

# **BOLLETTINO DEL MARCHESATO**

Organo di informazione del Circolo Culturale "*I Marchesi del Monferrato*"  
a cura di Roberto Maestri

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<b>EDITORIALE</b> .....	2
<b>PRESENTAZIONE LIBRO SU BONIFACIO DI MONFERRATO.</b> .....	2
<b>ASSEMBLEA GENERALE</b> .....	3
<b>CELEBRAZIONI PER I 700 ANNI DALL'ARRIVO IN MONFERRATO DEI PALEOLOGI DI BISANZIO: LA VOCAZIONE EUROPEA DEL MONFERRATO</b> .....	3
<b>DALLA SCOZIA AL MONFERRATO</b> .....	5
<b>ADESIONI</b> .....	5
<b>CHARACTER-ASSASSINATION: CONRAD DE MONFERRAT IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FICTION &amp; POPULAR HISTORIES</b> .....	5
<b>COLLABORAZIONI E SCAMBI CULTURALI</b> .....	14
<b>NOTIZIE VARIE</b> .....	14
<b>CONCLUDENDO</b> .....	15

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## **Editoriale**

Questo è il quinto numero del nostro Bollettino.

Molte novità hanno riguardato l'attività del ns. Circolo: ve ne diamo resoconto in queste pagine.

Come nostra abitudine, abbiamo cercato di dare il massimo supporto ad ogni iniziativa che ci è stata segnalata, sia a livello di adesione e partecipazione, sia a livello informativo, tramite la nostra mailing list.

Nei prossimi giorni presenteremo il nuovo libro su *Bonifacio di Monferrato* e, nel mese di Dicembre, si svolgerà la nostra seconda *Assemblea Generale*; inoltre stiamo predisponendo un corposo programma celebrativo riguardante i 700 anni dall'arrivo dei *Paleologi in Monferrato*.

Le idee non mancano e, con il Vostro aiuto e sostegno, riusciremo a concretizzare i nostri progetti.

Arrivederci al prossimo anno.

*Roberto Maestri*

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## **Presentazione libro su Bonifacio di Monferrato.**

Come preannunciato da precedenti comunicati, giovedì 24 novembre 2005 alle ore 17.00 presso la Sala Consiliare Provinciale di Palazzo Ghilini - Piazza della Libertà n. 22 - Alessandria, la Provincia di Alessandria ed il Circolo Culturale "I Marchesi del Monferrato" presentano il volume *Bonifacio di Monferrato ed i suoi rapporti in Oriente con la Repubblica di Venezia* di ROBERTO MAESTRI.

### Programma

Introduce il prof. ADRIANO ICARDI (Presidente *Consiglio Provinciale di Alessandria*)

Interverranno:

- GEO PISTARINO (già dell'*Università di Genova*)
- PIER CIRIACO ASTORI (Presidente *Società Storia Arte Archeologia*)
- ALDO A. SETTIA (già dell'*Università di Pavia*)
- RINALDO MERLONE (Dirigente Scolastico, Membro del *CRISM*)
- WALTER HABERSTUMPF (Docente, Membro del *CRISM*)
- L' AUTORE

La presentazione è organizzata in collaborazione con:

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino - Regione Piemonte – Regione Lombardia – Società di Storia Arte Archeologia per le province di Alessandria e Asti

## **Assemblea Generale**

Come previsto dall'art. 19 del nostro Statuto Sociale, previa delibera del Consiglio Direttivo del nostro Circolo, è stata convocata l'annuale *Assemblea Generale*, che si terrà in Alessandria in data **domenica 18 dicembre** c.a. presso la Sala Conferenze Circoscrizione Europista, via Wagner 38. Considerato che l'Assemblea Generale rappresenta il principale momento di incontro dei membri del Circolo e che il Circolo stesso ha interesse a migliorare la sua visibilità, il Consiglio Direttivo ha ritenuto opportuno rendere pubblica l'assemblea, coinvolgendo persone od Enti che hanno manifestato interesse per le finalità del Circolo.

Nei prossimi giorni verrà comunicato l'ordine del giorno ed il programma dettagliato dell'Assemblea.

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## **Celebrazioni per i 700 anni dall'arrivo in Monferrato dei Paleologi di Bisanzio: La vocazione europea del Monferrato**

Il nostro Circolo Culturale "*I Marchesi del Monferrato*", in collaborazione con *l'Accademia Aleramica* di Alba, intende promuovere una serie di iniziative in occasione dei 700 anni dall'arrivo dei Paleologi in Monferrato.

Si prevede l'organizzazione di *Giornate di Studio* e di un *Itinerario dei Paleologi* aventi come punto di riferimento l'arrivo nel 1306 di Teodoro Paleologo in Monferrato. Evento che segna non solo l'inizio di una nuova dinastia al governo del marchesato di Monferrato, ma anche uno straordinario momento di contatto tra oriente ed occidente. Concluse le vicende dei Marchesi Aleramici in Oriente, al seguito della terza e quarta Crociata, ed esauritasi l'esperienza del Regno di Tessalonica, il frutto della accorta politica matrimoniale dei Marchesi monferrini portò ad insediarsi in Monferrato il figlio cadetto di Iolanda di Monferrato e Andronico Paleologo, Teodoro, il quale, con l'aiuto determinante della famiglia genovese degli Spinola, di cui aveva sposato una figlia, riuscì faticosamente ad avere ragione dei molti nemici e a dare avvio alla nuova dinastia dei Paleologi di Monferrato (1306 – 1536).

Riteniamo che questo centenario rappresenti un momento di grande rilevanza, non solo storica, in un periodo in cui l'Europa ricerca faticosamente un allargamento politico ed economico verso l'Oriente.

Crediamo quindi che un evento di tale rilevanza non possa essere celebrato con una sola sporadica iniziativa, seppure di grande valenza, ma richieda l'organizzazione di una serie di manifestazioni da tenersi presso le diverse località su cui i Marchesi Paleologi esercitarono la loro influenza.

Al fine di consentire la più capillare diffusione della iniziativa, il ns. Circolo organizzerà una serie di *Giornate di Studio* in diverse località del territorio che fu sottoposto al controllo dei Paleologi. Lo schema adottato sarà quello già utilizzato con successo nel corrente anno: un pomeriggio (preferibilmente festivo o prefestivo) in cui si svolgeranno una serie di relazioni – di durata non superiore ai venti minuti – tenute da relatori particolarmente qualificati e con l'intervento delle Associazioni Culturali operanti sul territorio.

Le relazioni ed i relatori varieranno nelle diverse occasioni a seconda delle esigenze e delle disponibilità.

Se le disponibilità economiche lo consentiranno, si provvederà a predisporre materiale specifico, da distribuire ai presenti, in forma cartacea o digitale.

Ogni iniziativa sarà pubblicizzata tramite il nostro sito web [www.marchesimonferrato.com](http://www.marchesimonferrato.com) ed attraverso le iniziative della *Accademia Aleramica* di Alba grazie al supporto tecnologico del *Il Faro del Nord-Ovest* che garantirà la massima diffusione delle iniziative attraverso i mass-media.

Integrando le Giornate di Studio, il ns. Circolo intende promuovere in collaborazione con l'Accademia Aleramica, un percorso dal titolo *Itinerario dei Paleologi: le strade della storia e del gusto*, ovvero un itinerario turistico che coinvolga, nel modo più ampio possibile, le località appartenute, anche solo per un breve periodo, ai Marchesi Paleologi.

Il ns. Circolo si pone a disposizione delle singole Associazioni di promozione turistica presenti sul territorio interessato dal progetto ed alle Autorità locali per l'organizzazione di incontri, anche a livello di semplice conversazione, fornendo adeguato materiale divulgativo in base alle rispettive disponibilità economiche.

Gli incontri potranno essere organizzati, preferibilmente, in occasione di festeggiamenti organizzati in ambito di ricorrenze locali, supportando le iniziative già in calendario, ed integrandole anche mediante l'organizzazione dei Mercatini Aleramici, esempio di tradizione di una cultura materiale che merita di essere difesa, valorizzata e diffusa anche al di fuori dei territori di origine.

Le iniziative riguarderanno l'ambito regionale di Piemonte, Liguria e Lombardia., tenendo conto delle richieste di intervento che perverranno da Enti ed Associazioni locali. Si evidenzia che alla data odierna sono già pervenute diverse richieste relative alla organizzazione di Giornate di Studio dedicate a questo progetto.

Sono inoltre già state identificate aree specifiche di intervento quali, ad esempio:

- il *Triangolo* costituito dalle direttrici di collegamento tra: Alba, Asti, Casale Monferrato, Alessandria ed Acqui Terme.
- Il territorio *Savonese* appartenente alla "Comunità Montana Alta Val Bormida".
- Il territorio del *Canavese* avente come punto di riferimento Chivasso.
- Il territorio della *Lomellina* avente come punto di riferimento Pavia.

Il progetto riguarda una serie di iniziative che si svolgeranno nell'intero arco dell'anno 2006. Il calendario delle iniziative sarà regolarmente aggiornato e diffuso attraverso gli strumenti del Circolo Culturale "*I Marchesi del Monferrato*", ovvero il sito web [www.marchesimonferrato.com](http://www.marchesimonferrato.com) ed il suo organo di informazione il "Bollettino del Marchesato". Le iniziative di comunicazione saranno gestite principalmente dalla Accademia Aleramica di Alba, grazie al supporto tecnologico del *Il Faro del Nord-Ovest* che garantirà la massima visibilità di ogni singolo evento attraverso la pubblicizzazione degli eventi tramite gli organi di stampa: *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa* ed *Il Secolo XIX* e le emittenti televisive: *GRP* e *Tele Cupole*.

Ogni realtà locale coinvolta nel progetto dovrà farsi carico di garantire una adeguata visibilità di ogni singola iniziativa, attraverso il coinvolgimento della propria realtà locale e con l'invio degli inviti ufficiali.

Ogni singola iniziativa sarà promossa con adeguati supporti mediatici – tenendo ovviamente conto delle singole disponibilità economiche esistenti – tra cui: conferenza stampa, brochure, volantini, manifesti, locandine, pieghevoli, striscioni, Cd-rom e/o video, pubblicità (inserzioni o spot pubblicitari), realizzazione di un sito internet dedicato e pubblicazione degli atti.

## ***Dalla Scozia al Monferrato***

La Dottoressa MARIANNE GILCHRIST è venuta in visita nel Monferrato nel mese di ottobre: scopo della sua visita la possibilità di conoscere direttamente i luoghi oggetto delle sue ricerche presso l'Università di St. Andrews.

Il giorno 17 abbiamo organizzato un breve tour attraverso alcune località di particolare interesse: Moncalvo, Lucedio, Casale Monferrato e Grazzano Badoglio. Ringraziamo, per la disponibilità offerta: il Comune di Moncalvo, il Principato di Lucedio, il Sacrestano del Duomo di Casale Monferrato ed il Parroco di Grazzano Badoglio.



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## ***Adesioni***

Nel corso degli ultimi due mesi abbiamo avuto il piacere di ricevere la disponibilità del prof. GIUSEPPE LIGATO di Milano ad associarsi al nostro Circolo.

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## ***Character-Assassination: Conrad de Monferrat in English-language Fiction & Popular Histories***

Grazie alla disponibilità della nostra Socia dott.ssa MARIANNE M. GILCHRIST, provvediamo alla pubblicazione del suo interessante lavoro dal titolo: *Character-Assassination: Conrad de Monferrat in English-language Fiction & Popular Histories*. Si tratta del primo di una serie di lavori frutto delle ricerche che la dott.ssa Gilchrist sta svolgendo riguardo alla figura di Corrado di Monferrato.

## Character-Assassination: Conrad de Monferrat in English-language Fiction & Popular Histories

M M GILCHRIST, MA Hons, PhD

It is a story with all the ingredients of epic tragedy: a brilliant, courageous and handsome nobleman travels to distant lands, fights battles, marries princesses, is elected King but is slain by treachery, still relatively young, just before he is crowned. If a historical novelist invented the career of Conrad de Monferrat, King of Jerusalem (mid-1140s-1192), it would seem improbably colourful. But English-language fiction, Hollywood cinema and popular histories have persistently represented him in an extremely negative light.

For almost two centuries, Conrad - Peirol's "marques valens e pros",<sup>1</sup> the hero of Bertran de Born's great Crusade song, *Ara sai eu de pretz quals l'a plus gran*<sup>2</sup> - has been marginalised and maligned in English-language popular writing. Despite the researches of academic historians over a long time-period (Ilgen and Usseglio's classic works have never been translated into English), it is through historical novels or 'bestseller' popular non-fiction that most British and American readers make their first acquaintance with him. The impression they receive is disturbingly misleading: a treacherous, effete villain, even a vicious sadist. The weight of repetition has reinforced this image for generations of readers. I wish here to present a brief selection from these popular accounts, and to sketch in the background of this tradition of hostility.



THE ASSASSINATION OF CONRADE DE MONTSERRAT.

The historical foundation of English-language texts' hostility towards Conrad lies in the antagonism of Richard I's chroniclers towards him during the Third Crusade. Guy de Lusignan, a Poitevin vassal of Richard, was Richard's preferred candidate for the Kingship of Jerusalem; Philip of France (and the established *polein* nobles) supported his second-cousin Conrad: therefore Conrad had to be the villain. The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*<sup>3</sup> is full of diatribes against Conrad and his allies, grudging in its praise of him even in the defence of Tyre. But why should the biases of twelfth-century chronicles still dominate the perspective of novelists and popular writers in more recent times?

One factor in this is Richard I's re-emergence as an embodiment of chivalric values through the Romantics' interest in the Middle Ages in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. Stimulated by Walter Scott's historical novels, his hero-cult expanded during the Victorian period in Britain. Although born in England, Richard was essentially a Frenchman, for whom England was just a small part of his extensive territories: he spent barely six months of his reign there. Nevertheless, he was portrayed as an English and, by extension, British national hero. English-language writers, even those who try to be iconoclastic about Richard as a man, remain in thrall to nationalistic mythology, and the prejudices of his own chroniclers.

A secondary factor is the racist stereotyping of Italians in English-language literature. The stereotype in question emerged from the later Renaissance, the era of Machiavelli and the Borgias, and developed in Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, expressing Protestant fears during the Counter-Reformation. Italians were frequently depicted as scheming, poisoning, and morally decadent. Cowardice was already considered an Italian attribute by the 1740s, as evidenced by Lord Elcho's

<sup>1</sup> *Quant Amors trobet partit*, in S. C. ASTON, *Peirol, Troubadour of the Auvergne*, Cambridge, 1953, pp 157-60.

<sup>2</sup> WILLIAM D. PADDEN, JR., TILDE SANKOVITCH & PATRICIA H. STÄBLEIN, ed., *The Poems of the Troubadour Bertran de Born*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1986, pp. 414-21.

<sup>3</sup> HELEN J. NICHOLSON, ed., *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade: The Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Aldershot, 1997.

cry after Charles Edward Stuart, as he fled the field at Culloden, “There you go for a damn cowardly Italian!” Later in the eighteenth century, at the beginning of the Romantic movement, Ann Ward Radcliffe’s Gothic novels further shaped the image of the Italian villain who cloaks his evil schemes with charming manners and fine clothes, for example, Montoni in her 1790 novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Conrad’s popular image in English owes most to Sir Walter Scott, who invented the Romantic historical novel in the early nineteenth century, and was influenced to some degree by Ann Radcliffe. *The Talisman* (1825) is not one of his best works - one of the late novels he wrote rapidly to repay the huge debts he had accumulated in his efforts to live a baronial lifestyle in his Gothic mansion at Abbotsford. Conrad appears in it as a villain - the role in which he has remained for almost two centuries in British and American popular narratives. Scott misread ‘f’ as a long ‘s’ in his sources: throughout the novel, and in the introduction, he refers consistently to ‘Conrade of Montserrat’, and even redesigns the family heraldry to bear, “in reference to his title, a serrated and rocky mountain”<sup>4</sup> - not the simple *argent, a chief gules* of Monferrat. Before he is introduced to the reader directly, Conrad is described by Richard as conforming to the anti-Italian stereotype - a scheming, treacherous dandy, gallant in the boudoir and tournament, but a coward in battle:

...”What say you to the gallant Marquis of Montserrat, so wise, so elegant, such a good man-at-arms?”

“Wise? - cunning, you would say,” replied Richard; “elegant in a lady’s chamber, if you will. Oh, ay, Conrade of Montserrat - who knows not the popinjay? Politic and versatile, he will change you his purposes as often as the trimmings of his doublet, and you shall never be able to guess the hue of his inmost vestments from their outward colours. A man-at-arms? Ay, a fine figure on horseback, and can bear him well in the tilt-yard, and at the barriers, when swords are blunted at point and edge, and spears are tipped with trenchers of wood instead of steel pikes. Wert thou not with me when I said to that same gay Marquis, ‘Here we be, three good Christians, and on yonder plain there pricks a band of some threescore Saracens - what say you to charge them briskly? There are but twenty unbelieving miscreants to each true knight.’”

“I recollect the Marquis replied,” said De Vaux, “that his limbs were of flesh, not of iron, and that he would rather bear the heart of a man than of a beast, though that beast were the lion...”<sup>5</sup>

He appears in person a few chapters later:

a handsome man, of middle age, or something past that term, bold in the field, sagacious in council, gay and gallant in times of festivity; but, on the other hand, he was generally accused of versatility, of a narrow and selfish ambition, of a desire to extend his own principality, without regard to the weal of the Latin kingdom of Palestine, and of seeking his own interest, by private negotiations with Saladin, to the prejudice of the Christian leaguers.<sup>6</sup>

It escaped Scott’s notice, or not did not suit his purposes to note, that Conrad’s “own principality” was the Latin Kingdom, following his marriage to the rightful queen; and his heroism at Tyre is similarly omitted. Scott depicts him and the Grand Master of the Templars (not the historical Grand Master, Gerard de Ridefort, but a fictional character, Giles Amaury) as plotting against Richard’s life. His treachery discovered, Conrad fights a trial by combat with the young hero, Sir Kenneth of the Leopard (the Scots Prince David, *incognito*), and is defeated and severely wounded. While recovering, he is stabbed to death in his bed by his former ally the Grand Master, who is summarily beheaded by Saladin in a scene based on the execution of Reynaud de Châtillon after Hattin.

Scott openly admitted in his 1832 introduction to *The Talisman*:

Considerable liberties have also been taken with the truth of history, both with respect to Conrade of Montserrat’s life, as well as his death. That Conrade, however, was reckoned the

<sup>4</sup> WALTER SCOTT, *The Talisman*, Oxford, 1912, p. 331.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

enemy of Richard, is agreed both in history and romance. The general opinion of the terms upon which they stood, may be guessed from the proposal of the Saracens, that the Marquis of Montserrat should be invested with certain parts of Syria, which they were to yield to the Christians. Richard, according to the romance which bears his name, 'could not longer repress his fury. The Marquis, he said, was a traitor, who had robbed the Knight Hospitallers of sixty thousand pounds, the present of his father, Henry; that he was a renegade, whose treachery had occasioned the loss of Acre; and he concluded by a solemn oath, that he would cause him to be drawn to pieces by wild horses, if he should ever venture to pollute the Christian camp by his presence[...]' - *History of Chivalry*.

Conrade of Montserrat makes a considerable figure in those wars, and was at length put to death by one of the followers of the Scheik, or Old Man of the Mountains; nor did Richard remain free of the suspicion of having instigated his death.<sup>7</sup>

For Scott, the mere fact that Conrad was on bad terms with Richard was sufficient reason to charge him with any calumny and treachery.

In *The Talisman* (and also in *Ivanhoe*), Scott made Richard an iconic figure in the chivalric revival. Amelia Robertson Paton (Mrs Hill) sculpted him as one of several characters from Scott's novels to adorn the Scott Monument in Edinburgh. In 1850, the Pre-Raphaelite artist Charles Allston Collins painted *Berengaria's Alarm for the Safety of Her Husband, Richard Coeur de Lion, Awakened by the Sight of his Girdle Offered for Sale at Rome* (Manchester City Art Gallery). In 1860, a bronze equestrian statue of Richard (ironically, by a Piemontese sculptor, Carlo Marochetti, who had settled in London after the 1848 revolutions) was erected outside the Houses of Parliament. Generations of schoolchildren were brought up on an idealised legend of 'Richard the Lionheart' as the embodiment of chivalric kingship. *The Talisman* itself was widely read throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was dramatised soon after publication. It provided the plot of the Irish composer Michael Balfe's last opera, *Il Talismano* (produced posthumously in 1874). In the twentieth century, it has been filmed for the cinema (1954, as *King Richard and the Crusaders*) and for television by BBC1 (1980, broadcast in 1981)<sup>8</sup> and even in Russia, in two parts, as *Richard Ivinoye serdtse (Richard the Lionheart)* and *Rytsar Kennet (Sir Kenneth)* (1992-93). As a result, Scott's interpretation of Conrad has had a longevity and international currency probably greater than any factual depictions.

Maurice Hewlett (1861-1923) derived the title of *The Life and Death of Richard Yea-and-Nay* (1900) from Bertran de Born's *senhal* (nickname) for Richard, *Oc-e-Non* (Yes-and-No). A friend of Ezra Pound, with a strong interest in the troubadors and in mediæval Tuscany, Hewlett quotes from troubador songs, and alludes to many personages from their *vidas* and *razos*. Sadly, his literary interests do not guarantee historical accuracy in characterisations and depictions of events. Conrad is described as "a large, pale, ruminating Italian, full of bluster and thick blood",<sup>9</sup> and is placed at the French Court, conspiring with Philip II and with Richard's younger brother John: "any king of England who would help him to the throne of Jerusalem was the king of England he would serve."<sup>10</sup> He travels to Outremer with Richard and Philip. In reality, he was already there, heroically defending Tyre against Saladin's armies: the songs of Peirol and Bertran de Born, composed at this time, burn with outrage at the delay of Kings Richard and Philip to go to his aid. As to his claim to the throne of Jerusalem, Hewlett writes:

Montferrat had the Archduke of Austria's as well as French support; with these worthies, and the ravished wife of old King Baldwin for title-deed, he claimed the throne of Jerusalem...<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>8</sup> This was my first encounter with Conrad: I then read Steven Runciman's *A History of the Crusades*.

<sup>9</sup> MAURICE HEWLETT, *The Life & Death of Richard Yea-and-Nay*, London, 1900, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

and makes Richard say, “As to the Marquess, I will never get a kingdom for him, and I marvel that King Philip can make no better choice than of a man whose only title is rape”.<sup>12</sup> Conrad’s wife Isabella was the half-sister, *not* the wife, of Baldwin IV - who, dying before he was twenty-four, could hardly be considered old. Also, although Isabella had been forced to divorce Humphrey of Toron, it seems extreme to refer to “rape” and “the ravished wife”, when marriages for political expediency were far from unusual among the mediæval élite. Hewlett shows Conrad seeking out the Assassins to kill Richard. The Old Man of the Mountain is warned of his schemes by Richard’s (fictional) former mistress Jehane, now in his harem. As a result, the Assassins murder him instead, and cut off his right hand. As in *The Talisman*, the main real incidents of Conrad’s career are omitted: his defence of Tyre, the marriage to Isabella and the struggle for the kingship, the tragic true circumstances of his death.

Cecil B De Mille’s 1935 film, *The Crusades*, placed Conrad on screen, played by the Austrian actor Joseph Schildkraut. Since Conrad’s mother was Austrian, this is not unreasonable casting, although one doubts the film-makers knew this. It is the scripting which is problematic. The main writer was Harold Lamb, author of a 2-volume popular history of the Crusades.<sup>13</sup>



The depiction of Conrad combines elements from both Walter Scott and Maurice Hewlett’s novels. The film opens after the fall of Jerusalem, with a Peter the Hermit-like monk (C. Aubrey Smith) going to preach the Crusade in Europe. When he arrives in France, King Philip takes the cross. Meanwhile, as in Hewlett’s novel, skulking furtively around Philip’s court is *Conrad*. At the time depicted, he was already embattled in Tyre: it was his envoy, the Archbishop of Tyre, not an obscure monk, who sent out the appeals that launched the Third Crusade. Schildkraut plays Conrad as an unctuous and puny schemer, who winces when given a hearty slap on the shoulder: hardly the physically vigorous and courageous man described by Niketas Choniates.<sup>14</sup>

Lamb and DeMille show him conspiring with John to kill Richard so that John and Philip will make him King of Jerusalem: again, a motif derived from Hewlett. After various plots, Saladin has Conrad summarily murdered off-screen for offering to have Richard killed if Saladin will make him King of Jerusalem. The role assigned by Hewlett to Richard’s mistress, warning of his treachery, is occupied in DeMille’s film by Richard’s wife Berengaria, temporarily under Saladin’s protection. DeMille’s film was a spectacular work by a master showman (much like Scott), and clearly made a deep impression on audiences. Ronald Welch’s children’s novel, *Knight Crusader*, (1954), gives a brief glimpse of Conrad, which appears to be based on Schildkraut’s film portrayal:

[Philip D’Aubigny] bowed politely to Conrad de Montferrat, a sleek cat of a man, olive of complexion, and long of face, with white, fluttering hands, and a silky voice[...] Conrad made much of Philip. He needed every supporter he could win for his struggle with Guy of Lusignan for the throne of Jerusalem. Philip knew Conrad’s motives. He had often heard Sir Hugo discuss the man, and now that he had met the count himself, Philip could understand his father’s scathing remarks.<sup>15</sup>

The young hero has an opportunity to warn Conrad that his life is in danger from the Assassins, but chooses not to do so. The author’s historical end-note contains a remarkably euphemistic understatement: “Conrad of Montferrat did die suddenly, and it was thought at the time that the Assassins were responsible”.<sup>16</sup> The victim of a stabbing may indeed be said to have “died suddenly”, but that surely omits the most important fact about his death - that it is the result of a violent crime.

Graham Shelby’s *The Kings of Vain Intent* (1970) is the nadir of Conrad’s fictional appearances in

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Lamb also wrote the lyrics for the songs performed in the film by Blondel (Alan Hale) - more reminiscent of *The Ballad of Brave Sir Robin* in *Monty Python & the Holy Grail* than the real Lord of Nesle’s poignant melodies.

<sup>14</sup> HARRY MAGOULIAS, ed., *O City of Byzantium: The Chronicle of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit, 1984, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> RONALD WELCH, *Knight Crusader*, Oxford, 1954, p. 189.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

English, taking artistic licence to new depths. In his preceding novel, *The Knights of Dark Renown* (1969), Shelby depicted Balian of Ibelin and the other anti-Lusignan barons of Outremer sympathetically. From this, the reader might have anticipated a positive portrayal of Conrad. However, in the first book, Shelby had established Isabella and Humphrey of Toron as an idealised young romantic couple. Consequently, he treats Conrad, who separates them, as a melodrama villain, resembling a vampire:

Marquis Conrad of Montferrat came out of the shadows like an apparition from hell. He was an exceptionally tall man, with narrow shoulders that even now seemed to be held in an invisible vise. He had long, thin fingers, thin wrists and, by the hang of his sleeves, the arms of an undernourished woman. His face was also thin, his cheeks adzed into shadows, his jaw narrow beneath taut skin. His scraped-down features allowed his eyes to register their full impact - hard and wide, then half covered by low, veined lids. Around his face and across his forehead hung lank black hair. It concealed his ears and lay like spilt pitch on his compressed shoulders. It was an unnerving introduction.<sup>17</sup>

He is elsewhere described as “this sinister Italian”,<sup>18</sup> and “the monster of Montferrat”.<sup>19</sup> Shelby implies that he has had the Archbishop of Canterbury poisoned. Queen Isabella, depicted as having been drugged by her mother, thinks of him thus:

...And now that evil man extends his skinny claw and shrieks that he has found a difference in Humphrey. How dare he? Where are his children then? Who’s to say Conrad - Conrad, I wish you in hell - is not unnatural? There’s a more likely rumour. But who would care to start it?

...Maria gave me laudanum. I feel heavy in the limbs. Maria. A queen and a princess, and we are powerless to resist that evil... evil...<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, Shelby spares us nothing of this “evil”. Conrad is portrayed as a sadist who habitually abuses his young wife:

“...We’ll see if this makes you more amiable.” He hefted a black leather belt. The leather was studded with heavy iron stars.<sup>21</sup>

The scene continues horrifically, with a vicious beating and rape: “The sight of the stunned and lacerated girl aroused him”.<sup>22</sup> There is no historical basis whatsoever for Shelby’s characterisation of Conrad or for these scenes. They exist solely so that he can present a new murder-suspect: *Isabella*, whom he depicts as plotting her husband’s murder to obtain vengeance and release from him. He implies that she has ordered the Assassins not to kill Conrad outright, so that he will suffer as much pain as possible before dying.<sup>23</sup>

After Shelby’s lurid sensationalism, the bland portrayal - without physical description or even much attempt at characterisation - in Jean Plaidy (Eleanor Hibbert)’s dull and pedestrian novel about Richard, *The Heart of the Lion* (London, 1977), comes almost as a relief. He is simply Philip’s candidate for the throne: there is no mention of his heroic defence of Tyre. Like most English-language writers, she depicts him as a “traitor” for negotiating separately with Saladin - but as King of Jerusalem, he had every right to do so.

One needs to turn to France to find positive representations of Conrad. In her novel, *The World Is Not Enough*, the Russian-born French writer Zoé Oldenbourg gives him a brief, splendid cameo-rôle:

...the man had a strange beauty compounded of authority and pride; his arms and his armour glittered with gold and precious stones, his grey fox cloaks were trimmed with golden chains, his gloves were sewn with pearls, his falcons bedecked with rubies. Yet such

<sup>17</sup> GRAHAM SHELBY, *The Kings of Vain Intent*, London, 1970, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

magnificence was so natural to the man that it went almost unremarked. His was a head which demanded a crown, and the fairest crown of all, the crown of Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup>

She is, perhaps, thinking of the painting by François-Edouard Picot in the *Salles des Croisades* at Versailles (c. 1842-43), which depicts him as a strikingly handsome man in a gold coronet and an ermine-lined cloak. She later writes of his death:

When a strong man disappeared, it was as if the world fell to ruins or were suddenly transformed - the world of the present was a world without the marquess. The marquess had been like a granite pillar supporting the entire edifice...<sup>25</sup>

In her popular non-fiction book, *The Crusades*, she describes him as “one of the bravest generals of the period. He was stern, dictatorial, and ambitious, and in the face of an apparently desperate situation he reacted with all the courage of a great man of action.”<sup>26</sup> Of his election as King, she writes, “Much was expected of Conrad. He was a man of strong will and great ambitions, capable, stubborn, cunning, and fearless.”<sup>27</sup> It is plain that she finds him inspiring and impressive; but then, in contrast to the other writers cited here, she writes originally in French, for an audience to whom Conrad’s second-cousin Philip II, not Richard I, is the main hero of the Third Crusade.

English-language popular non-fiction on the Crusades - attractively produced and aimed at the general reader, rather than the university specialist - is similarly influenced by the negative tradition established by the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* and by Scott. Most popular writers in English know little, if anything, of Conrad’s life before his arrival in Tyre, or of his family’s political and cultural background. Some do not even know where he came from: Paul Williams describes him as “a Flemish knight”,<sup>28</sup> Sean Martin as a “German prince”<sup>29</sup> - the latter at least an understandable error, given his maternal ancestry and his family’s alliance with Frederick Barbarossa. Conrad’s career in Outremer, his marriage to Queen Isabella and even the circumstances of his death are interpreted so that he appears in an unsympathetic light.

A frequently repeated allegation against Conrad is that he fled Constantinople in 1187 because he had committed *murder*. This appears (surprisingly, given the author’s erudition and knowledge of Byzantine sources) in Runciman’s *A History of the Crusades*: “He had been living at Constantinople but had been involved in a murder there.”<sup>30</sup> Later writers have paraphrased this. Wayne Bartlett, in *God Wills It!: An Illustrated History of the Crusades*, claims: “He was fleeing from Constantinople, where he had been implicated in a murder.”<sup>31</sup> Terry Jones and Alan Ereira write that he left because “the relatives of a man he had killed announced that they would blind him.”<sup>32</sup> In James Reston’s *Warriors of God*, there is a more oblique allusion to him having “a dubious past of murder and conspiracy”.<sup>33</sup> All these references are, in fact, to his defeat and killing *in battle* of the rebel general Alexios Branas. But how has the death of Branas - described in heroic terms by Choniates<sup>34</sup> - become transformed into a “dubious” murder? The answer lies in the *Old French Continuation of William of Tyre*, known variously as the *Chronicle of Ernoul* or the *Histoire d’Eracles*. The French chroniclers had difficulty with Greek names and events: Branas becomes “Lyvernas” (“li” - the Old French definite article, and “Vernas”, Branas, owing to the proximity of Greek ‘b’ and ‘v’ sounds). As a result, some writers have treated “Lyvernas” as a separate character. They also appear to have read only edited extracts from the chronicle, probably

<sup>24</sup> ZOÉ OLDENBOURG, *The World is Not Enough*, London, 1949, p. 406.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 470-71.

<sup>26</sup> ZOÉ OLDENBOURG, *The Crusades*, London, 1966, p. 434.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>28</sup> PAUL L. WILLIAMS, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Crusades*, Indianapolis, 2001, p. 188.

<sup>29</sup> SEAN MARTIN, *The Knights Templar*, Harpenden, 2004, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> STEVEN RUNCIMAN, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem, Cambridge, 1952, p. 384

<sup>31</sup> WAYNE B. BARTLETT, *God Wills It!: An Illustrated History of the Crusades*, Stroud, 1999, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> TERRY JONES & ALAN EREIRA, *The Crusades*, London, 1994, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> JAMES RESTON, Jr., *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade*, New York, 2001, p. 67. (Italian translation, *Storia della Terza Crociata*, Casale Monferrato, 2002.)

<sup>34</sup> MAGOULIAS, ed., *O City of Byzantium: The Chronicle of Niketas Choniates*, pp. 210-13.

commencing at Chapter 47 (“Now I shall tell you about the marquis’s arrival”), not with the account of Branäs’ coup, described in Chapter 16. Hence, Conrad’s wish to escape reprisals by the Branäs family is taken completely out of context.<sup>35</sup>

Some modern writers clearly find it difficult to engage with the chivalric values of Conrad’s time. The story of Saladin bringing William the Elder to the city walls and threatening him with death unless Conrad surrendered Tyre is recounted in both the *Old French Continuation of William of Tyre* and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*. The truth of some details - such as whether Conrad himself picked up a crossbow and fired, deliberately missing his father by a short distance - may be uncertain, as is whether the incident took place during the first or the second siege of 1187. What is undeniable is that the fate of a whole city - indeed, of all that remained of the Latin Kingdom - was at stake. In refusing to be cowed by Saladin’s threats, Conrad was fulfilling his feudal and moral obligations to the citizens and refugees he had vowed to protect, no matter what the personal cost. His father understood this: “Conrad, dear son, guard well the city!”<sup>36</sup> Yet James Reston remarks in astonishment that William “seemed not at all upset at his son’s lack of filial loyalty” - as if their personal relationship were all that mattered - and quotes, with apparent approval, Saladin’s reported response that Conrad was “very cruel”.<sup>37</sup> David Boyle ascribes Conrad’s conduct to “cold-heartedness”,<sup>38</sup> but we cannot presume to know the emotions or thoughts of the participants in such desperate circumstances. These writers have not altered the chroniclers’ narrative, but in their interpretation have chosen to imply that Conrad is not a man whom the reader should like or admire - even for one of the most courageous acts of his career.

Similarly, to make Isabella’s enforced divorce from Humphrey of Toron and marriage to Conrad all the more disagreeable to modern readers, the latter is frequently described as a “grizzled old warrior”.<sup>39</sup> Steven Runciman romantically refers to Isabella finding her third husband, Henry of Champagne, “irresistible, after the grimness of the ageing Piedmontese to whom she had been forcibly united”.<sup>40</sup> However, although he was around twenty-five years her senior, the most vivid impression one gains of Conrad from Arab<sup>41</sup> and European chroniclers alike is of a man of extraordinary vitality and energy, who carried his years lightly. He was already in his mid-thirties, c. 1180, when Choniates described him as “comely and in the bloom of youth, brave and prudent beyond measure, and flourishing in vigor and bodily strength”.<sup>42</sup> He was probably in his mid-late forties when he was murdered - even in the twelfth century, no great age for a man whose father had been captured fighting in the battle of Hattin when over seventy. Moreover, if Richard can be described as dying “in his prime of life”<sup>43</sup> in his forty-second year, Conrad can scarcely be considered past *his* prime when only a few years older. Boyle also calls him “brutish”.<sup>44</sup> again, one has to ask, on what evidence? The *Brevis historia occupationis et amissionis Terræ Sanctæ* described him as “*animo et facto amabilis*”, “likeable in mind and deed”.<sup>45</sup> He was certainly a tough soldier, but he was regarded as highly intelligent, educated, fluent in several languages and as accomplished in diplomacy as on the battlefield:<sup>46</sup> according to Choniates, a man who “so excelled

<sup>35</sup> PETER W. EDBURY, ed., *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade*, Aldershot, 1998, p. 19, 23-24, 51-52.

<sup>36</sup> EDBURY, ed., *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade*, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> RESTON, *Warriors of God*, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> DAVID BOYLE, *Blondel’s Song: The Capture, Imprisonment and Ransom of Richard the Lionheart*, London, 2005, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> STEVEN RUNCIMAN, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. III: *The Kingdom of Acre*, Cambridge, 1954, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> For Arab writers, see FRANCESCO GABRIELI, ed., *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (English translation) Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1969. Ibn al-Athir describes Conrad as “a devil incarnate in his ability to govern and defend a town, and a man of extraordinary courage”, p. 177. (Original Italian edition, *Storici Arabi delle Crociate*, Torino, 1957.)

<sup>42</sup> MAGOULIAS, ed., *O City of Byzantium: The Chronicle of Niketas Choniates*, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> BOYLE, *Blondel’s Song*, p. 270.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> THEODOR ILGEN (transl. Giuseppe Cerrato), *Corrado, Marchese di Monferrato*, Casale Monferrato, 1890, p. 120, citing the *Brevis historia occupationis et amissionis Terræ Sanctæ*, p. 361.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

in bravery and sagacity that he was far-famed".<sup>47</sup> Monferrat was no obscure cultural backwater, but part of a sophisticated Occitan literary world, also with strong links to the German imperial court; under Conrad's brother Boniface I, it was one of the foremost troubador courts. However, to depict Conrad as cultured and attractive would undermine the writers' hostile agenda concerning the marriage. As to the allegations of bigamy because of his previous marriage to Theodora, sister of the Emperor Isaac Angelos - a charge first raised by the pro-Lusignan faction at the time, Choniates's silence on the matter may suggest a divorce had taken place.<sup>48</sup> However, even after Magoulias's translation of Choniates was published in 1984, few, if any, of the popular English-language writers on the Crusades seem to have consulted him about Conrad, whom he knew.

By establishing Conrad as a shady character, a murderer and even a traitor (for conducting separate negotiations with Saladin, which, as *de jure* King of Jerusalem, he had every right to do)<sup>49</sup>, English-language writers actively discourage sympathetic reader-responses to his fate as a murder *victim*. Reston, in his highly coloured account of the assassination, gloatingly cites Imad ad-Din's comments about Conrad being condemned to "the deepest circle of Hell-fire", and takes at face-value similar Arabic rhetorical devices such as Ibn al-Athir's interjections of "God damn him!"<sup>50</sup> The implication, here and in other popular works in English, is that he got what he deserved. They nevertheless become defensive regarding Richard's slaughter of Muslim prisoners after the surrender of Acre (in which Conrad's role as negotiator is glossed over). Bartlett asserts: "It is dangerous to take a moral view of the massacre"<sup>51</sup> - yet he and his colleagues eagerly adopt a disapproving moral tone in their depictions of Conrad, often on questionable grounds. They try to exonerate Richard from suspicion of Conrad's murder, referring to the letter allegedly from the Sheikh of the Assassins, which claimed that it was vengeance for an act of piracy against an Assassin merchant-ship: Conrad's own greed is therefore blamed for his downfall. However, this letter is widely regarded as a forgery. As Patrick A. Williams pointed out in 1970, apart from the letter, and the chronicle texts clearly derived from it, there is no independent evidence that the Ismaili, whose territory was landlocked, were involved in shipping.<sup>52</sup> The case remains unsolved.

As I have outlined here, for almost two hundred years Conrad de Monferrat's image in popular British and American accounts, fiction and non-fiction, has been characterised by treachery, cowardice and murder - as perpetrator, *not* victim. In historical fiction, various aspects of the 'sinister Machiavellian' stereotype of Italians have dominated his depiction. For Scott, DeMille and Lamb, and Welch, he becomes a scheming, cowardly dandy, with hints that he is somehow 'unmanly'; for Hewlett, he is a treacherous brute; for Shelby, a twisted sexual sadist. These portrayals have little to do with the *real* Conrad, but they have defined him as a villain in British and American imaginations. Each generation has given the myth fresh life, without questioning its underlying assumptions. Although some British and American non-fiction writers have challenged the heroic status of 'Richard the Lionheart', they have retained the negative depictions of Conrad begun by Richard's chroniclers and developed by Walter Scott and his successors. As a result, he has yet to receive justice, in terms of his historical significance and his personal reputation, in either fiction or non-fiction in the English-speaking world.

<sup>47</sup> MAGOULIAS, ed., *O City of Byzantium: The Chronicle of Niketas Choniates*, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217. Choniates scarcely misses an opportunity to criticise sexual or marital misconduct, even by people he otherwise admires. His failure to pass comment on Conrad's remarriage suggests that his marriage to Theodora had already been ended in Constantinople. They had been apart for three-and-a-half years by the time he married Isabella, well over the one-year period of desertion needed for divorce. It seems unlikely that an Emperor would have allowed his sister to remain so long in the humiliating position of abandoned spouse.

<sup>49</sup> Saladin offered him terms if he were to break with the Crusaders (an offer similar to that made to Raymond III of Tripoli a few years previously), but there is no recorded response.

<sup>50</sup> RESTON, *Warriors of God*, pp. 251-56.

<sup>51</sup> BARTLETT, *God Wills It!*, p. 184.

<sup>52</sup> PATRICK A. WILLIAMS, "The Assassination of Conrad of Montferrat: Another Suspect?", *Traditio*, vol. XXVI, New York, 1970, p. 386. Williams argues a case for Henry of Champagne being behind the murder: however, it must be asked whether he would have taken such drastic action without his uncle Richard's knowledge or approval.

## **Collaborazioni e scambi culturali**

- Sabato 8 ottobre si è tenuto ad Alba un incontro con i rappresentanti della *Accademia Aleramica*: nell'occasione sono stati valutati diversi aspetti organizzativi, tra cui la preparazione di un programma comune relativo alle iniziative celebrative per i 700 anni dall'arrivo dei Paleologi in Monferrato.
- Mercoledì 19 ottobre si è tenuto a Chivasso un incontro con i rappresentanti del *Gruppo Marchesi Paleologi* allo scopo di valutare la possibilità di organizzare un Convegno od una Giornata di Studio sui Paleologi.
- Lunedì 24 ottobre si è tenuto un incontro presso il Comune di Acqui Terme con il dott. ALBERTO PIRNI, al fine di prevedere l'organizzazione, in primavera, di una Giornata di Studio sui Paleologi.
- Venerdì 28 ottobre si è tenuto ad Alba un incontro con il dott. MAURO CARBONE, Direttore dell'*Ente Turismo Alba Bra Langhe Roero*, al fine di prevedere l'organizzazione di alcuni eventi riguardanti le Celebrazioni per i Paleologi.
- Mercoledì 2 novembre si è tenuto presso il Comune di Casale Monferrato un incontro con il dott. CALVO, Assessore alla Cultura, ed i professori ALDO SETTIA e ANTONINO ANGELINO, in rappresentanza della *Associazione Casalese Arte e Storia*, al fine di costituire un coordinamento per l'organizzazione di un convegno sui Paleologi.
- Abbiamo ricevuto in dono dalla *Società Savonese di Storia Patria* i volumi: *Atti e Memorie* vol. XL – XLI, pubblicati nel corrente anno. Di particolare interesse il volume XLI che reca il titolo "*Le Superbe Navi. Cantieri e tipologie navali liguri medievali*" a cura di FURIO CICILIOT.

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## **Notizie varie**

In questo spazio raccogliamo brevi notizie riguardanti la nostra ed altre Associazioni:

- Venerdì 23 settembre, abbiamo partecipato al Convegno tenutosi ad Alessandria dal titolo: "*Il Senatore del Regno Teresio Borsalino ed i suoi cappelli*". L'iniziativa è stata promossa dall'Istituto Nazionale per la Guardia d'Onore alle Reali Tombe del Pantheon. Relatori della conferenza: VITTORIO CARDINALI, giornalista e Presidente dell'Associazione "Immagini per il Piemonte", UGO BOCASSI della rivista "Nuova Alexandria" e FULVIO CELLERINO.
- Giovedì 6 ottobre, abbiamo partecipato al Convegno: "Dal Risorgimento all'Unità d'Italia, dalla Resistenza alla Costituzione: *La Provincia di Alessandria per la liberazione d'Europa*". Il Convegno è stato organizzato dalla Provincia di Alessandria in collaborazione con l'Istituto per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea in provincia di Alessandria, l'Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano e l' A.N.P.I.
- Venerdì 4 novembre, abbiamo presenziato alla conferenza "*90 anni dalla Grande Guerra*", organizzata ad Alessandria dal *Club Reale Vittorio Amedeo II*. Conferenza cui ha partecipato MARIO CERVI, giornalista ed autore del volume "*Il Duca Invitto*"

### **Concludendo**

Questo numero del Bollettino viene trasmesso in automatico a **384** indirizzi e-mail presenti nella nostra banca dati ed alle liste di distribuzione: **BYZANS-L** della *Università del Missouri* e **H-ITALY** della *Michigan University*; chi lo ricevesse, ma non fosse interessato potrà richiedere la cancellazione del suo nominativo inviandoci una e-mail; coloro che ritenessero interessante questo nostro lavoro ed avessero piacere che venisse inviato anche ad altre persone o Enti di loro conoscenza potranno segnalarcelo con un messaggio di posta elettronica.

Come precisato nello Statuto Sociale, il Circolo non ha finalità di lucro, ma ha comunque l'esigenza di autofinanziare le proprie attività. A tale scopo saranno graditi contributi da parte di Enti, Associazioni e singoli Privati che provvederemo a ringraziare attraverso le pagine del ns. *Bollettino*. I contributi possono essere versati sul ns. conto corrente intestato a "Circolo Culturale I Marchesi del Monferrato" presso la Cassa di Risparmio di Alessandria - Agenzia G di Alessandria - ABI 06075 - CAB 10407 - c/c 13426/2