzini; while depictions of saints are central to Catania, Salemi, Marsala, Santa Lucia, Termini Imerese. Among recurring elements, the sea stands out, present in numerous coats of arms of coastal cities such as Augusta, Cefalù, Trapani, Acireale, Licata, often represented with waves or ships, and associated with towers and castles guarding the coast. The sea thus becomes an element of defense, commerce, and cultural openness, but also a distinctive trait of Mediterranean identity. Another important element is the depiction of patron saints: the coat of arms of Catania, besides the elephant, represents Saint Agatha, martyr and protector of the city, while Termini Imerese honors Saint Calogerus. In Mineo's coat of arms, St Agrippina appears on top of a tower, recalling the apparition of the Saint who saved the city from the Arab siege.

Catania, gennaio 1929; C. Coco, *Cani, elefanti, dee e santi. La storia dello stemma e del gonfalone di Catania*, Viareggio 2011.

¹⁶ On the history of the elephant see B. Pace, *Arte e civiltà della Sicilia antica*, Roma 1949, vol. IV, pp. 48 ss.

¹⁷ On the coat of arms of Taormina cfr. C. Rizzo, *Centauro o Minotauro? Genesi ed interpretazioni storiche dello Stemma di Taormina*, Roma, Maurfix, 2019. Cf. also Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata*, cit., p. 421.

¹⁸ On 'armi parlanti' see Bascapè, *Araldica e simbologia generale pubblica e privata*, cit., pp. 199 ss.

¹⁹ On the city cfr. S. Mangano, *Storia di Corleone dalle origini ai normanni*, Palermo, Lo Giudice, 1979.

These presences do not only have devotional value but also serve an identity function, invoking divine protection over the community²⁰. The lion, often rampant, also appears widely in the coats of arms of Corleone, Carlentini, Calascibetta, Sciacca, Troina, marking the strength and nobility of these cities.

3. Between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The Bourbon Age

The War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) resulted, albeit for a mere two decades, in Sicily falling under Habsburg rule. During the reign of Charles VI (1713–1735), civic heraldry was enriched with imperial symbols: the double-headed eagle occasionally reappeared as an ornament on municipal coats of arms²¹. However, following the reconquest of the island by Spanish forces in 1735 and the ascent of Charles III, son of Philip V of Spain and Elisabeth Farnese of Parma, civic heraldry realigned with Iberian models. The Baroque style — characterized by abundant ornamentation and complex crowns (princely, ducal, marquiseate) — marked the new heraldic grants, sometimes reinterpreting older motifs in a celebratory key.



²⁰ C. Gregorio, *Santi e Beati di Sicilia*, Città di castello, Nuova Prhomos, 2018.

²¹ On 'Austrian' Sicily cf. F. Gallo, *L'alba dei gattopardi. La formazione della classe dirigente nella Sicilia austriaca (1719-1734)*, Roma-Catanzaro, Meridiana, 1996.

In the eighteenth century, numerous Sicilian settlements remained under feudal baronial control: these 'terre', lacking municipal status, typically adopted coats of arms corresponding to the insignia of the feudal families, with few exceptions such as Francofonte. Consequently, noble heraldry²² overlapped with civic heraldry, generating a hybridization that in some cases persisted until the Italian Unification²³. Within this framework, the civic coat of arms ceased to be solely a symbol of collective identity, becoming also a further sign of seigniorial dominion. This hierarchical system profoundly influenced the perception of heraldic symbols among local communities.

Sicily was never conquered by Napoleonic armies, which instead occupied the Kingdom of Naples. This explains why transformations imposed on civic heraldry in territories occupied by the French did not occur on the Island²⁴. Sicilian heraldry thus continued its autonomous trajectory.

With the establishment of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1816, which formally unified the Kingdom of Naples and that of Sicily, an administrative rationalization process was initiated, also affecting civic heraldry. Municipalities were equated in rights and symbols: the ancient distinctions between royal cities and feudal 'terre' were abolished. A ministerial circular dated 3 October 1818 ordered the preservation of municipal coat of arms designs at the Ministry of the General Chancellery, established by Law no. 656 of 8 December 1816 as a replacement for the suppressed State Secretariat. In compliance with this directive, the Intendancies forwarded the municipal heraldic drawings²⁵. Copies of some manuscripts prepared by the Sicilian Intendancies were made at the State Archive of Naples – Political Section, between 23 May 1942 and 20 March 1943, during the Second World War, by the draftsman Giuseppe Simonelli, possibly for transmission to the state government in view of drafting the new law on Italian nobiliary organization, Royal Decree no. 651 of 7 June 1943²⁶. These are important sources that allow us to evaluate the entirety of Sicilian municipal heraldic insignia, triggering a phase of 'normalization' and homogenization of municipal symbols across different parts of the island, no longer taking into account the distinction between feudal and royal centers. In certain cases, the Bourbon monarchy granted noble titles linked to major royal cities to members of the royal family,

²² On sicilian aristocracy see F. Mugnos, *Teatro genologico delle famiglie nobili titolate feudatarie ed antiche nobili del fidelissimo Regno di Sicilia viventi ed estinte*, Palermo e Messina, Pietro Coppola, Domenico d'Anselmo e Giacomo Mattei, 1647, 1655, 1670; V. Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, cit.; A. Mango di Casalgerardo, *Nobiliario di Sicilia*, cit.; F. San Martino De Spucches, *La storia dei feudi e dei titoli nobiliari di Sicilia dalla loro origine ai nostri giorni*, voll. 10, Palermo 1924-1941.

²³ V. Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, cit.

²⁴ Cfr. G.C. Bascapè-M. Del Piazzo, *Araldica napoleonica in Italia*, in *Insegne e simboli. Araldica pubblica e privata medievale e moderna*, cit., pp. 745 ss., and literature cited therein.

²⁵ Archivio di Stato di Palermo, *Miscellanea archivistica*, serie I, *Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Valle di Catania, 1818-1819; Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Distretto di Siracusa, 1818; Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Valle di Girgenti, 1818; Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Distretto di Modica, 1818; Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Distretto di Noto, 1818; Raccolta di stemmi e sigilli dei Comuni di Sicilia. Distretto di Trapani, 1818.*

²⁶ Archivio di Stato di Palermo, *Miscellanea archivistica*, serie I, *Antiche imprese dei Comuni di Sicilia. Vol. 1 - Valle di Palermo e di Trapani; Vol. 2, Valle di Palermo e di Trapani; Vol. 3, Valle di Catania; Vol. 4, Valle di Caltanissetta; Vol. 5, Valle di Girgenti; Vol. 6, Valle di Messina; Vol. 7, Valle di Siracusa.*

as in the cases of the Duke of Noto or the Count of Caltagirone, producing a curious phenomenon of further ennoblement of cities, with effects also on official heraldry, as exemplified by Noto, which superimposed the ducal crown with foliage over its civic emblem.

4. The Unification of Italy and the 'Consulta Araldica'

The unification of the Kingdom of Italy, formalized in 1861, necessitated the standardization of the diverse heraldic traditions of the pre-unification kingdoms. The 'Consulta Araldica' was established by Royal Decree No. 5318 of 14 November 1869, which in Article 1 defined its functions: "A Heraldic Council is established to advise the government on matters concerning noble titles, coats of arms, and other public honors." The institution, composed of eight members — four of whom were senators — was also charged with regulating and rationalizing civic heraldry according to the models codified by the Kingdom of Sardinia, the leading state in the unification process²⁷.

In 1869, a Sicilian branch, the Sicilian Heraldic Council, was likewise established with the same functions. It consisted of a president selected from state officials, eight councilors including four senators, and was assisted by a royal commissioner and a chancellor, all appointed by royal decree upon the proposal of the Ministry of the Interior.

Among the most significant reforms was the introduction of the mural crowns ('corone turrette'), differentiated by rank (municipalities, cities, provinces), which replaced the ancient noble crowns that urban centers had extensively employed since the Middle Ages. Additionally, the 'modern' Samnite shield shape — a rectangular form with rounded lower corners — was adopted in place of the various shield styles previously used by individual cities. These transformations held profound symbolic value, marking a definitive break with the privileged civic structures of the *Ancien Régime* and affirming a new, homogeneous institutional identity within unified Italy.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, amid a cultural climate characterized by the post-unification drive for systematization, Baron Vincenzo Palizzolo Gravina's monumental work, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, published between 1871 and 1875, emerged. The result of extensive archival research and comparison, enriched with detailed color plates, this work represents the first major attempt to rationalize the public and private heraldry of Sicily, establishing its forms, colors, and meanings according to scientific criteria.

²⁷ G. Sabini, *Araldica, Consulta*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol. III, 1929, pp. 947-948; G. Cansacchi, *Consulta araldica*, in *Novissimo Digesto italiano*, vol. IV, Torino, 1959.



Palizzolo Gravina displayed a philological and symbolic sensitivity rare for the period: the author did not merely catalog coats of arms but interpreted their historical sources, formal transformations, and cultural foundations, thereby contributing to the formation of a distinct Sicilian heraldic science²⁸.

²⁸ Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blason in Sicilia*, cit. Vincenzo Palizzolo Gravina (Trapani 1831-Palermo 1914), baron of Ramione, son-in-law of Giuseppe Gravina and Ruffo, was an internationally known heraldist. His other works on the subject of heraldry includes: *La famiglia Palizzi: notizie e documenti*, Palermo, 1872; *Un diploma di re Martino e la famiglia Gravina della regia stirpe normanna*, Palermo, 1874; *Genealogia della famiglia Termine e sue relazioni*, Palermo, 1875; *Genealogia della famiglia Colonna Romano di Sicilia*, Pisa, 1876; *La nobiltà siciliana nelle armi, nelle scienze, nelle lettere e nelle arti*, Palermo, 1876; *Gli Ugo di Sicilia: cenno ed albero genealogico*, Palermo, 1878; *La Casa Gravina: Cenno e tavole genealogiche*, Palermo, Tipografia dell'Armonia, 1887; *Emmanuele Requesens*, Palermo, 1898; *Vanni di Pisa e di Palermo: Cenno ed epigrafi*, Avellino, 1931. In some representations of the city coats of arms Palizzolo Gravina ran into error, probably on the basis of fallacious information, as with the coat of arms of Caltagirone, where the eagle does not hold a giant's bone with its right claw, but a Moor's head.



Throughout the twentieth century, civic heraldry underwent further transformation, initially driven by the unifying ambitions of the Fascist regime, and later by reforms instituted by the Republic. During the Fascist era, which claimed its own heraldry, many municipal coats of arms were modified to include eagles, fasces, and particularly the *Capo del Littorio*, established by Royal Decree No. 1440 of 12 October 1933, blazoned as: “purple with a golden fasces of lictor, surrounded by two branches of oak and laurel, tied with a ribbon bearing national colors.”²⁹ The coat of arms of Sutera exemplifies this trend.

With the establishment of the Italian Republic in 1946, Fascist symbols were removed: for example, the fasces were eliminated from Sutera’s coat of arms, leaving only the two branches of oak and laurel on a purple field with a voided center.

In the post-war period – and increasingly during the final decades of the twentieth century – many Sicilian municipalities opted to abandon their ancient coats of arms of feudal origin, regarded as legacies of an oppressive past, in favor of new symbolic elements. This is the case with Ramacca, where a sheaf of wheat, emblematic of the municipality’s cereal wealth, replaced the old emblem of the Gravina Cruyllas family. In some instances, new insignia have been chosen without reference to local histori-

²⁹ See *Araldica*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana* - Appendice I, 1938.

cal or symbolic traditions, occasionally resulting in questionable graphic and semantic outcomes.

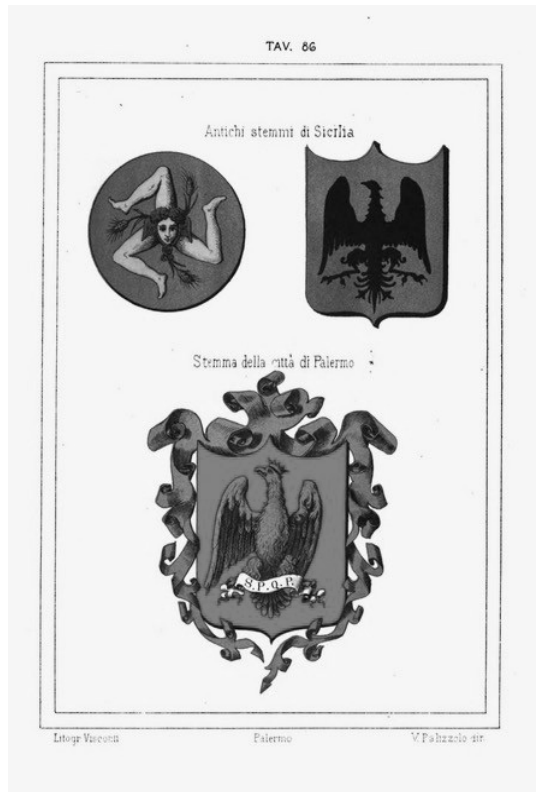
5. A Case Study: The Coat of Arms of Caltagirone

A paradigmatic example of the transformations experienced by Sicilian civic heraldry at the historical turning point between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period is offered by the insignia of Caltagirone. Originally, under the Normans, the city adopted a coat of arms representing a castle, a fortified symbol of royal power and of the strategic role of the town within the island's defensive system. This is documented by two seals recently discovered among the ruins of the tower constructed by the city amid the remains of the Arab castle of Iudica, in the fiefdom of Camopetro.



In the 13th century, following the reconstruction of Caltagirone's castle by Frederick II of Swabia, the insignia evolved to feature a crowned eagle clutching in its right talon a giant's bone — an echo of the cyclopean legend that regards Caltagirone as the homeland of ancient giants. These heraldic symbols underwent further transformations in subsequent centuries, acquiring new elements: from the 15th century, the use of a red

cross on a silver field supported by two griffins — symbols of strength and vigilance — became attested. This motif was borrowed from the Republic of Genoa's arms, which, according to legend, had seized control of the town in 1030 with a group of warriors serving under the Byzantine general George Maniakes, who was attempting to reconquer the island from the Arabs.



Figg. 1-6. Coats of Arms of the sicilian cities (V. Palizzolo Gravina, *Il Blasone in Sicilia*, Palermo, Visconti & Huber, Tipografia di Alessandro Mirto, 1871-1875).

The Genoese coat of arms remained in use until the 19th century, with a significant variation documented by the magnificent marble coat of arms on the Church of San Giacomo, created approx. 1610 by Giandomenico Gagini the Younger³⁰: the red cross on silver field supported by the griffins is placed on the chest of the crowned eagle, which holds the giant's bone in its right claw, perfectly synthesizing the ancient and the more modern arms. This insignia accompanied the city's fortunes into contemporary times.

³⁰ A. Ragona, *Il Tempio di S. Giacomo in Caltagirone nella storia, nell'arte, nel folclore*, Catania, Tringale, 1992, pp. 54,119. See also note 27, pp. 202-203.

The eagle's crown continued to be depicted as a baronial crown, since Caltagirone was baroness of the fiefdom of Camopetro, through a bold juridical construction whereby a royal city (demanial city) held a *beneficium feudal* title³¹. This was also the case during the brief period when the young Gennaro Maria Immacolata di Borbone (1857–1867), the last son of King Ferdinand II, bore the title Count of Caltagirone³². As noted above, in analogous circumstances, the city of Noto changed its crown to a ducal one.

6. Conclusions: Fragility and Prospects of Sicilian Civic Heraldry

Sicilian civic heraldry, far from being a mere collection of decorative emblems, constitutes a cultural heritage of profound historical, anthropological, and identity-related significance. It symbolically narrates the histories of cities, the political stratifications, the foundational mythologies, and the power relations that have shaped the Island and its communities over the centuries. However, this heritage is currently under significant threat: on one hand, due to institutional neglect and the loss of historical memory; on the other, from graphic and symbolic interventions often lacking rigor, which erase centuries of heraldic stratification in the name of ephemeral modernity.

A renewed commitment from local and national institutions would be desirable, through programs aimed at the protection, enhancement, and dissemination of civic coats of arms as intangible cultural assets, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In this regard, heraldry can still speak to the present — and the future — if it is regarded not as a useless and incomprehensible relic of a past to be forgotten, but as a tool for identity, memory, and civic cohesion.

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³¹ On the city and his coats of arms see P.P. Morretta, *De Calatagirono Urbe Gratissima brevis notitia*, Venetiis, Hertz, 1663, F. Aprile, *Della cronologia universale della Sicilia*, Palermo, Bayona, 1725; G. Pace Gravina, *Il governo dei gentiluomini. Ceti dirigenti e magistrature a Caltagirone tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Roma 1996; Id. (ed.), *Il Senato civico di Caltagirone: storia, racconto, memoria*, Caltagirone, ApS Vox, 2021.

³² See E. Taranto, *La festa del Conte in Caltagirone*, Catania, Galatola, 1857.

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