

Little known flags of the State of Lucca

by Roberto Breschi

Abstract Lucca was an independent Republic for a very long period from 1119, when a free Commune was established, to 1799 when it was occupied by Napoleon. The State survived for another half century, but it was controlled by foreign princes. The flags of Lucca are rather known by the vexillologists, however, particularly in the Middle Ages, when Lucca was involved in relentless struggle with the neighboring Communes, different flags of the temporary rulers appeared on the city walls. When the aristocratic Republic was stably restored, local Lords rarely hoisted similar standards. All these interesting flags are very little known, even if well documented in some ancient illuminated chronicles. In addition to these aristocratic standards, some little known popular flags were hoisted in Lucca over the centuries. For example the flag of the Volto Santo (Holy Face), not only a devotional device, but also a sort of battle ensign.

1. The State of Lucca

The State of Lucca¹ was located in north-western Tuscany, stretching roughly on the territory of today's Province of Lucca. Except for a short dramatic period of subjection to foreign powers during 14th century, the State enjoyed a very long period of independence, from 1119, when it became a free Commune, to 1799 when it was occupied by France. Lucca negotiated its freedom and by 1801 had regained its republican status; however it did not succeed in regaining complete independence: the State survived for another half century, but under the control of foreign monarchs. In fact, after the fall of Napoleon there were a succession of provisional governments (1813-17) and eventually Lucca became a Duchy under Mary Louise Bourbon-Parma. In 1847 Mary Louise's son Charles Ludwig ceded the State to Tuscany, which was under the House of Lorraine, and this marked the end of any residual autonomy Lucca might had enjoyed.

2. Rather well known flags

The basic flags of the State of Lucca are known by the vexillologists rather well; however it seems useful to recall them briefly. The white-red bicolour was the flag of the Commune (fig. 1) and was already in use at least in the 12th century, and in time it acquired a meaning somewhat similar to today's national flag. In 1799 when the French occupation occurred, followed by Austrian counteroffensive, the flag was abolished and resumed more than one time. In 1801 when the French came back permanently,



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7



fig.8 – From the Croniche by Sercambi



fig. 9



fig. 10



fig. 11



fig. 12



fig. 13



fig. 14

it was adopted as state flag and remained until 1805. Even today, it is the flag of the municipality of Lucca. The origin of the colours is uncertain, but the red is most likely related to the Ghibellin fraction, which Lucca joined by the first half of 11th century. During the 13th century in accordance with the custom of Italian Communes, a distinct flag was adopted for the Government, blue with the golden motto LIBERTAS, proud declaration of sovereignty of the State (fig. 2). It was hoisted both on land and at sea. The flag disappeared in 1799 following the French occupation. A less known different version of this flag had a white field, and the golden inscription LIBERTAS on blue was within a centred crowned shield (fig. 3): it was used as state and merchant ensign from 14th century until 1799. In addition medieval chronicles of Lucca give an account of three flags derived from different arrangement of both Commune and Government flags on a single cloth (fig. 4 - 6).

Another very significant flag was that of the People; it was the usual white-red bicolour bearing the image of Saint Peter holding only one key (fig 7). The ancient chronicles (fig. 8) report this flag from 1368; after 1392 is always shown at the head of the army of Lucca. Following on the transformation of the Commune in aristocratic Republic, the flag fell into disuse.

During the French period two new flags were decreed. On 20 June 1803 a new maritime flag was adopted, a red lozenge in a white rectangle within a blue border (fig. 9). It had the French colours, but even the same as those of the two flags of the old aristocratic Republic together. The flag was commissioned to Vincenzo Scotti, famous designer of flagcharts³, who was inspired by the flag then in force of the Italian Republic. This was the last republican flag of the State of Lucca⁴. In fact in 1805 Napoleon converted the Republic into a Principality, which included Piombino, for his sister Elisa. On 8 August 1805 a horizontal tricolour was adopted, light blue, white and red (fig. 10). It lasted until 1809, when the State was united with Tuscany, which by that time was part of French Empire.

As already said, during the last years of residual autonomy (1818-1847), Lucca was a Duchy assigned to Mary Louise Bourbon-Parma, later (1824) passed to her son Charles Ludwig. Bourbon flags waved over the duchy. The state flag was white with a small yellow-and-red canton, and bore the ruling family's coat-of-arms: from 1818 to 1824 the one of Mary Louise and from 1824 to 1847 the blazon of her son (fig. 11 - 12).

The merchant ensign was a white flag with a yellow-over-red canton (fig. 13) during Mary Louise's rule. It was displayed first (1820) side-by-side with, and later (1824) replaced by, a Spanish-style flag that had five yellow and red stripes (fig. 14). The latter differed from the merchant flag of Spain by having stripes of uniform width.

3. Little known flags

3.1. The terrible century

During the 13th and 14th centuries wars between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines convulsed Italy, Tuscany in particular. The two factions were in favour of Papacy and Empire respectively, and often were discordant inside themselves. In that time Lucca, where the Guelph faction was prevailing, was the most important Commune of Tuscany⁵, but the increasing power of the nearby Ghibelline Pisa, was the cause of con-



fig. 15 - Uguccione of Pisa conquering Lucca (from Sercambi)



fig. 16 - Battle of Altopascio



fig. 17



fig. 18



fig. 19



fig. 20



fig. 21



fig. 22



fig. 23



fig. 24



fig. 25



fig. 26



fig. 27



fig. 28

stant wars. So, on 14 June 1314 Uguccione della Faggiola, Lord of Pisa, conquered Lucca with the help of local Ghibellines, and hoisted on the city walls the red flags of the Commune of Pisa (fig. 15). A little later Castruccio Castracani, a Lucchese Ghibelline, who had been nominated as Captain General of the city and Defender of the People, banished Uguccione. Thanks to the great military ability of its Captain, Lucca reached the peak of its power and influence. He defeated Florence too (battle of Altopascio, 1325, fig. 16) and the whole of Tuscany became also under control of Lucca. Unfortunately with the mysterious death of Castruccio also his powerful State passed away, and for Lucca an obscure period of subjugation began and lasted until 1370. From 1314 to 1370 Lucca saw several flags on its ramparts. In fact the different domestic and foreign Lords who ruled in succession were used to hoist their own ensigns, usually armorial, often in spite of the strong dislike of the Lucchesi. On the other hand a notice of the king Charles of Bohemia (1331), imperial vicar in Italy, granted to the current ruler of the State of Lucca to hoist his own flag⁶. All these flags are reported in the *Croniche* of Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1423), a Lucchese author, story writer and chronicler, that relate the events from 1164 to 1423. Until 1399 the text is accompanied by miniatures in colour. The original manuscript is preserved at the State Archives of Lucca^{7,8}. The images of the flags, as approximated, are easily recognizable. In any case many of them may be confirmed by other almost contemporary documents, such as the chronicles of the Florentine Giovanni Villani (e.g. fig. 16, 33, 34)⁹.

The first miniature (fig. 17) shows that the Government flag of Lucca, blue with the word LIBERTAS, is lowered and the red ensigns of the Commune of Pisa is raised (1314). Shortly after (1316) the governor of Pisa Gaddo della Gherardesca added his round shield with a half black eagle on gold on the one side, and truncated red on white on the other (fig. 18). Castruccio Castracani (1317) took away the Pisan flags and hoisted his own ensign blue and silver, with a silver greyhound emerging from blue (fig. 19 - 20). The Castruccio flag is also mentioned in the Villani's chronicle but it is incorrectly reported as blue and yellow (fig. 16). In 1329, after Castruccio's death, and a short period of rule of his sons, Lucca passed to the Visconti of Milan. They hoisted the well known flag with the snake devouring the child (fig. 21), also reported by Villani (fig. 33). Marco Visconti was lord of Lucca just for a few months. In the same year 1329, the city had a new owner, Gherardino Spinola, from Genoa, who hoisted the ensigns of his family, which at that time was yellow with three twigs of blooming hawthorn (fig. 22).

Another round of dance. In 1330 John king of Bohemia and vicar of the Emperor arrived in Lucca. He ruled along with his son Carlo and also had the services of Castruccio's sons. In the chronicles of Sercambi two coats of arms are given (fig. 23 - 24). The first party per pale with the black imperial eagle on gold and the silver lion of Bohemia on red, the second party per pale too with the coat of arms of Castruccio's family and still the imperial eagle. However, until 1333 the flag was only that of the Empire, the black eagle in a golden field, very well known and reported by other chronicles of the time (fig. 34).

In 1333 the Rossi, counts of Parma, became vicars of the Emperor in Lucca. They had an armorial flag quartered of white and red (fig. 25 - 26).

The next image of the chronicles of Sercambi summarizes the years from 1335 to 1342. Mastino and Alberto della Scala ruled as Lords of Lucca until 1341, when they sold the city and most of its territorial dependencies to the Commune of Florence



fig. 29



fig. 30



fig.31

(fig. 32). The della Scala hoisted on the palace of the government their armorial agalonic¹⁰ ensign, a white ladder (*scala* = ladder) on red. The Commune of Florence his red fleur-de-lys on white (fig. 26).

In 1342 Lucca, hostage of endless struggles for dominance over Italy among the great families (Visconti, della Scala, Malatesta, etc.) as well as among the strongest States (Genoa, Florence, Pisa) eventually fell under the red flags of the hated Pisa (fig. 27). The Pisan Giovanni dell'Agnello, Lord of Lucca from 1364 until 1369, raised his canting flag, a white lamb (*agnello* = lamb) on blue and yellow vertical stripes (fig. 28).

Finally, on 8 April 1369, first Sunday after Easter, the State of Lucca regained liberty, not before a brief passage under the black eagles on gold of the Emperor, and under the red flags with a yellow figure (called "banner") of his cardinal vicar Guido de Monfort (fig. 29 – 31). As Sercambi tells, the independence of Lucca cost its citizens very much. In fact, before the Emperor Charles IV left he demanded a huge sum of money. But the joy was great, so that this event is still remembered celebrating each year, on Sunday after Easter, the "Liberty Day".



fig.32

3.2. Terzieri and Gonfaloni

The hard lesson was useful. On the territory of the State roads were improved, bridges thrown, and great defensive works were built. It was necessary to strengthen and enlarge the city walls; the renewed government of Lucca established a commission which would set hand to a city defense system as rational as possible. The result was that the area included in the circle of the city walls was divided into three *terzieri* (city districts). In fact a division in quarters (the *societates populi*) existed since 1100, but it was more theoretical than practical. The new *terzieri* were very well organized. Each of them was divided into four parts called *gonfaloni* (sub-districts) garrisoned by companies of militia, for a total of twelve. Duty of these urban units was not only to defend the city from attacks of the enemies, but even to protect and assist it in case of natural phenomena as floods or earthquakes: it was a sort of civil defense. The *terzieri* took the name of the Saint to whom the most important church within their borders was dedicated, and they had its own flag. The flags were white on red, charged by the image of the Saint. Even the *gonfaloni* had white-red flags wearing a distinctive figure¹¹.



fig.33



fig.34

The *terziere* of Saint Paulinus, including the southwestern sector of the city, was the most densely populated. It was the most important as it had the task of defending the segment of wall facing the main enemy, Pisa. Its white-red flag wore the image of Saint Paulinus holding the pastoral with the left hand and a Lucca in miniature with the right hand, as bishop and patron of the city. The *terziere* was divided in four *gonfaloni*: *Serena* (Marmaid), *Luna* (Moon), *Granchio* (Crab), and *Falcone* (Hawk). Each *gonfalone* hoisted its own white-red banner, with the figure from which it took the name. The *terziere* of the *Salvatore* (the Savior) was the smallest and included the central part of the city full of shops of merchants and craftsmen. The figure of the Christ blessing stood out on its white and red banner, while the four *gonfaloni* had the respective figures from which they drew the name, *Sole* (Sun), the *Gallo* (Rooster), *Corona* (Crown) and *Rosa* (Rose).



fig. 35 - This drawing of Lucca from the *Croniche* of Giovanni Sercambi, summarizes, not without some inaccuracy, the frequent hoisting and lowering rulers' flags during the 14th century

The *terziere* of Saint Martin occupied the eastern part of the city including the cathedral. It was by far the most extensive. Its white-red flag showed the Saint in the act of



fig. 36 - Terzieri (city districts) and Gonfaloni (sub-districts)

dividing his mantle with the poor man. The names and the emblems of the *gonfaloni* were *Ruota* (Wheel), *Pappagallo* (Parrot), *Cavallo* (Horse) and *Stella* (Star).

The flags of the *terzieri* and the *gonfaloni* are very similar, being all derived from the bicolour white on red of the Commune. In this Lucca was distinguished from other cities, such as Siena, where the colour contrast of the banners of the various *contrade* seems to emphasize and stimulate the rivalry among them. Here, instead, all parties had to contribute to the defense of the town in order to preserve the people by natural disasters as well as by the attacks of the enemies¹². These flags relive today on the occasion of pageants and tournaments in historical costume.

3.3. The Lordship of Paolo Guinigi

Toward the end of the 14th century, there was in Lucca the rise of a powerful merchant family, the Guinigi. In 1400 Paolo Guinigi, at the age of 24, rose to power and proclaimed himself "Captain and Defender of the People". A *Signoria* (Lordship) was formally introduced. So the State of Lucca, no longer a Republic, became a sort of Principality. Although a dictator, Paolo, seem to have been a just and peaceable man. During his long Lordship the State prospered greatly and trade flourished again. His management of internal affairs brought stability and wealth even if he was not so skilful in foreign policy. Unfortunately his complete power gave rise to jealous rivals and, on August 1430, a conspiracy hatched by other families of Lucca (Cenami, Buonvisi) deposed him. He was imprisoned in the castle of Pavia, where he died in 1432. Paolo Guinigi had his flag¹³, an ermine cross on red. It was an armorial flag, reproducing the family coat of arms (fig. 37 - 39). He was the last Lord of Lucca who hoisted a personal flag. After the Republic was re-established, any ruler's flag was never seen next to those of the Commune and of the Government up to 1818.



fig. 37



fig.38



fig.39



fig. 40



fig. 41



fig.42



fig.43 – The Rivolta degli Straccioni, Volto Santo.

3.4. The proposal of Francesco Burlamacchi

Francesco Burlamacchi, was born in 1498 into one of the most affluent families of Lucca. He took a very active part in the public life of the city acquiring important public offices in the administration of the Republic¹⁴. He controlled the mint as well as the military defence, had a hand in the education, and eventually became *gonfaloniere*, the highest republican authority. In foreign policy, he tried to promote – with a surprisingly modern and morally relevant political vision, but unfortunately misunderstood – a federal union of States in central and northern Italy, in order to cease the oppressive struggles between the various Lords. His project was misrepresented and passed for a conspiracy, especially against the Medici, as everybody knew he was concerned at the growing domination of Florence. So Burlamacchi was arrested and consigned to the authority of the Emperor. He was imprisoned in Genoa, sentenced to death and publicly beheaded in 1548.

Francesco Burlamacchi has been rehabilitated, and today he's considered a figure of high relief moral. Every year, on 30 November, an opinion movement, *Per Lucca e i suoi Paesi* (For Lucca and its Villages), inspired by his ideals, is used to place a laurel wreath and unfurl "his" flag by the statue representing him, in the central St. Michael square¹⁵.

The mentioned flag is striped white and red, the most frequent heraldic colours in Italy, bearing the coat of arms with the gold inscription *LIBERTAS* on a blue background. Burlamacchi's supporters affirm that this flag was designed by Burlamacchi himself for the projected federation, but they do not lead any convincing evidence. Although its historicity is suspected, nevertheless this flag exists (fig. 40 - 42).

3.5. The grey flags of the Rivolta degli Straccioni

Just a mention to a rather peculiar flag. From the start of 12th century to the end of 15th century, Lucca was famous throughout Europe for the production of silk drapes. In the 16th century, silk industry, went into a depression because of the war between France and Spain and the foreign competition. Most of the production remained unsold. On 1 May 1531, feast of spring, instead of joyful processions, a violent revolt of the weavers against the government did burst. It's known as *Rivolta degli Straccioni* (Revolution of the Regged Fellows). The flags of the Republic were torn, and replaced with plain gray or black drapes (fig. 43)¹⁶. But the protest degenerated in criminal acts, and it was quickly suppressed¹⁷.

3.6. The banner of the Volto Santo

To bring this work to an end I like to mention a banner correlated to the extraordinary legend of the *Volto Santo* (Holy Face) of Lucca. The *Volto Santo* is a mysterious wooden crucifix, quite dark in colouring, dating to the early Middle Ages, as it has been estimated, even if an ancient tradition attributes the making to Nicodemus, the man who assisted Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the corpse of Jesus for burial. The impressive artifact is still venerated in the cathedral of Saint Martin. The legend says¹⁸ that the crucifix after remaining buried for seven centuries, in 742 miraculously reached the coastline of Tuscany on an unmanned ship without a name. It was then drawn in a cart by two untamed bulls to Lucca, where it was welcomed by the population and declared "King of Lucca"¹⁹. In the Middle Ages, the image of the crucifix was depicted on flags, often also brought in battle (fig. 44). In the course of the cen-



fig. 44

turies, the flag of the Holy Face was enriched with decorations and other holy figures, becoming a devotional banner periodically renewed. The last magnificent version, measuring 2.4 m x 4 m, was painted in 1890. It has just been restored and exhibited in the cathedral (fig. 45).



fig.45

Notes and bibliography

1. The original sources for any research on the history of Lucca are in the State Archives of the city. However there are also many helpful general works. Among these: F. GIOVANNINI, *Storia dello Stato di Lucca*, Lucca, 2003; J. JONES, *History of Lucca/Storia di Lucca*, Lucca, 2002; A. MANCINI, *Storia di Lucca*, Firenze, 1949; A. MAZZAROSA, *Storia di Lucca dalla sua origine fino al MDCCCXIV*, Lucca, 1833 (available as free e-book).
2. For an overview on historical flags of Lucca: A. ZIGGIOTO, *Le bandiere degli Stati Italiani, 5) Gli Stati della Toscana*, in "Armi Antiche", special issue for 4th ICV, Turin 1971. See also "Flagmaster" 100, 2000; R. BRESCHI, *Flags of Italian States since 1700*, flagchart and booklet, 2002.
3. A. ZIGGIOTO, *La più bella carta di bandiere italiana: il Prospetto Salvatico*, in "Vexilla Italica", XXVII,1, 2000.
4. R. BRESCHI, *L'ultima bandiera della Repubblica di Lucca*, in "Vexilla Italica", XXVI,2, 1999.
5. Iconographic and historical suggestions can be found in M. SEIDEL, S. ROMANO, *Potere delle immagini, immagini del potere. Lucca città imperiale: iconografia politica*, Venezia, 2007.
6. F.F. DEI DAUGNON, *Arme e bandiere di Lucca*, in "Giornale araldico-genealogico-diplomatico Italiano", 2-3, 1875. This source also mentions, without any image, several flags hoisted in Lucca until 1861 including those of 1314-1370.
7. G. SERCAMBI, *Croniche*, various codexes. The archetypal codex (1400-1424), belonged to Paolo Guinigi, is preserved in the State Archive of Lucca.
8. VV.AA. *Giovanni Sercambi e il suo tempo*, Lucca, 1991; A. ZIGGIOTO, *Le bandiere della Cronaca del Sercambi*, Proceedings of 14th ICV, Barcelona 1991 (publ. 2001), and *Sfogliando antichi manoscritti. Parte II*, in "Vexilla Italica", 56, 2003; images mostly taken from O. BANTI, M.L. TESTI CRISTIANI, *Giovanni Sercambi, Le illustrazioni delle Croniche nel Codice Lucchese*, 2 vol., Genova, 1978; see also S. BONGI, G. Sercambi, *Le Croniche*, Roma, 1893.
9. Giovanni Villani (1276-1348) was a Florentine statesman and chronicler. He wrote the Nuova Cronica (New Chronicles) where the events regarding the history of Florence are reported year for year. For the figures 16, 33, 34 credits to C. FRUGONI *et al.*, in *Il Villani Illustrato*, from *Manoscritto Chigiano LVIII 296* of the Vatican Library, Florence 2005.
10. If a patronymic is taken from the figure on the shield the coat of arms is said to be "agalmonic". Vice versa, if the figure is inspired by the family name, we deal with a "canting" arm.
11. To understand the mechanism by which in general were chosen some figures rather than other, see A. SAVORELLI, *Il nome della cosa* (The Name of the Thing), in *Emblemi e Vessilli*, Pisa, 2002.
12. R. BRESCHI, *Bandiere delle contrade lucchesi*, in "Vexilla Italica", 58, 2004.
13. F.F. DEI DAUGNON, *ibidem* (see note 3).
14. M. BERENGO, *Nobili e mercanti nella Lucca del Cinquecento*, Turin, 1965.
15. The statue stands isolated in the center of the *piazza* turning his back to the church (fig. 40), as Burlamacchi had been accused to have a liking for Calvin and to belong to the freemasonry.
16. From a water colour by V. Barsotti, State Archives of Lucca, legato Barsotti, 5, 1943.
17. On 7 April 1532, the Liberty Day, the College of the Elders, ordered to ring the bells of the civic tower. At this signal all men valid of the people gathered next to the banner of their own *terziere* and the revolt vanished as a soap bubble.
18. From an explanatory panel next the chapel of the *Volto Santo* in the cathedral of Saint Martin in Lucca.
19. A. SANTINI, *Pellegrinaggio al Volto Santo*, Milano, 2007; P. LAZZARINI, *Il Volto Santo di Lucca*, Lucca, 1982.





Biography

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