

TOKEN TOTEMS - FLAGS OF THE PALIO AND CULTURAL CROSS-OVER IN FLAG DESIGN



A lecture delivered to the 23rd ICV in Yokohama, July 2009
illustrated with physical flags and images projected via MS PowerPoint.

ABSTRACT

Whilst it is a commonplace that flags are mobiles, and that their design ideally should take account of this – in their simplicity, distinctiveness and all the heraldic and chromatic conventions – less mundane uses of flags in various cultures (eg the “company” flags of the Asafo of Ghana, or the banners of Masonic Lodges) are often overlooked.

The kinetics of flag display are a feature of Beijing Opera, and taken further in totalitarian liturgies. The civic rituals of medieval Europe are another rich resource of design ideas. Among these, the flags of the Palio held in Siena and other Italian cities stand out.

The *contrade* banners of the Palio employ a design template seldom found in modern national flags. The pageantry of this earlier flag heritage has something to say even when minimalism in flag design is seen as practical and to be preferred. They present a challenge for vexillography.

The paper examines the forms of the Palio flags, and the relationship to flags as tokens of totem. Some examples are given of cross-cultural application in national and other flags of the future.

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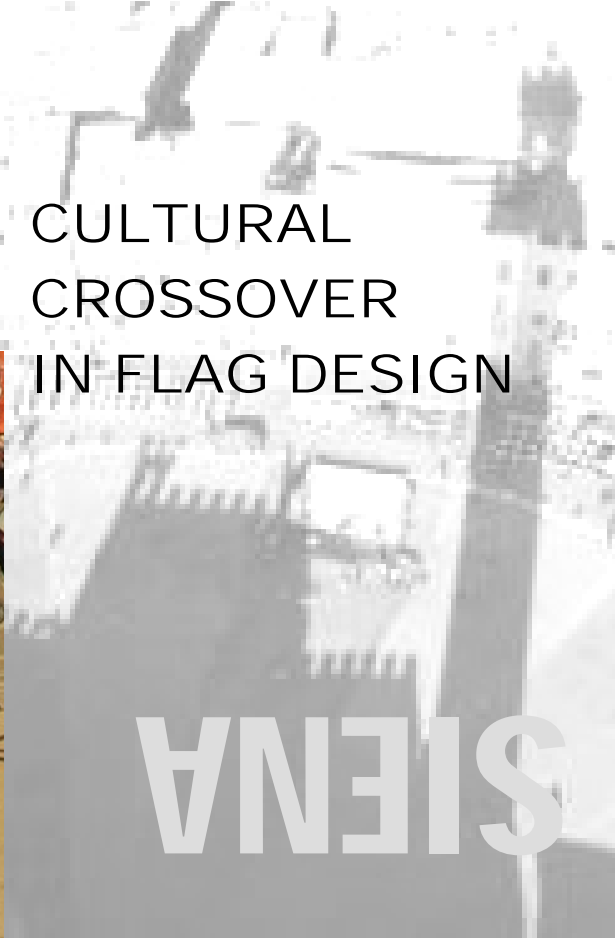
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

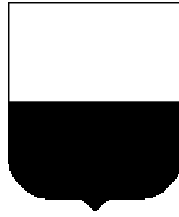
Tony Burton is a long standing member of **Flags Australia** and its executive, and the editor of its journal **Crux Australis**. He has a keen interest in the principles and practice of flag design. He is the author of many cross-cultural articles on flags and aspects of Australian flag history. Some of his work is reflected in the emblems of Aboriginal Councils, and he is the designer of the Australian South Sea Islanders flag. Other designs of his have won finalist place in several of the design competitions conducted as part of the debate over the Australian flag.

The **PALIO**

CULTURAL
CROSSOVER
IN FLAG DESIGN



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SIENA



FIGURE 1



Medieval city, Central Tuscany
said to have been founded by Senius,
son of Remus brother of Romulus,
founders of Rome



FIGURE 2



TOKEN TOTEMS - FLAGS OF THE PALIO AND CULTURAL CROSS-OVER IN FLAG DESIGN

INTRODUCTION – Figure 1

Flags are more than simply graphics, and flat graphics, as designers often seem to imagine. At the Melbourne ICV in 1989, Dr Whitney Smith reminded us that flags have another dimension beyond length and breadth. They have *edge*, by which I believe he meant that flimsiness that allows the fabric to move about and thus attract attention to convey their essential message.

That message lies in the fourth dimension of flags, external to the fabric of the flag. This aspect of flags resides in the psyche. One of the key tests for flag design is what happens for the beholder when flags actually move, as they are meant to do. Is the beholder also moved?

Kinetic flag display features in Beijing Opera. It is taken further in totalitarian liturgies. The civic rituals of medieval Europe are another rich source of flag display and design. Among these, the flags of the Palio held every summer in Siena and other Italian cities stand out. Their flags do indeed move, as they are flourished and tossed in the air. For those actually there, it is a spectacle moving like few others.

The unusual design and pageantry of the Sienese flags is the first focus of this paper. There follow some observations on what goes into their design, and further remarks on the power of flag devices as reflections of a totemic world, and the need for symbolism that makes our humanity. The paper then considers how the flags of the Palio offer insights about flag design elsewhere, starting with my own country, Australia.

PART I – THE PALIO

BACKGROUND

After the 2007 Berlin Congress my brother and I visited Siena to see the Palio. Held twice each summer, the Siena Palio is the best known among other contests that combine a horse race and the pageantry of flags (**Figure 2**).

A CIVIC LITURGY

The Palio easily resonates with Australians: on a Tuesday in November all of Australia stops for a similar event - though without the flags. The Italian event is however more than just a horse-race. It is a demonstration of civic pride, engaging a whole community, thrilled by the pageantry and panache that flags convey so well.



The day before, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, flags and horses had been blessed in Siena's Cathedral. The horses behaved themselves; the flags were left overnight on the altar (**Figure 3**).

FIGURE 3



14th century fresco
Aphantico Church, Mistra,
Greece depicting Pope
Gregory I wearing the *pallium*
Source: Wikipedia Commons

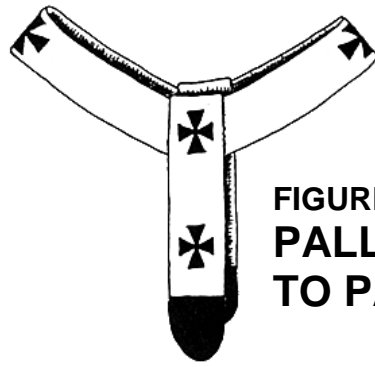


FIGURE 4
PALLIUM
TO PALIO

Adapted from Byzantine court dress, a symbol of civic, and later, spiritual and ecclesiastical authority.

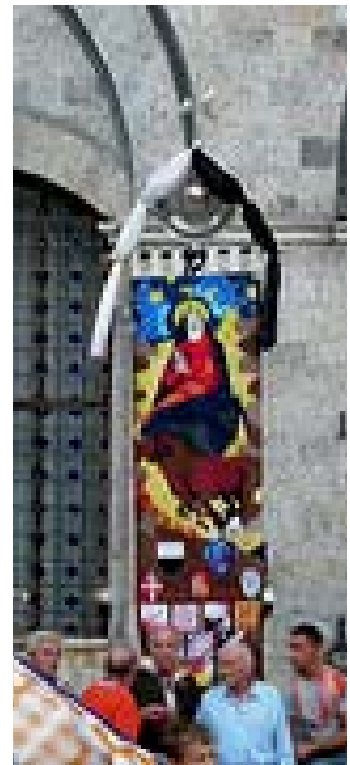


FIGURE 5

The religious ritual is significant. Originally a Byzantine court vestment, the *omophorion*, the Palio takes its name from the Latin *pallium*, a long scarf bestowed as a symbol of authority on bishops by the Pope, from around the 6th century (**Figure 4**).

Though not a flag itself, the Palio gives it name to and is the real trophy of the festival in Siena. Black and white (the city colours) and otherwise undecorated, it is draped over a vertical banner – a true vexillum (**Figure 5**). The banner, not the Palio itself, is decorated, usually depicting the city's most famous daughter, Catherine, patron saint of Siena and of Italy.¹

The best vantage points around the Piazza del Campo (**Figure 6**) are taken early by those keen and hardy enough to stew in the sun until start of proceedings at 3 in the afternoon. Meanwhile the tension builds in the *contrade* (**Figure 7**). If the *Palio* and a purse are the prize of the race, there is also the glory gained by the winner before 10,000 people jammed into the central piazza of the Old City. Victory is hard won. Horses and riders career, without saddle or stirrups, three times around the lopsided and sloping arena. There are always a few tumbles. The crowd roars. Fourteen minutes – and it is all over.



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7

THE PAGEANT

The fourteen minutes of the race are preceded by four hours of fanfare and pageantry. Representatives of the competing *contrade*, or districts of the Old City, along with equerries, pages and retinue, including flag-bearers, all in 15th century costume, parade around the circuit to the slow beat of drums, the blare of trumpets punctuating the proceedings. (There is just one tune, the theme of the Palio). **Figures 8-10** below and following pages convey some of the pageantry.



FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10





FIGURE 11:
Flags of the
contrade



FIGURE 12:
IL PALIO
August 2007
9 am on the day,
John picks the 7pm
winner!



THE FLAGS

Each of the *contrade* has a signature flag (**Figure 11** and **Appendix A**) displayed throughout the *contrada* as well as in the Palio procession (**Figure 13**). These well-defined neighbourhoods were designated in the Middle Ages, primarily to provide funds and manpower for the military companies hired to defend Siena's independence from Florence and other nearby city-states. There are now 17 *contrade*, consolidated from 59.

FIGURE 13

There are distinct cultural traditions and styles among flags. The Chinese developed their own type of fringed pennants; in Japan *kamon* were used as symbols of ruling families, and have been adapted for large corporations today.² In Ghana, colonial flags of the past have been adapted to express and enhance the prestige of local community associations.³ Medieval and Renaissance flags of the Italian city-states - and these at Siena in particular - are another, and a unique type. Compared with the plain geometrics of most flags today, the unusual designs of the *contrada* flags illustrate the rich foundations of - and reasons for - vexillology.

They also suggest territory largely unexplored for flag design of the future.

DESIGN STRUCTURE

The *contrade* banners follow a template seldom found in modern national flags. By today's design standards they may seem quaint and exotic. However, even when minimalism in flag design is seen as practical and preferred, the pageantry of this earlier flag heritage should not be overlooked.

The Palio flags are square, an aid to the aerial ballet that is a part of the pageantry. At first glance there is a likeness to regimental banners - though without the slogans and mottos usually incorporated in those. Like any properly designed flag, these impact without the need of labels.

The matrix is relatively consistent: a single device is offset by an ornate yet generally geometric background. As a graphic technique, counter-changing colours reinforces the harmony and balance of the designs. Each *contrada* has a set colour scheme, but the precise detail of representation appears to vary from time to time, and also between the formal banners and versions sold as souvenirs (**Figure 12**). The defining emblem reflecting the name of the *contrada* is placed in the centre, or in one of the corners. All the rest - borders and stripes, wavy lines, scallops - is simply embellishment but always in the colours or livery of the *contrada*.



FIGURE 14



FIGURE 15



FIGURE 16



FIGURE 17



The device on each flag is the emblem or mascot of the *contrada*. These are not heraldic Arms in the usual municipal sense (the city of Siena has its own flag and emblem, white over black).⁴ The emblems reflect the name of their *contrada*. As a device, the emblem is usually an animal or some other mascot (**Figure 14**) not very different in concept from modern football mascots - the Bulldogs, the Sea Eagles, the Demons (**Figure 15**), intended to connote some quality or prowess as well as the locality. With the *contrade*, the locality comes first, and its traditional profession implied by the background colours. Thus the *contrada* of *Bruco*, the caterpillar, is the symbol of the silk-weavers. *La Chiocciola*, the Snail, shown in an older style (**Figure 16**) is set on a background of red and gold – colours associated with the traditional profession in that *contrada* of terra-cotta workers. Two of the emblems are mythological: *Leocorno* (unicorn) has a stylized background of rivers of gold, for the traditional goldsmiths of that quarter. A dragon represents the residents of *Drago contrada*, traditionally the residence of bankers. Others include an eagle, a dolphin, a panther, a giraffe, a rhinoceros, an elephant, a porcupine - and a goose (**Figure 17**).

PART II - TOKENS AND TOTEMS

What are we to make of such symbols, especially those like dragons and eagles that appear again and again on flags? At the profoundest and most ancient level of cultures, theriomorphs – fauna representing supra-human powers - hint at a perceived human need for transcendence, if not an equally human desire for dominating power. The reality of external “divinity”, though widely promoted, is yet to be proven. It is equally sensible that these symbols in reality represent some human activity, moral quality, aspiration or power, or possibly, innate aggression. The lion and eagle are the most common as symbols of courage and *imperium*.

Some of the Palio emblems are unusual – a rhinoceros and a giraffe are part of the menagerie. The porcupine (*istrice*) has an exotic counterpart in Australia. A mammal, the echidna (**Figure 18**) lays eggs like a reptile. Its quirkiness alone and the implied deterrence of its spikes afford it place on the coinage.

FIGURE 18



vexillonomic⁵ connection is that the echidna and other indigenous fauna are in Australia more than just cute mascots. Among Aboriginal people, they are significant symbols, often invested with both human and spirit-world qualities, and assigned to individual as totems and protectors.

In many respects flags perform a function not greatly different from totem poles: both are a focus of tribal coherence and identity and of the myths underlying them. Beyond this, like an icon in its religious sense, the essence of a totem is more than an image seen for its surface. A totem is a symbol used and respected as a reminder of things unquantifiable. They are part of a message or sign (some would say a postulation) of another dimension and its “unseen” powers.

Whether the mascot-emblems on the Palio flags have an ultimately and conscious religious origin of this kind, or exert that kind of inspiration today, is moot. They may simply be, or have become, token totems.

Such emblems do however highlight the role a specific device can have in focusing the significance of a flag design. On flags, devices are more than decoration. They convey at least part of the symbolism for which the whole flag is a summary statement. A flag bearing a device says something more evidently than an apparently bland combination of abstract geometric shapes, whose deeper significance is less obvious than a pictograph.

Symbols express in visible (or in the case of language and music, audible, or in dancing, kinetic) ways, things that largely are unseen, but supposed, surmised, supported, respected and thereby sanctified.⁶ That is the definition and function of any sacrament, and not very far from an adequate definition of flags themselves. The Palio flags are flourished in a kind of tattoo or stately dance; they are the kinetic sacraments of this civic liturgy. Flags and dance are often associated, even when the dance is a political demonstration; colours are raised aloft as feet stamp the earth, both an affirmation of our existence.⁷

As with flags (especially national flags – when taken as flags of nationalism), it is well to recall that the power of the totem, and its printed representations, works not by any magical efficacy of paint and fabric, but in the way the image meddles with the mind of the beholder.

This can seem a circular argument, for of course it is the cognitive artist who *models* the image in the first place, and who in so doing, also meddles with the image. What I am focusing on here is the *effect* of the image - in this case, a flag - once created, propagated, and elevated to its postulated status. In its decade of outing, the bent cross was a notorious but clear example of such power and process. It is arguably a dynamic device, stark, black against an opposing circle of light, (two sun symbols together) in the centre of a field of blood (another symbol of life-force). It is an image, a totem, that when repeated over and over, enhanced by the theatre of torchlit processions and other ritual, works a mesmerizing magic on the minds of those who consciously wish, or subconsciously are disposed, to be entranced. Of more benign intent, but as powerful, is the symbol of the rising sun, with all its mythic connotations in these islands, but evoking also the birth of each new day in every place, and for many, a replay of what happened on the first day of the world and the first day of the week. The association of ideas implied in their symbols underpins the power of flags, and reinforces that effective flags will also seize, shake and move - and sometimes, disturb - the beholder.

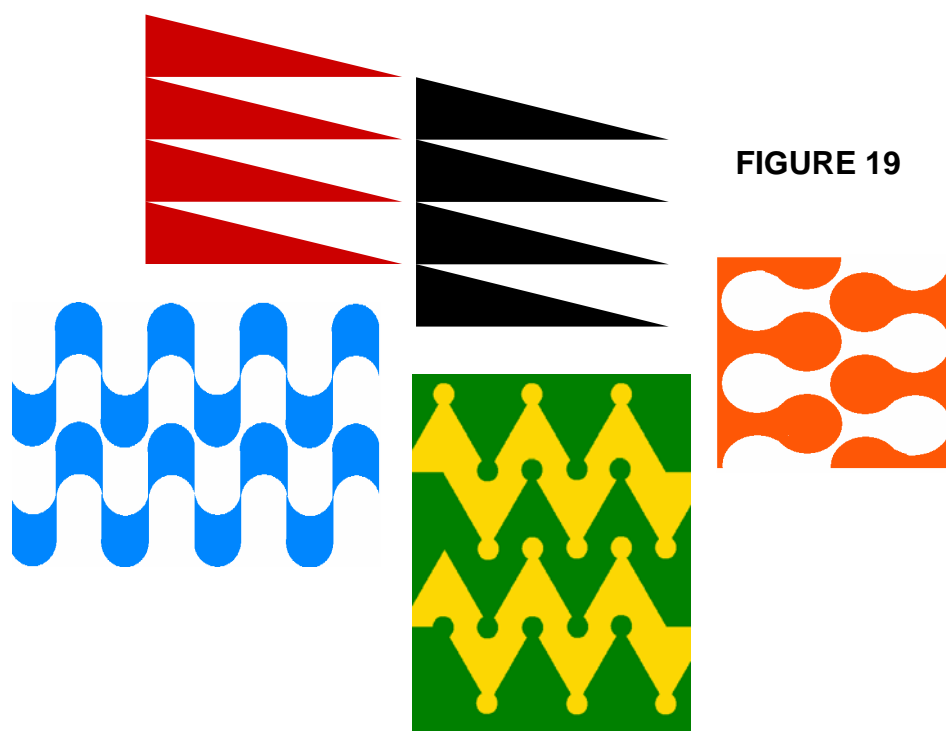
These speculations fall into the realm of vexillosophy perhaps, and may seem far from the innocent heraldry and spectacle of the Palio - or any other pageantry of flags. They do however explain in part the attraction of that pageant and illuminate the power of these (and, by extension), other flags.

All cultures use images and icons, emblems and idols as an emanation or manifestation of a “race-memory” or collective unconscious.⁸ As symbols seem to convey, the human race has seen something or things that have affected us profoundly since the dawn of history - though what we have seen, arguably, is of our own making, or at least wired within us. Hormones and pheromones, aided perhaps by fermented and other substances - all the chemistry that creates euphoria - or taps into a wider euphoria, and even ecstasy - interact. The resultant images - external projections all, stimulate a powerful reaction. The spark that so many cultures imagine as divinity is with and within each one of us. With all its ambiguity, access to transcendence is within our ordinary powers: a “kingdom” or nirvana never really absent, only hidden to the blind. It is not something imported or in need of saviours other than our own nature fully known and realised. Flags are symbolic attendants of this process - a world-wide cultural work in progress.

Abstruse as it seems, all this goes into the meaning of flags - especially national and civic flags as the chief symbols of community. The nation, and more immediately, the city, is that community greater than family and tribe in which most of us find our individual destinies. At an immediate civic level, in the Palio *contrade* and their flags, emblems like the unicorn and the dragon can be seen more clearly than the others as mythical totems of such challenges and power. The eagle is another, one evoking authority, ultimately that of its twinned city, Rome and its successive empires - and of course, *imperium* that implies (self)mastery and never-ending rule in a cosmos made of chaos is a very powerful myth.⁹

PART III - CULTURAL TRANSFERENCE

If flags are a form of totem, then the idea of individual or specific totems is transferable to flags. Totemic or not, the Palio flags are far from bland. The background embellishment of the flags is a riot of shapes and counterchanging colour, of checks and curves, flames and zigzags making these flags an art-form in their own right. Some of these shapes and patterns are shown in **Figure 19**.



They exhibit an exuberance that is infectious, as the Palio draws near, unfolds in the long afternoon and finds final celebration in the city streets and taverns afterwards. There is nothing staid or beige about these banners. Everything about them is made for celebration and festivity. While other flags in other times and places have often been hijacked to the abuse of power, here is one instance at least where they bring joy to the beholder.



FIGURE 20



FIGURE 21



FIGURE 22



A CHALLENGE

There is a challenge for vexillography here.

- Can the gaiety of the Palio flags be translated beyond the theatre of medieval and Renaissance Italy?
- As more flags are hung out, can this lead to a cultural transition for the better?

The answer to these two questions is written in time to come. Cultural bliss, like euphoria, cannot be guaranteed or predicted. It may be hoped for.

- A third question is more specifically vexillological. Can the design forms in the Palio banners find useful application in other flags? That depends on whose pageant demands it. Who or what occasion needs such dazzling flags?
- And if such cultural borrowing is possible, *why* do it?

This last is the fundamental question. It is perhaps the easiest to answer, for it is related to hope. This fourth question goes to the heart of what vexillology is about and why we need it. Not just those who have a conscious fascination with the minutiae of flags, but we, the emerging world community. In such a world, flags will be the continuing signage and assurance of cultural individuality and diversity.

With the rise of nationalism, flags have become bland, though stark simplicity is part of their manipulating power. Among national flags the possible permutations of colours and shapes, bands and bars, stripes and sashes, crosses, triangles, saltires, and circles are almost exhausted. In a recent issue of **Flagscan**¹⁰ Kevin Harrington illustrated this with an array of other red and white flags besides Canada's. In the end they seem interchangeable, as do many flags of the Middle East (**Figure 20**).

The most cogent reason to “hang out more flags”, in my view, is that the world *needs* pageantry. This is not simply to paste over the appalling daily round of death and disaster, ill-will and suspicion. To the contrary, flags can be an irritating, even revolutionary, reminder that joy in living is the birthright of all. Colour and verve are not a luxury, or a camouflage against pain and suffering, but a sure sign of civilization present – and in its absence or suppression, a call to it.

ADAPTATION

Can the Palio-style designs be adapted to modern flags?

Possibly. The *contrade* banners of the Siena Palio are close in style, but not the quite the same as flags that are essentially banners of Arms - the State flag of **Maryland**, the lozenge flags of **Bavaria**, or the regimental flag of the **Swiss Guards** are examples (**Figure 21**). And although the Palio banners employ a design template rare in current national flags, a few do come to mind: **Sri Lanka**, **Kiribati**, **Montenegro** – and most extravagantly, **Tibet** (**Figure 22**)

**FLAGS IN OZ:
WIZARDS WANTED**

Addressing further the question of cross-cultural inspiration, the Palio flags might be adapted to the design of future flags, and in particular, to bring pageantry to Australian flags that currently have little exciting or inspiring about them, with at least two most recently devised proving the adage that more is less.¹¹ (Figure 23)



**FIGURE 23
DESIGNS IN
STRAITJACKET**

**AND MORE
IS LESS**

Australian state flags especially could be much more exciting than the serviceable but colonial blue-ensign and badge hand-me-downs we have. Like one of the Palio banners, two of the states have a bird as their badge emblem, one suspiciously like an eagle. The other states and the Capital Territory use more abstract heraldic devices - stars, lions, crosses - as components of their respective badges.

Celebrating 150 years this year, Queensland might be the state to start with. Stretching through the tropics from the Torres Strait to the Gold Coast, Queensland is often referred to as the Sunshine State. Since 1876, the state emblem and flag badge has been a blue Maltese Cross with a Royal crown in the centre. As with the Palio flags, the combination of a badge and geometry can still make a striking flag. Based on the existing state badge, a sunny flag for the Sunshine State, “Beautiful one day, perfect the next” might look like this (Figure 24).

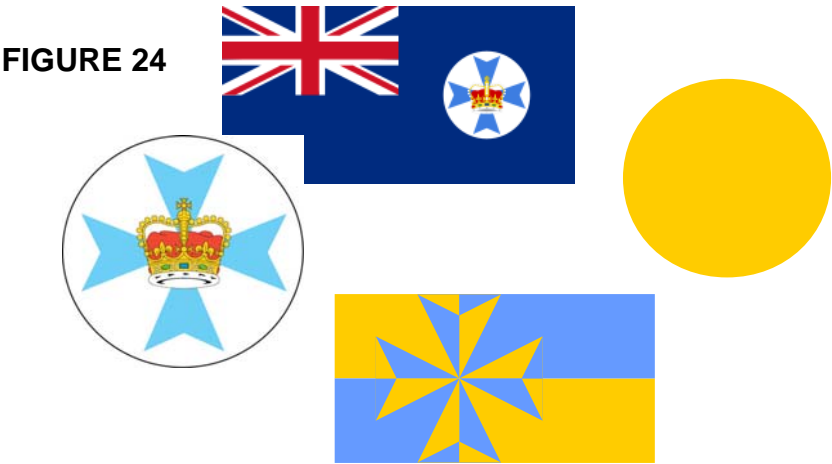
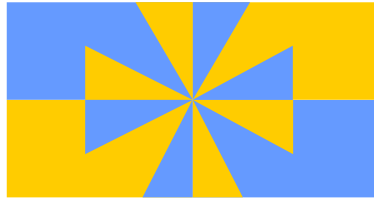
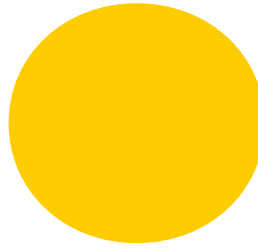
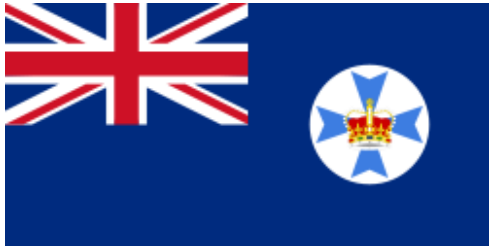
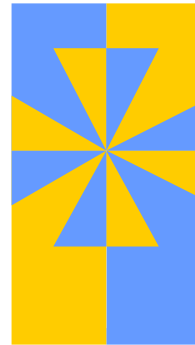


FIGURE 24



**FIGURE 24:
QUEENSLAND
THE SUNSHINE
STATE**



AN AUSTRALIAN FLAG?

Flags should both attract and inspire, and that applies especially to the national flag.

What would an Australian flag look like if the Palio design template were followed?

Referred to sometimes as the “Holy Grail” of Australian vexillography,¹² a new flag eludes designers, much as it does the promoters of the idea of change itself, although the launch of new words to the national anthem on 24 May this year is perhaps a sign of things to come.

“Exciting” is the main quality missing from practically all the design suggestions, amateur and professional, since the 1970s. The other criterion lacking so far is beyond the power of designers: the will and leadership to consider a new flag a real priority any time soon.

In the meantime, there is no harm if vexillologists play and practice. It may stand in good stead eventually. Others have already made the effort - in the 1901 competition, **Figure 25** and a little more sedately, Joe Bollen and Anthony Frost in 1993, **Figures 26** and **27**.



FIGURE 25

FIGURE 26



FIGURE 27



Frost’s black, gold and white suggestion led to this writer’s amendment (**Figure 28**) making the main device the Southern Cross, not the Commonwealth Star – the flag itself already stands for the Commonwealth: why say it twice, with a superfluous symbol?

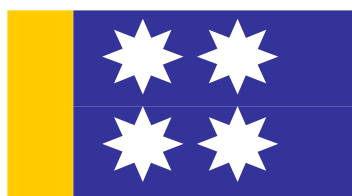


FIGURE 28

Designers’ block and current official reluctance does not mean a wonderful flag will not eventuate or does not exist. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong places - trying to make a silk purse out of the existing colonial relic, or going too far to include all the clutter imaginable from the surfeit of national symbols that we have.¹³

In addition to the axiomatic principles of flag design, an ideal Australian - or any national - flag should express

symbols appropriate to the national culture,
with simplicity of line and device,
and stand out among the nations

The last criterion, distinctiveness, is difficult given the repetition of themes and colours on more than 200 national flags currently recognised.

A Palio model suggests a flag with one device and other embellishment to enhance the central emblem – a kind of Kaviani flag illumined by Whitney Smith at the 13th Congress.¹⁴ In practice, this suggests that an Australian flag will portray, in some form, the Southern Cross (**Figure 29**). It is the simplest symbol longest and most consistently used in Australian flags. It holds the affection of Australians, not just because it is on our present flag and many of its historical prototypes. The emotion is the other way round. The Southern stars are on those flags because we feel, as the first Australians always have felt, a sense of destiny symbolized by the stars - the same stars that proclaim continuity of the ageless Aboriginal Dreaming.



NEW DESIGNS

A new flag should float serene above us. It is not there to project power aggressively or as an excuse for prejudice as the world has seen the current flag abused. Its design should be such that while it stands out, it is so effective a symbol of Australians’ national self-confidence that we can all safely ignore it - though not take it, or what it represents, for granted. It will avoid grand politically-correct statements. In that context, it is interesting that the designer of the Aboriginal flag has stated that while his people are the first Australians, their flag doesn’t need to be on the one national flag inclusive of all.¹⁵

AN EVOLUTIONARY DESIGN

An evolutionary flag derived from existing forms and colours is almost obvious. Hints and even images are found in the published record of *Crux Australis*.¹⁶

Such a flag (**Figure 30**) might retain red - as a symbol of our red continent and to express the idea of a “crimson thread of kinship” that no longer stands for the colonial link with British foundation, but the kinship of the wider community of all those who work to make Australia home. It will have blue for our surrounding seas and an endless sky, blue for the peace of mind and the general happiness we should strive to build, common health in a common wealth, all under the same silver stars that shine as a beacon – the “light on the hill” of a just and fair society.

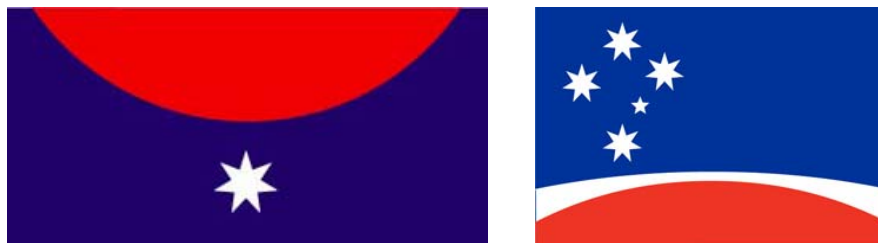
FIGURE 30



SOMETHING BOLD, SOMETHING NEW ...

Alternatively, perhaps Australians should look for something even more distinctive - a flag like no other. In that, we might break new ground in flag design - and have fun in the process.

In a land of quirky flora and fauna, in the Land Down Under, a certain quirkiness in the flag may not be out of place. Hundertwasser's Down Under flag (**Figure 31**) and Ausflag's 1993 Uluru choice came close (**Figure 32**).



The weakness of Tucker's design, and others like, it is that it seems too pictorial. Flags are symbols, not landscape paintings. The design also lacked a clear visual focus, a weakness not evident in the current flag with its unmistakable focus on the Union Jack. Hundertwasser's flag reflects his proctological interests.

What then are the symbols that might warm Australian hearts and excite admiration among others? Do the complex flags of the Palio offer a clue, and how could that inspiration be translated to the simple forms required of a modern flag?

Implicit in some of the designs of the Palio banners is the concept of light and fire. One in particular - *Torre*, the Tower - with an elephant mascot, indeed has the elephant in the room - a sunburst. The sun is the symbol of life and all the good and glad things that make life worth living in the Land Down Under. That is why it is on the Aboriginal flag. Perhaps the national flag too should reflect such light and warmth, its quiet glory filtered through the eucalypts, currawongs calling in the early morning - a quintessentially Australian experience. (**Fig. 33**)

... GREEN AND GOLD, WHITE AND BLUE

In such a vision of sun and light, a starting point may be acceptance of Australia's official colours since 1984, green and gold, as complement to the blue and white flag of the Southern Cross, broken out on Sydney Harbour in 1838,¹⁷ and in another version, at the Eureka Stockade in 1854.

As noted earlier, the Southern Cross is almost the totem of belonging for Australians, whilst the stars are assigned as the home of the ancestral spirits of the Aboriginal Dreaming. Sun and stars have both been used in various insignia of the free settlement of South Australia (**Figure 34**) where the sun is the backdrop to the current arms and badge in the state flag. The native acacia, or Golden Wattle, a bright yellow flower with grey-green leaves, reflects both the sun and the bush. The wattle and the bush find special reference in Australian literature and are held in special regard in the Australian mind-set. The green and golden Wattle is the national floral emblem, backdrop to the Coat of Arms. And there is nothing more Australian than a eucalyptus leaf.

The very quirkiness of the Palio banners provides a clue to how such symbolism might be conveyed in an innovative approach for an Australian flag.



Above: 1988
Bicentennial logo



FIGURE 33
COLOURS OF AUSTRALIA National colours -
Green and gold in the eucalypts,
Golden Wattle and Gumtree green



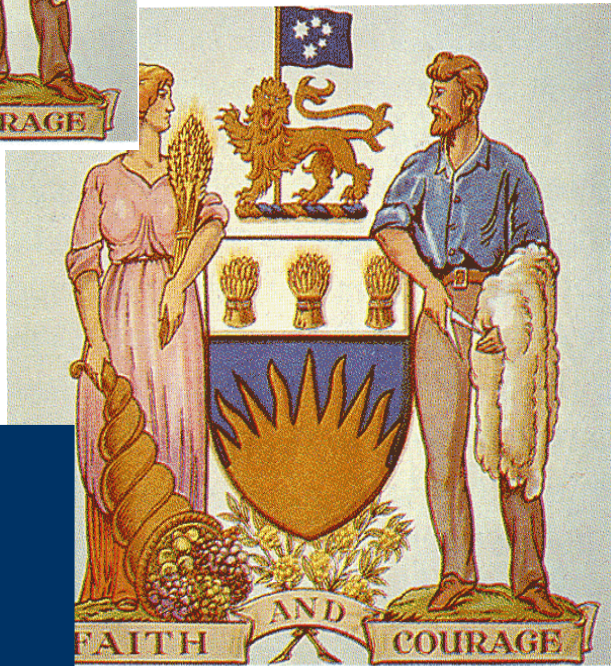
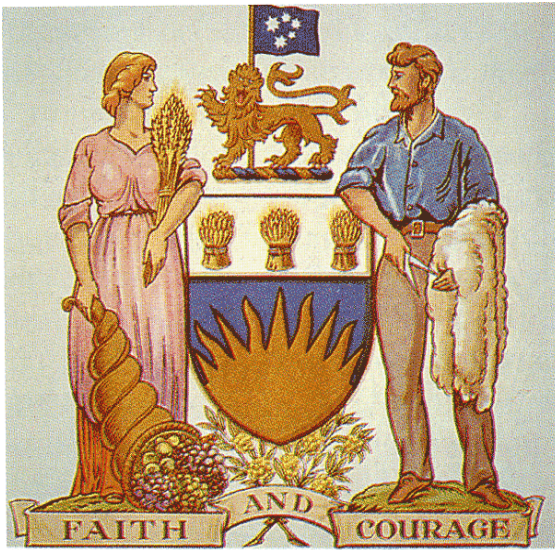


FIGURE 34
SYMBOLS OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A DESIGN
FALLS INTO
PLACE

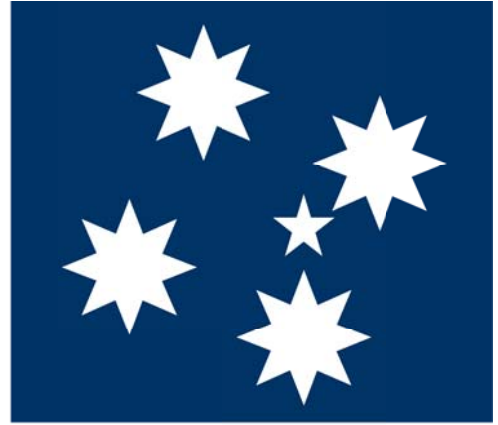


FIGURE 35:

SOMETHING BOLD,
SOMETHING NEW
GREEN AND GOLD,
WHITE AND BLUE



One design that I offer here (**Figure 35**), has a structure similar to the Canadian flag. A central *pale* bears the main device, but the idea is also there of a totem flanked by secondary symbols. As shown in **Figures 36-38**, the flag is constructed from a series of inter-related rhomboids, creating a rotating dynamism in the design. Almost a work of origami, it opens to reveal the silver Southern Cross on a dark ground blending blue and green. That is unusual in flags, anathema to heraldry, but intentional here – to provide foil to the white stars and golden shards stylising the light of each new day filtered through the eucalypts.

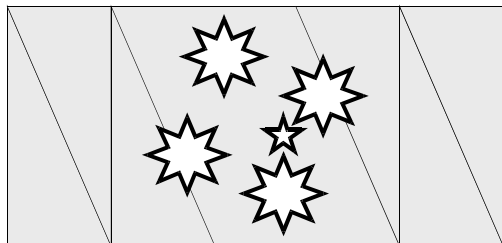


FIGURE 36

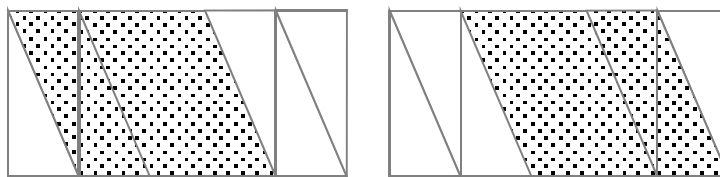
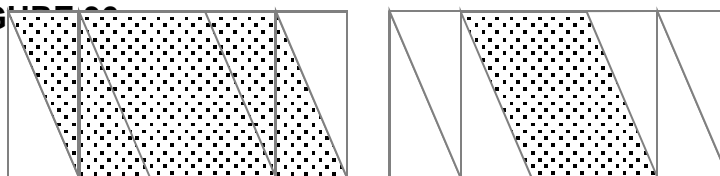


FIGURE 38

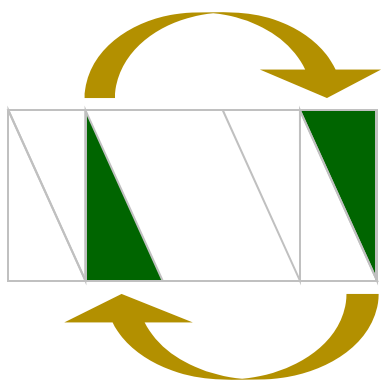
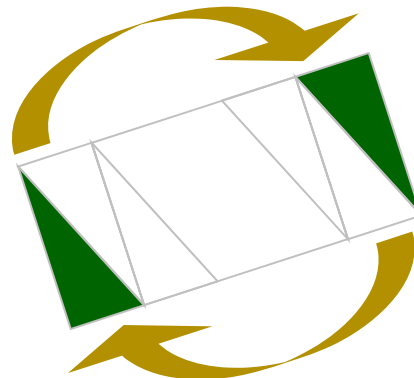
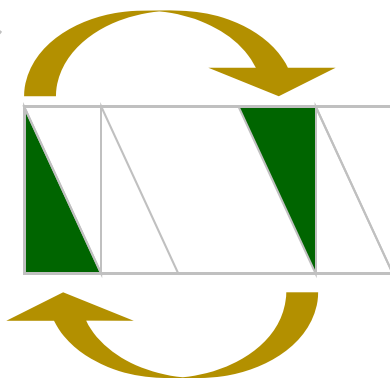
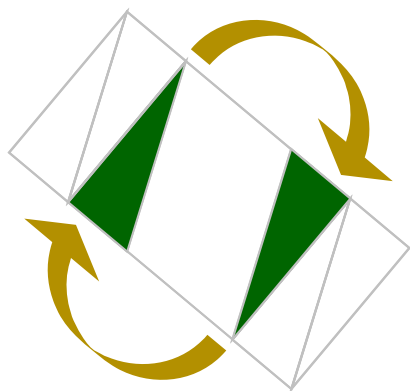
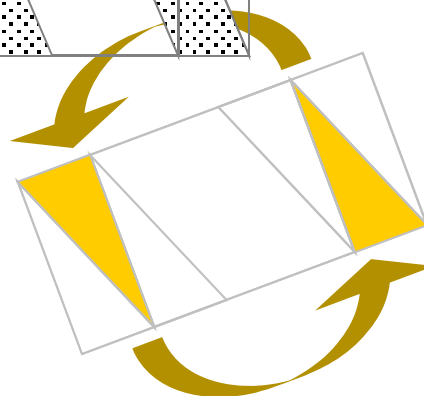
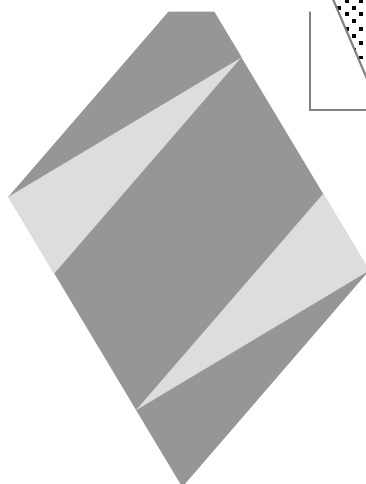
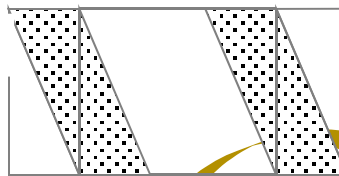


FIGURE 37



CONCLUSION

As Harold Thomas has also observed,¹⁸ whilst Australia has a workable flag that is no longer offensive to Aboriginal people (though still alienating others), if it were replaced, it would have to be “something better.”

This paper does not argue that a couple of adventurous design examples amount to that “something better” or to have the “zing” that Thomas felt the mark of a well-designed flag.

It does however invite designers to forego the tired and safe rehashing of stale concepts.

It is time to think outside the square in a way that respects the symbols of the past, but without slavish retention of familiar forms just because they are familiar. To do otherwise is to devalue the skill of truly creative designers. In the end, what counts is the idea behind the symbol, that may yet find exciting, attractive and distinctive expression - if only we were to think a little more creatively and dynamically, as the Sienese obviously have done.

In this paper

- I have shown, in the flags of the Siena Palio, something of the splendour of an unusual genre of flags possibly overlooked by designers;
- focused on their simplest components – a device and geometric decoration;
- touched on the deeper meaning, power and purposes of flags;
- noted the symbolic importance of devices that are more than merely token totems;
- suggested how the Palio template might be adapted to flag design elsewhere,
- with particular reference to the elusive “better” Australia flag

and so, I present at this forum of flags, and to encourage more creativity, a flag of unusual and distinct design.

It is a design that touches and tugs at the notion of home, of belonging, and of the kinship found in sharing all these. It proclaims the joy of each new day: the light of the rising sun slips through the eucalyptus forests that frame our shining national totem, the stars of the Southern Cross, seeming so far away, yet in our hearts, so close.

FIGURE 39



FOOTNOTES

- 1 A feisty woman, in the 1300s Catherine initiated a successful campaign for the Popes to return to Rome after 70 years exile in the south of France.
- 2 See Isao Honda, **Traditional Japanese Family Crests for artists and craftspeople and Family Crests of Japan** (Paperback - 2007/04/01) by Stone Bridge Press.
- 3 *Asafo flags* **Crux Australis** Volume 12/1 No 56.
- 4 Arms and flag of Siena. The *gonfalon* – vertical from a cross-bar, white over black with swallow tail. The separate symbol of the she-wolf and twins is a direct association with Rome).
- 5 **Vexillonomy** – the protocols and guidelines informing flag design and flagcraft in general. Gk: *nomos* – law, rule.
- 6 Jung CG, **Symbols of Transformation**, Routledge Kegan Paul 1956 fourth edition, English tr. RFC Hull.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p315 – the earth-pounding dance as a symbol of assertion.
- 8 *Ibid.*, para 75, p49 and para 509, p330 and passim. The race referred to is the entire human species.
- 9 According to legend, Siena is said to have been founded by Senius, the son of Remus, hence the symbol of the she-wolf.
- 10 **Flagscan** Issue 89/90 Fall/Autumn 2008.
- 11 The colonial badge pattern in six states has some consistency and a common history, but this tidiness and uniformity of design template has been obtained at the expensive of regional flags that really sing. The more recent flags of the Northern and Capital Territories are clumsy in their design, a device on each panel. The Christmas and Cocos Islands concoctions are even clunkier examples, with overload of emblems.
- 12 RD Kelly ICV *The Australian Flag Debate a Decade On*, paper to **ICV-22, Berlin 2007** and **Crux Australis** Vol. 21/1 No 85 January-March 2007.
- 13 A Burton, *Flag Design Workshop*, Report of ICV13 Melbourne 1989 and **Crux Australis** Vol 8/4 No 36 Oct-December 1992.
- 14 Whitney Smith, *5000 Years of Persian Military Banners*, paper to **ICV 13 Melbourne 1989**.
See also **Derafshe Kavian** in **Wikipedia**: “The *Derafshe Kavian* was the legendary royal standard of the Sassanid kings ...The banner consisted of a star on a purple field, was encrusted with jewels and had trailing red, gold and purple streamers on its edges. The star also represented "fortune" ... star imagery in banners remained popular until the ascendance of the lion and sun symbol”.
- 15 A Conversation with Harold Thomas. **Crux Australis** No. 89/2009.
- 16 **Crux Australis** Nos 33, 38, 78, 85, 88.
- 17 A Burton, *John Bingle’s Notebooks and Australia’s Original Ensign*, **Crux Australis** Volume 21/2 No 86 April-June 2008, pp71-90
- *Stars in the South – Australia’s Forgotten Flag Revisited*, **Crux Australis** Vol. 21/1 No 85 January-March 2008, pp35-56
- 18 RD Kelly, *A Conversation with Harold Thomas*, **Crux Australis** Vol. 22/1, No. 89 January-March 2009

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See also **Proceedings of ICV-13** published 1994 (publ. by **Flags Australia**)
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- Kelly, RD *The Australian Flag Debate a Decade On*, paper to ICV-22, Berlin 2007
- Smith, Whitney *5000 Years of Persian Military Banners*, paper to ICV-13 Melbourne 1989
- Photographs** taken by the author at the Siena Palio, 16 August 2007
- Artefacts** Australian flag design prototypes,
by Flags of All Nations, Wooloongabba, Brisbane
- Souvenir scarves from the Palio di Siena, 16 August 2007

APPENDIX A: CONTRADE OF SIENA

Districts of the Old City, the *contrade* were set up in the Middle Ages to provide troops to the many military companies hired to defend Siena's independence from Florence and other nearby city-states. The *contrade* have lost their administrative and military functions and today are simply areas of local patriotism and civic pride. Their roles have broadened: every important event - baptisms, deaths, marriages, church holidays, victories at the Palio, even wine or food festivals - is celebrated only within one's own *contrada*.

Every *contrada* has its own museum, fountain and baptismal font, motto, allied *contrada* (only *Oca* has no allies) and enemy *contrade* (only four - *Bruco*, *Drago*, *Giraffa* and *Selva* - have no declared enemies). In reality, Sienese don't refer to opposing *contrade* as an enemy, but merely as competitors. .

Originally 59, the *contrade* have over time been consolidated to 17.

AQUILA (Eagle)

Immediately to the south-west of Piazza del Campo in the centre of the city, and the *duomo* (cathedral). Traditionally, its residents were notaries.

Symbol: Double-headed black eagle grasping an orb, sword and sceptre.

Colours: Yellow, trimmed blue and black

Aquila is one of only four *nobile* (noble) *contrade*, the title bestowed by Habsburg emperor Charles V, in gratitude for the warm reception he received there in 1536.

The *contrada*'s museum is home to the oldest surviving Palio di Siena banner (also called a *palio*), dating from 1719. Patron Saint is the Virgin Mary, feast day 8 September.

Allied to *Civetta* and *Drago*. Opposed to *Pantera*.

BRUCO (Caterpillar)

North of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents worked in the silk trade.

Symbol: Crowned caterpillar crawling on a rose.

Colours: Green and yellow, trimmed with blue.

Bruco is one of the four *nobili* (noble) *contrade*, the title earned in 1369 by its people's bravery in helping defeat Charles IV, and consolidated in 1371 when they led the revolt to replace the Sienese council with a people's government.

Headquarters at Via del Comune, 44. Patron is the Madonna, celebrated on 2 July. Its motto is "Come rivoluzion(e) suona il mio nome" (My name echoes like the Revolution). Allied to *Istrice*, *Nicchio* and *Torre*; not officially opposed to any other *contrada* since rivalry with neighbouring *Giraffa* (giraffe)

ended. Last Palio victory 16 August 2008 (and 37 official victories).

CHIOCCIOLA (Snail)

Chiocciola is in the south-western corner of the city. Traditionally, its residents worked as terracotta makers.

Symbol: Snail.

Colours: Red and yellow, trimmed with blue

Chiocciola's enemy is the Tortoise. Last Palio victory 16 August 1999.

CIVETTA (Little Owl)

Immediately north of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, residents were shoemakers.

Symbol: Crowned owl perched on a branch.

Colours: Red and black, white stripes.

Considered the "Nonna" as it hasn't won a Palio for more than 30 years.

DRAGO (Dragon)

North-west of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents were bankers.

Symbol: Flying golden dragon carrying a banner with the letter "U" (for King Umberto).

Colours: Red and green, trimmed with yellow.

GIRAFFA (Giraffe)

An affluent area of the city north-east of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents were painters.

Symbol: Giraffe, led by a Moor, and a ribbon bearing the motto "Humbertus I dedit" (Umberto I gave it"). **Colours:** White and red.

Giraffa has the title of *contrada imperiale* (imperial *contrada*), bestowed by Vittorio Emanuele III when it won the *Palio* in 1936, the year the race was dedicated to Italy's empire in East Africa.

ISTRICE (Crested Porcupine)

North-west edge of the Old City, with the Church of *San Vincenzo e Anastasio*, home of the city's oldest surviving fresco and tomb of Pinturicchio.

Symbol: A porcupine.

Colours: Red, white, blue and black.

Istrice has the title of *contrada sovrana* (sovereign *contrada*) as it was headquarters of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta during the 14th century. *Istrice* won the Palio in July 2008.

LEOCORNO (Unicorn)

West of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents were goldsmiths.

Symbol: Unicorn rampant, with motto "Humberti regio gratia" ("A region by the grace of Umberto").
Colours: Orange and white, bordered blue.

Leocorno won the Palio of 16 August 2007.

LUPA (She-Wolf)

North of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, the residents of *Lupa* were bakers.

Symbol: Female wolf suckling twin boys.
Colours: Black and white, trimmed with orange.

The wolf refers to the legend that Siena was founded by Senius, the son of Remus who, along with his twin Romulus, was raised by a wolf. Because of this, *Lupa*'s sister city is Rome.

The *Lupa* museum's prize exhibit is a photograph of Giuseppe Garibaldi, which he donated to the *contrada* on its victory in the Palio di Siena of 1867.

NICCHIO (Seashell)

Far eastern corner of the city. Traditionally, its residents worked as potters.

Symbol: Crowned scallop shell flanked by two branches of coral. **Colours:** blue, yellow, red trim.

Nicchio is one of the four *nobile* (noble) *contrade*, awarded for bravery in 1260 (Battle of Montaperti against Florence, when its soldiers led the attack).

OCA (Goose)

Just to the west of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents made dyes.

Symbol: Goose, crowned, with a blue ribbon around its neck marked with the cross of Savoy.
Colours: green and white, with red trim.

Oca is one of the four *nobili* (noble) *contrade* due to its people's bravery in many battles fought for the former Siennese Republic. The only *contrada* with no allies. Most recent Palio win: 2 July 2007.

ONDA (Wave)

Onda runs south from Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents were carpenters.

Symbol: Dolphin.
Colours: White and sky blue; the *contrada* describes itself as "The colour of Heaven, the force of the sea".

Onda has the title of *contrada capitana* as its troops once guarded the Palazzo Pubblico. A famous *Ondanense* was the sculptor Giovanni Dupria (the main street in *Onda* is named for him). Rival: *Torre*.

PANTERA (Panther)

Western edge of the city. Traditionally, its residents were grocers and chemists.

Symbol: Panther, rampant.
Colours: Red, blue and white.

SELVA (Forest)

West of Piazza del Campo. Traditionally, its residents were weavers, but when the *contrade* were mainly military divisions, the *Selvensi* had a reputation as excellent archers.

Symbol: Rhinoceros, at the base of an oak tree hung with hunting tools. **Colours:** Green and orange, bordered and white.

Winner of the Palio on August 16 2006.

TARTUCA (Tortoise)

Southern end of the city. Traditionally, its residents were sculptors.

Symbol: Turtle, with Savoy knots and daisies alternating. **Colours:** Yellow and deep blue. Rival of *Chiocciola*.

TORRE (Tower)

South-east of Piazza del Campo, and includes Siena's Jewish quarter and synagogue. Traditionally, its residents worked as woolcombers.

Symbol: Elephant (the *contrada*'s original name was *Liofante* or *Lionfante*) with a tower on its back.
Colours: Crimson, striped with white and blue.

Rival said to be *Onda*, but the real rival is *Oca*.

VALDIMONTONE (Ram)

South-east of the city near Porta Romana. Traditionally, its residents were tailors.

Symbol: Ram rampant and crowned, with a blue shield bearing the letter "U" for (King) Umberto.
Colours: Red and yellow, white trim.

Allied with *Onda*; opposed to *Nicchio*, its neighbour.

Source:
www.initaly.com/regions/museums/palio.htm