

Certaldo. Poesia del Medioevo. Alla scoperta delle chiese, delle torri, dei palazzi nel paese di Giovanni Boccaccio. Francesca Allegri and Massimo Tosi, eds. Robert Hollander, Intro. Certaldo: Federighi Colorgrafiche, 2002. Pp. 150 + 18 unnumbered pp. at end. 215 color photos, 36 drawings, 16 watercolors, 7 maps. €10. ISBN: 8-8900-7054-9.

Creative layout, informative text and colorful illustrations make this little book an excellent companion for visitors to Certaldo, whether in person or as armchair travelers. Robert Hollander's paragraphs of presentation recall the first time he went, "an experience both unforgettable and unforgotten" in 1975, before major changes reanimated the home of the town's most famous son. His words can resonate for all who have made that pilgrimage to the Casa del Boccaccio, church of SS. Jacopo and Filippo, Palazzo Pretorio, and paused for a classic Tuscan *pranzo* at the Osteria del Vicario or lingered overnight in one of the atmospheric guest rooms tucked upstairs.

A preliminary dip into history, "Cenni storici," sets the pace of this dual language paperback, conveniently bound front and back with fold-out covers that open inside to attractive bird's-eye watercolor illustrations of the town and its *contado*. Certaldo may derive from "Cerreto Alto" (as Boccaccio has it in *Filocolo* IV, 1) or *Castra-Cataldum*, given its ideal situation as a fortified Roman encampment. Its deep origins are Etruscan and Hellenistic, signaled by a nearby burial mound called "Poggio del Boccaccio" and the names of the rivers Elsa and Agliena, at whose confluence the community lies. Never a free commune, Certaldo was from the thirteenth century administered by a Florentine *podestà* who lived in the Palazzo Pretorio, and it flourished as a stop on the great medieval pilgrimage route from France to Rome, the *Francigena*. Certaldo Basso began around 1700 with huts the peasants built for their tools, soon augmented by businesses that served an agricultural economy — smithies, wheelwrights and carters. The coming of the railroad in 1849 assured the fortunes of a commercial center important for glass factories that produced wine flasks for which women (*fiascaie*) and children wove straw holders; Chianti wine, pasta, oil, truffles and onions — hence the city's coat-of-arms, a shield divided between red and white fields with a red onion on the latter.

"Visita alla città," the major portion of the book, then takes readers on a stroll that circles from Piazza SS. Annunziata up the Via Boccaccio to Palazzo Pretorio at the end, southward to the sixteenth-century fortification ("ravelin") at the Porta Rivellina, and loops back along Via della Rena to the Porta Alberti, near the starting point and upper stop of the funicular that now connects Certaldo Alto and Basso. (General motor traffic is no

longer allowed in the medieval town, but there is ample parking at the base of the *funivia* in Piazza Boccaccio, dominated by Augusto Passaglia's 1879 statue of the poet.) The *Casa del Boccaccio* settles into its proper context, a neighborhood of other named dwellings along the central *via* — Palazzo Stiozzi Ridolfi, Palazzo Giannozzi, Palazzo Machiavelli, each with a historical and physical description keyed to multiple illustrations. What makes the visuals so unusual is the mixed-media presentation. Many watercolors in a uniform chromatic palette by the co-author Tosi, ranging from high-angle double-page layout to small inserts that focus on such architectural details as ancient mural brick patterns, complement creatively framed color photos and helpful ground plans, both for urban layout and individual structures. All work together to invite readers into a three-dimensional Tuscan space, amplified by privileged aerial views and the kind of pointers that come proudly from locals long acquainted with a town's best secrets.

Documentation multiplies around the most important monuments. We see phases of a building's history in old engravings, prints, drawings and photographs. Interiors open to display decorations, contents and the facts about personages associated with them (these last set in a smaller font and inserted on pages with tinted backgrounds to distinguish them from the primary narrative). So, for example, we see Boccaccio's house in the Settecento, at the 1875 centennial of his death, in ruins after World War II bombing, and the library as it looked after restoration in the 1990s. A small medallion portrait of the Marquise Carlotta Lenzone de' Medici precedes a larger color reproduction of the trompe-l'oeil fresco she commissioned of Boccaccio in *His Study*. A separate article follows to introduce its Napoleonic artist, Pietro Benvenuti (1769–1844), whose prominent career is represented by a small-scale color reproduction of his most famous painting, *Il giuramento dei Sassoni*. Book covers of the *Decameron* in Arabic, Hebrew, English, French and German, a full-page detail of Castagno's *Boccaccio* and a biographical profile of the author with illustrations in his own hand from Hamilton 90 and Paris Ms. it. 482 complete the pages on *Casa del Boccaccio*.

Centerpiece of the book is the church next door. La Canonica dei SS. Jacopo e Filippo opens to the reader as part of a larger complex: the cell in which the Blessed Giulia della Rena, Boccaccio's contemporary, spent her life immured (she, like the painter Benvenuto, is the subject of a separate article); a cloister, and the surrounding convent, now home to the Museo d'Arte Sacra, with liturgical objects and art from the surrounding territory. Interior views contrast the church as it appeared before 1900, plastered and painted with faux stones in a late Romantic style, and then after 1963,

restored to Gothic simplicity. Running commentary and matched images call our attention to artifacts beyond the main attractions (Boccaccio's epitaphs and his 1503 cenotaph bust by Gian Francesco Rustici): a recently uncovered Duecento fresco of the *Madonna Enthroned* by Memmo di Filippuccio, and sixteenth-century Della Robbian tabernacles.

Coming to Piazzetta del Vicariato, bounded by Palazzo Pretorio, we meet Paolo da Certaldo (14th c.), author of *Libro dei buoni costumi*, and "I Conti Alberti di Certaldo," relatives of Farinata degli Uberti who built the stronghold confiscated early in the fourteenth century by Florence to serve as headquarters for its "vicari." Records preserve the names of 707 judicial officials from magnate families appointed to administer this political dependency (Ginori, Pitti, Altoviti, Tedaldi, Medici, Ridolfi) for semester-long terms down to the year 1784. Their coats-of-arms dot the façade in "una vera e propria antologia di quell'arte araldica che in Italia, ed in particolare nella Toscana dell'Età di mezzo e del Rinascimento, ha trovato le sue più elevate espressioni di equilibrio e di armonia" (80). These pages of history and heraldry, with full-color close-up pictures, are among the most enjoyably informative of the volume. Glimpses into the past come from details that tell of the column out in front where decrees and laws were posted, an allegorical fresco in the Tribunal of *Truth Pulling Falsehood's Tongue out with a Pair of Pliers*, a painted motto that reads "Odi l'altra parte / et credi pocho," prison cells with graffiti on the ceiling reached by inmates who formed human ladders three people high, the torture chamber, the women's prison and the Palace Chapel, where criminals condemned to death found their final comfort.

The Palace houses Etruscan objects as well, and behind it lies an oasis little known to outsiders, "Il Giardino di Nagasawa," named after the Japanese artist who designed it as a setting for a tea house donated by Certaldo's sister city of Kanramachi. Information surrounding the Palazzo Pretorio continues with entries on "Omaggio a Giovanni Boccaccio degli artisti contemporanei" (an exhibit of 1967 preserved in the catalogue published by Sansoni), frescos from various rooms that serve now for exhibits of modern art and a profile of Pier Francesco Fiorentino (15th c.), a collaborator of Benozzo Gozzoli, who worked extensively in the Certaldan palace.

Beside the palace stands the deconsecrated church of San Tommaso and Prospero, now used for lectures and conferences inside walls with sad remnants of frescos dimly visible. It houses the *Tabernacolo dei Giustiziati* by Gozzoli and assistants, detached from its original setting near a bridge over the Agliena River on the Via Francigena and so named because it served prisoners condemned to death. The church's cloister became the picturesque restaurant and inn known as Osteria del Vicario. The

last stops on the circle tour are three city gates: Porta al Rivellino, once defended by canons whose brickwork mount is still visible; Porta al Sole, the main city gate shown in a hundred-year old photo with Medici es-cutcheon sculpted above and ragamuffins clustered in the street outside; and the third, the gothic Porta Alberti, illustrated in artistic photographs before the recent funicular installation diminished its charm.

Leaving Certaldo behind, our authors invite us to roam its surrounding countryside, such places as “le fonti di Certaldo” linked to Fileno’s weeping in the *Filocolo*; the Pieve di San Lazzaro at Luccardo, a prime example of Romanesque architecture on the Via Francigena; and the eleventh-century Castle of Santa Maria Novella, so named from the custom of calling “nuovo” newly ploughed land (“*novellare* significa mettere a coltura nuovi vitigni” [145]). The final pages bring us back to the present-day city, in which cultural activity flourishes — street acrobatics and theater, processions in historic costume, the annual fall wine and oil festival, the *Premio Letterario Boccaccio*, concerts, outdoor cinema and, of course, a rich Tuscan *cucina*.

Original in format, appealing for the way it combines photos old and new with watercolor maps and illustrations, this is both “*poesia del medio-evo*,” as the title promises, and a small encyclopedia, good either for quick consultation or more leisurely inspection, and always informative. Slips are scarce: on p. 40, a caption identifies the initial “H” of “Humana cosa è” in Paris, Bibl. Nat., Ms. 482, as “codice Hamilton”; on p. 43, Boccaccio only reached the sixth canto of *Inferno* in his *Esposizioni*; on p. 148, a biographical capsule on Pace da Certaldo, “a contemporary and perhaps a friend of Dante,” dates his *Storia della guerra di Semifonte* as complete in 1320, and (in the next paragraph) as begun in 1332. Remarkable for its visual apparatus (some 270 images), Allegri and Tosi’s *Certaldo* is more than a fine guidebook. It is a history of the city from the Pliocene to the present, strongest obviously for the Middle Ages. Our libraries should acquire it, and all Boccaccisti will want to make its acquaintance.

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