Near the end of his turbulent rule of Padua, the city’s last prince, Francesco II ‘il Novello’ da Carrara (r. 1390–1405), commissioned a remarkable illustrated manuscript for his personal library. Known in contemporary scholarship as the *Carrara Herbal*, the book contains a vernacular translation of Serapion the Younger’s thirteenth-century treatise on plant and animal medicines, the *Liber aggregatus in medicinis simplicibus*.¹ Serapion’s text is accompanied by over fifty illustrations of plants executed in gouache on vellum by an anonymous artist. Historically, scholarship on the *Herbal* has focused on the plant imagery’s verisimilar qualities as early examples of the realistic representation associated with the idea of Renaissance.² Several of the plants in the *Herbal* appear to be drawn from observation of natural specimens, and these realistic plant images are unique among contemporaneous illustrated pharmacopeias. The emphasis on empirically based observation may anticipate the scientific accuracy of illustrations in later books on plant medicine; however, focusing on this characteristic to the exclusion of other illustrative and textual elements of the book fails to account for the late fourteenth-century reader’s interpretive framework. This framework is as informed by notions of kinship, rhetoric, and memory in circulation in Padua as it is by notions of pictorial realism.

On the one hand, when opening the book the reader immediately encounters the prominent placement of family heraldry on the frontispiece. The family’s heraldic arms, individual crests, and personal badges are all present,

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Figure 9.1 North Italian, Frontispiece of the Carrara Herbal (ca. 1390–1405). Gouache on vellum, 237mm × 353mm. The British Library, ms Egerton 2020 fol. 4r. Image © The British Library.