



EDITED BY
MICHAEL KNAPTON, JOHN E. LAW, ALISON A. SMITH

VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



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Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl

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The Tombs of the Scaligers at Verona: a nineteenth century English account

by John Easton Law

1. *The memory of the Della Scala*

At the conclusion to his study of the Carrara published in 1998, Benjamin Kohl discussed the destruction of the dynasty and the extinction of most of its members by the Venetian Republic in 1405: “The Carrara dynasty had been removed from power. Its despised and feared *carro* (the dynasty’s principal emblem) was stricken from the monuments of the former Carrara domains, to be revived in moments of rebellion over the next century as the defiant emblem of an independence that Padua had lost forever”¹. Above that passage, a photograph taken by Judith Kohl showed a surviving, if damaged, *carro* from the gates of Castelfranco Veneto. In an interesting article published in 1986, Paul Kaplan identified the *carro* as well as the Lion of St Mark on the buildings in the background to Giorgione’s *Tempesta* – traditionally dated to around 1508 – seeing its appearance, as Kohl was to suggest later, as a comment on the fragility of the Venetian *stato di terra* on the eve of the War of the League of Cambrai (1509)².

Of course, the arrival of Venetian rule in Padua in 1405 did not by any means obliterate the visual record of the dynasty in the city, as the contributions by Benjamin Kohl and Meredith Gill in this collection make clear. As one of Kohl’s posthumous contributions to this collection discusses, the Carrara mausoleum in the baptistery of Padua – which celebrates the dynasty – survives. However, there remains a striking contrast between their posthumous fate and that of their neighbours and rivals, the Della Scala of Verona. That city had also fallen to Venice in 1405, on 23 June, but the tomb monuments to some of the leading members of a dynasty that had ruled the city from 1260 to 1387 remained largely undamaged outside the church of S. Maria Antica at the very heart of the

¹ Kohl, 1998, 336. This important study has been under-reviewed in Italian journals. In his introduction, Kohl refers to the deliberate destruction of the archives of the Carrara chancery on the orders of the Venetian Council of Ten.

² Kaplan, 1986, 405-27. The *carro* survived on the *verso* of the medal struck for Francesco Novello after his return to power in 1390.

commercial, legal and administrative heart of the city, the most striking of the monuments being those of Cangrande I (1308-1329), Mastino II (1329-1351) and Cansignorio (1359-1375). Moreover, this complex of tombs faced the palace which was to become the residence of the Venetian podestà and adjacent to the palace taken over by the Venetian capitano³.

A principal reason for the survival of these monuments may possibly lie in the fact that the Venetian Republic did not – over time – perceive the Della Scala as a threat, as it came to view the Da Carrara. The last effective member of the dynasty, Antonio (1381-1387), was in alliance with Venice when he was driven into exile due to a combination of political incompetence, diplomatic miscalculation and military defeat⁴. Verona was then held by the Visconti of Milan, but following the death of Duke Giangaleazzo in 1402, his state disintegrated, and Verona was retaken by Guglielmo Della Scala in April 1404 with the help of Francesco Novello da Carrara⁵. However, on his death in the same month, his sons Brunoro and Antonio II were driven from power by their erstwhile ally, Francesco Novello, and it was from the Da Carrara that Venice took Verona in 1405.

Thereafter, the major threat to Venetian rule in Verona by the ousted dynasty was posed by Brunoro, a favourite of Sigismund, king of the Romans⁶. Sigismund had a claim to the cities of the Veneto as they lay within the boundaries of the imperial kingdom of Italy, and on 22 January 1412, he made Brunoro his imperial vicar for Verona and Vicenza; Brunoro even tried to provoke a revolt in Verona against Venetian rule, which took place on 2 May 1412. That failed, and although the Republic remained watchful as to his movements, and although Verona and Vicenza were not included in the imperial investiture granted to Venice by the now emperor Sigismund in 1437, the Della Scala threat to Venetian rule in Verona had evaporated. It is for that reason that Sebastiano Giustinian, the Venetian ambassador at the court of Henry VIII could report to his government on 6 July 1515 and 18 November 1516 that he had justified to the king's ministers Venetian claims to Verona – then held by the Emperor Maximilian – by pointing out that Venice had ruled the city for one hundred years and by claiming that the Della Scala, who had once ruled Verona had no heirs⁷.

The absence of a Della Scala threat to Venetian rule in Verona might help to explain the observations made by the Venetian patrician Marino Sanudo in his *Itinerario* of the Venetian *stato di terra* composed during, or shortly after, his visit to the *terraferma* in 1483⁸. There is little of triumphalism in his

³ Simeoni, 19-44; *Guida d'Italia*, 96-199. This building is now named the Palazzo del Governo. Its importance is underlined by the contribution by John Richards in this collection.

⁴ For the narrative: Rossini; Soldi Rondinini; Kohl, 1989, 329-34.

⁵ Guglielmo was the natural son of Cangrande II, lord of the city 1352-1359.

⁶ Law, 2000, ch. X, 10-11 and ch. IX *passim*. The most serious revolt was in May 1412.

⁷ Brown, 1854, 1:107-14; 2:9-12.

⁸ Brown, 1847, 96-102 (for Verona). Sanudo got the year of Verona's surrender to Venice wrong: it was 1405, not 1404. A new edition and commentary on the *Itinerario* is now available (Sanudo),

account, but he does record the sufferings of the city under previous regimes under “Eccelino de Romano tyrant”, then “li signori tyrani de la Scala” and finally “Francesco de Karara la prese, et alor servite con gran calamità et intolerabile dano”. However, Verona “venuta soto l’imperio veneto, per suo beneficio et libertà in mirabile è venuta incressimento et opulenta, e di giorno in giorno melgio si rinova”. Perhaps it was the distant history of tyrannical regimes, and the lack of the threat they posed to the Venetian regime, that encouraged Sanudo to record in his list of the distinctive monuments of the city “le arche de li Signori di la Scalla, tre, alte, marmoree et intagliate”, a clear reference to the three tomb monuments, supporting equestrian statues, mentioned above⁹.

The Venetian Republic’s perception that the Della Scala no longer posed a threat may also help to explain why their *signoria* continued to feature – almost to be celebrated – in the literature produced by a succession of Veronese chroniclers, antiquarians and historians from the fifteenth century onwards. This has been charted in the *schede* included in the fine 1988 Scala exhibition catalogue edited by Gian Maria Varanini, and also in *La statua equestre di Cangrande I della Scala*¹⁰. The earliest publication specifically focusing on the dynasty was by Torello Saraina, *Le historie e fatti de’ Veronesi nelli tempi d’il popolo et signori scaligeri*, first published in 1542, and then again – in a possibly lightly censored edition – in 1586. The dynasty came to be extensively covered in the text and documents published by Giambattista Verci in volume VII of his *Storia della Marca Trevigiana e Veronese* (1787)¹¹. What is also interesting is that from as early as 1676 measures were taken to ensure the preservation of the Della Scala tombs; on 12 April 1676, the communal council voted to restore the tomb of Cansignorio “che nel cimiterio di Santa Maria Antica con molta magnificenza si vede eretta alle glorie di quel Principe”. In 1766, the tomb of Mastino II was restored, and in 1839 a competition was held to restore the whole complex¹². Supposed portraits of leading members of the family, and key incidents, real and imagined, from their history – for example the hospitality showed to Dante in exile – became a subject for artists¹³. The Della Scala inheritance also led to the restoration – at times a rather free restoration – of buildings associated with them, for example the castle at Soave in 1890-92. This is a subject that deserves fuller exploration¹⁴. Their name and

but Brown’s edition has, for this contribution, a wider relevance as he knew the Cheney brothers well. Their prose and verse description of the Della Scala tombs are reprinted below in the Appendix.

⁹ For a good survey of the Della Scala legacy in Verona: *I segni della Verona scaligera*.

¹⁰ Varanini, 1988, 559-63: section headed “L’epoca scaligera nella coscienza culturale cittadina”. Varanini, 1995.

¹¹ Law, 2000, ch. viii.

¹² Varanini, 1988, 561-63; *L’arca di Mastino II*; Napione, 2011; Napione, 2009.

¹³ Marini et al., 277-78.

¹⁴ Perbellini, 161-62.

their principal emblem, the ladder, live on in contemporary Verona. The observation in the article republished below held and holds true: the “Scalas have left their impress on every part of their capital”.

2. *The British and Verona in the nineteenth century*

The British interest in Verona and its monuments is not hard to explain. The city was on one of the more travelled routes of the Grand Tour, and its Roman remains were an attraction. Interest in its medieval past came later, with the revival in taste for the Gothic in building, sculpture and painting, and Verona’s association with Dante and Shakespeare¹⁵. This transition can be illustrated from James Hakewell’s *A Picturesque Tour of Italy*, the first bound volume of which appeared in 1820¹⁶. This included views of Verona, but no detailed drawings of monuments associated with the medieval period other than of the Ponte Scaligero (1817). However, a sharper focus on the Della Scala monuments came with Samuel Prout¹⁷ and Joseph Mallord Turner¹⁸. These artists helped to inspire John Ruskin, who was drawn to Verona and its medieval monuments many times¹⁹. References to them are made in his *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), and his enthusiasm for the city is evident in *Verona and its Rivers*, and *Drawings and Photographs and Illustrations of Verona*, both published in 1870²⁰.

¹⁵ The literature on both is considerable. In art, for the former, see Carlo Canella’s painting, *Cangrande accoglie Dante in esilio* (c. 1835-1840): Marini et al., 2004, 276-77. Also, more famously, Frederic Leighton’s painting, *Dante in Exile*, dated 1864. For the impact of Dante on Britain again there is a considerable literature, but most recently, Havely, 2011 and Havely, 2014. On Romeo and Juliet, Clough.

¹⁶ Cubberley and Hermann.

¹⁷ Prout’s *The Tomb of Cangrande I della Scala, Verona*, c. 1824, is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

¹⁸ Turner’s *Four Sketches of the Scaliger Tombs*, 1833, are in Tate Britain, London, as part of the Turner Bequest.

¹⁹ There is a huge literature on Ruskin. A recent exhibition, *I Preraffaelliti*, held in the Museo d’Arte in Ravenna, and then transferred to the Ashmolean in Oxford as *The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy* (both events in 2010) brought out well Ruskin’s fascination with Verona, in terms of his own studies, and those he commissioned from others: Harrison; Law, 2013. Studies of Ruskin and Verona include: Mullaly (with an Italian translation of *Verona and its Rivers*); *My dearest place in Italy*; ‘A noble invention’; Sandrini, publishing Ruskin’s letters from Verona in 1869 and other related material, in both English and Italian. I would like to acknowledge the help given me by Professor Stephen Wildman, director and curator of the Ruskin Library and Research Centre at the University of Lancaster. Ruskin’s enthusiasm for Verona can be found throughout his work as both an artist and an author, for example in Ruskin, 1905, 1-60. In this lecture, delivered in Edinburgh, he compared his host city – unfavourably – to Verona.

²⁰ Ruskin, 1907. The indices include references to “Tombs at Verona”, “Scaliger Tombs”, “Grande” (Cangrande), “Mastino” (Mastino II) and “Signorio” (Cansignorio).

In terms of history writing, reaching an English reading public, influential may have been J.C.L. Sismondi's *A History of the Italian Republics*, published in a condensed one-volume edition in 1832, which discusses the overthrow of republican governments by signoril regimes of which the Della Scala were one²¹.

Much less well known in terms of the British presence in Italy in the nineteenth century were the Cheney brothers, though they have received some acknowledgement in the *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Edward Cheney (1803-1884), probably the most significant member of the family of that generation, was a close friend of the scholar Rawdon Brown (1806-1883). Brown lived in Venice, virtually without a break – though he also knew Verona – between 1833 and his death in 1883²². Edward Cheney also knew Italy well, being a prominent member of the British community in Rome and then in Venice. In the obituary which appeared in the journal of the society with which he was closely associated, *The Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, he was described as a prominent member of Anglo-Italian Society, drawn to Venice as a “homestead of antiquity and art”, belonging “to a generation of Englishmen who regarded Italy as a museum created and preserved for their pleasure and edification”²³. What the obituary does not bring out, is that he was a major collector of Italian works of art, particularly Venetian, which – together with an important library – were once housed in Badger Hall in Shropshire, as well as in his house in Audley Square, London. He also knew Ruskin well, although they were never close and their tastes only partially coincided. He probably did not share in his friend Brown's long, sometimes difficult, relationship with Ruskin²⁴.

It may be that Ruskin's interest in the Della Scala tombs prompted Edward Cheney to write the piece reprinted below. On the other hand, as has been mentioned, Cheney knew Italy well, and there was – in general – a taste for the Gothic, though his own collection was not, by any means, confined to the

²¹ Sismondi; the original edition in French appeared between 1807 and 1818. Hallam (first published in 1818) mentions the dynasty among other “tyrannical” regimes: *ibid.*, 184-85, citing Sismondi.

²² Griffiths and Law, *passim*. On Rawdon Brown: Pemble, 2004. For the British presence in nineteenth-century Venice, see: the essays by Laven and Pemble in Griffiths and Law; Pemble, 1988; Pemble, 1995, Norwich; Bosworth.

²³ I am extremely grateful to Tim Knox, curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for sending me a copy of his article on Cheney (Knox, 2007) and of the lecture associated with it. On Cheney and his family see too: Sebag-Montefiore; Mallalieu; Byam Shaw. The Philobiblon Society was named after a work by Richard de Bury, bishop of Durham (1333-1345), anxious to improve the literacy and learning of the clergy. Cheney was a founding member, and contributed articles on Venetian painters and Venetian illuminated manuscripts. Among the leading patrons and associates of the Society were Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, and his son Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, both highly appreciative of Italian art. The unsigned twenty-two page obituary to Edward Cheney appears in volume 15 (1884) of the *Miscellanies*.

²⁴ In the extensive Ruskin literature, the Cheneys often appear, though only in passing: e.g. Lutyens, 7, 42, 173-79, 205.

Middle Ages²⁵. The inspiration may have been the poem written and published in 1832 by his elder brother, Robert Henry (1801-1866)²⁶, anticipating Ruskin's knowledge of the monuments, and as Knox's article makes clear, the range and informed nature of Edward Cheney's interests in Italy²⁷. Cheney participated in the growing British interest in Italian medieval and renaissance history, contributing – for example – a long review of James Dennistoun's *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino* (1851) to the *Quarterly Review*²⁸.

This is the context in which the following contribution to the *Miscellanies* of the Philobiblon Society is reproduced, though not in the form of an edition and commentary²⁹. The Cheneys add little to our understanding of the Della Scala or their monuments, but they do add to an understanding of the interest in Italian medieval history, and the appreciation of Italian medieval art, which emerge strongly in nineteenth century Britain and which led on to more academic studies later in that century – and subsequently, as Benjamin Kohl has shown³⁰.

²⁵ In the text published in the Appendix Edward refers to the “fresh remembrance” associated with their “beautiful and conspicuous monuments”.

²⁶ Robert Henry's poem first appeared in 1837 in an obscure publication: *The Tribute*, dedicated to the writer Edward Smedley. Smedley published *Sketches in Venetian History*, as part of the publisher John Murray's “Family Library” series (London, 1831-1832); the book's engravings were by Prout.

²⁷ Knox.

²⁸ Cheney, 1851.

²⁹ For the original publication of Edward Cheney's piece: Cheney 1871-1872.

³⁰ This is a subject I have attempted to explore, for example in Law 2005a, 145-64, and also in Law, 2005b, 547-62; Law, 2008. For Benjamin Kohl's interest: Kohl, 2005.

Appendix

Edward Cheney

The Tombs of the Scaligers at Verona

Amongst the numerous cities of Lombardy which engage the attention of the traveller, none can compete with Verona in picturesque beauty and historical interest. The palaces, bridges, and churches, built on a scale of royal magnificence, denote its former grandeur and importance. The Scalas have left their impress on every part of their capital; but their own tombs far exceed all other monuments in beauty and singularity. This illustrious house has long been extinct.

The family of La Scala which reigned with supreme power in Verona for a hundred and fifty years, and which exercised so great an influence throughout the Italian Peninsula during that period, had no very remote or illustrious origin. An ambitious adventurer succeeded in gaining the supremacy in his native city, and establishing a dynasty that reigned first by favour and affection, and afterwards by tyranny and severity, till, worn out and exhausted, it lost the favour of the people, and the support of its followers, and finally fell a prey to the crafty policy of the more fortunate Visconti.

History rejects the fabulous antiquity which flatterers assigned to this family during the period of its prosperity, and authenticated annals commence with Bonifazio and Fabrizio Della Scala, who were put to death by Eccelino da Romano, tyrant of Padua, in the middle of the thirteenth century.

The first of the family whose name appears in the civic annals of Verona is one Adamo Della Scala, of whom little is recorded beyond his name. The ancient German descent which some genealogists have assigned to this family is not quite supported by evidence, and the origin of the name itself has been no less the subject of unfounded conjecture. Those who derive it from a warrior who first planted a ladder against the walls of a besieged city, and those less flattering, who suppose it to have been given to a mechanic whose trade was making ladders, are equally without warrant for their theory. These considerations, however, are beside our present purpose; it is sufficient that the Scalas, or *Scaligeri*, as they loved to be called, became famous in the history of their native country in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that they left those beautiful monuments of their grandeur which are the subject of the present notice.

The court of the lords of Verona during their brief period of supremacy became so famous throughout Italy for its splendid hospitality, that it was not only the resort of poets, sculptors and architects, who found favour and employment in it, but was also the asylum of illustrious exiles from every part of the Peninsula.

Dante records the courtesy with which he was received by Cangrande Della Scala. And the court of this prince, and of his still more famous successor Cansignorio, has been made the scene of tragic and romantic incidents. It is this connection between art and history that gives their chief value to the monuments of Italy, which lends them a charm beyond their artistic beauty, and which addresses itself to our imagination through our senses.

The Scalas perhaps now owe their "fresh remembrance" rather to the beautiful and conspicuous monuments they raised to their own glory than to their place in history. Though Cangrande was a great man, tried by a far higher standard than that which posterity can safely adopt in estimating the characters of his contemporaries, he was not without faults, both grievous and heavy; but endowed with qualities rare at any time, and far rarer in the age and country to which he belonged. He was succeeded by princes less worthy than himself, and the race finally dwindled and became extinct; and their sceptre passed into the hands of more powerful and more crafty neighbours.

A brief notice of the princes, whose bones repose in this romantic cemetery, may not be an unfitting preface to the lines which a visit to it suggested.

Mastino I, the first of his house who reigned with supreme authority in Verona, bore the modest title of Captain of the People, to which rank he was raised by acclamation. He was a wise and prudent governor, and a warrior of approved sagacity. He reigned for sixteen years, from 1261 to 1277.

He was succeeded by his brother, Albert I. To this last succeeded his three sons, Bartolomeo, Alboino, and Francesco, better known by the surname of Cangrande, the hero of the race. This last named prince was succeeded by his nephew Albert II, in the year 1314, and subsequently by another nephew, Mastino II, in the year 1329. Cansignorio I, and Paul-Alboin were the next in succession. The first was the father of the magnificent Cansignorio II, who in his turn was succeeded by his two natural sons Bartolomeo II, and Antonio, the twelfth and last lord of Verona, at whose death, or rather expulsion, the independence of the city ceased, and the state became very shortly a province of the Venetian Republic.

Though the love of illustrious birth exists in Italy, as in every other part of the world, the total want of it has never proved a bar to the success of a fortunate adventurer. Legitimacy, too, which was so early established as essential to legal succession in the rest of Europe, was wholly disregarded in Italy. It was not till the subjection of the Peninsula to the Spanish crown that titles of honour, irreproachable pedigree, and the laws of primogeniture, were adopted as indispensable badges of nobility.

The tombs of the Scaligers, the most romantic and the most magnificent in existence, are crowded within the narrow precincts of the cemetery of Santa Maria Antica, the parish church of the Palace, the ancient seat of government in which the Scaligers first fixed their residence. Though much confined, nothing can be more fortunate than their position, surrounded by striking and beautiful objects. The lofty tower, the ancient palace, the dilapidated church, the projecting balcony supported on massive brackets, the mouldering shield, with the weed and the wild flower peeping from every interstice, unite to form a combination of beauty and harmony which is heightened and illuminated by the bright Italian sun which shines over the whole.

The tombs, though standing in the open air and in the most crowded part of the city, defended only by a screen of slight and elastic ironwork, have sustained no injury in a capital which is also a fortress, the scene of frequent civil brawls, often disputed obstinately with an enemy, and taken and retaken by storm.

They are aptly described in Forsyth as "models of the most elegant Gothic, light, open spire, full of statues caged in niches; yet, slender as they seem, these tombs have stood entire for five hundred years in a public street, the frequent theatre of sedition"³¹.

The earlier tombs are stern and heavy; the classic sarcophagus of the Romans, within whose ponderous and marble jaws are interred according to tradition, the founders of the dynasty, Mastino I, Alberto, Bartolomeo and Alboino Della Scala.

The first of these is assigned to Mastino, who was raised, as has been already noticed, by acclamation to the rank of Captain General of the People, and who, after a reign of sixteen years, was treacherously murdered near his own residence; the memory of which crime is still preserved in the name of the place where it occurred, Il Volto Barbaro.

In the second sarcophagus are interred the remains of Albert, the brother, successor, and avenger of Mastino. The sides and lid of the sarcophagus are adorned with sculptured shields and a sacred subject in low relief.

The third is assigned, but without certainty, to Bartolomeo, the third of his house who reigned in Verona, but still with no other title than Captain of the People. He reigned but for two years, from 1302 to 1304. He had the reputation of being a prudent and amiable prince, and his premature loss was regretted by his subject fellow citizens. But his greatest claim on the interest of posterity is, that during his reign the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet occurred, a tale which was commemorated in Italy, both in prose and verse, before Shakespeare gave it a world-wide celebrity. He is the "Escalus, Prince of Verona" of the play.

The fourth of these massive tombs contains the bones of Alboino Della Scala, the son of Alberto I. Though there is no inscription, the insignia of the house of Scala are sculptured on the lid, and on the allusive ladder is perched the Imperial eagle, to denote the favour of the Emperor

³¹ This is a reference to Forsyth, 352. Forsyth's book was another publication from John Murray, prominent in publishing work on Italy.

of Germany, and the Ghibeline partialities of the lords of Verona, upon whom the title of Imperial Vicar was now bestowed.

“Che ’n su la scala porta il santo uccello”³².

The most remarkable tombs are those of Cangrande, Mastino II, and Cansignorio. The tomb of Cangrande, whom Dante calls “il Gran Lombardo”, is placed beneath a canopy and above the door of the church. The body lies in a sarcophagus in the robes of peace in which he was interred, while his figure on horseback, armed at all points exactly cap-à-pie, and like the ghost in Hamlet with his beaver up, surmounts the canopy. He died too soon for his glory, at the premature age of thirty-eight. Had he lived longer, it has been thought he might have realized those prophetic promises that “the wizard Michael Scott”, pronounced at his birth, which historians have more soberly repeated, and revived the Lombard kingdom of Italy.

The tomb of Mastino II, is more elaborate, more costly, and more imposing than that of Cangrande. The body reposes beneath a lofty canopy on a sarcophagus raised on pillars above the ground. Saints and martyrs guard the sepulchre, and low reliefs, representing the crimes that man is prone to, and the calamities which are their consequence; the origin of evil, the toil and travail inflicted as a curse on his posterity, the first murder and the sensuality of Noah, are sculptured on its sides and on the marble canopy. The new dispensation is also illustrated, and the redemption of the world and the great atonement are figured forth in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Mastino II was the nephew of Cangrande, and, with his nephew Alberto II, who had also been associated with his uncle on the throne, began his reign in 1329, and closed it in 1351. His ambition was equal to that of his uncle Cangrande, but his ability was less; and before he closed his reign, symptoms were already visible that the sceptre of his house would soon be transferred into other and more powerful hands.

The tomb of Cansignorio is the largest, the most imposing, and most magnificent of the race. The design is borrowed and amplified from the tombs of his immediate predecessors, already described.

Like that of Mastino, the sarcophagus on which the statue of the defunct lies stretched is raised on pillars and surmounted by a canopy, upon which stands an equestrian statue, fully armed and with lance in rest. Guardian angels and fainted warriors stand around, and claim the departed chief for their client. St. George, St. Martin, St. Valentine and St. Lewis have each their separate niche and canopy. The Virgin Mary and the Saviour bestow their benedictions, and the cardinal virtues are sculptured on pinnacles above the canopies. If the page of history and the tale of tradition may be credited, the prayers and intercessions of this celestial brotherhood were indeed necessary to secure the acceptance of their wayward client. Cansignorio raised himself to the sovereignty by a crime, and secured the succession by another committed on his deathbed, to his two natural sons Bartolomeo and Antonio.

With these two princes, the first of whom was murdered by the hand of the last, the race expired ingloriously in the year 1388.

The following lines were written in the year 1832, after the disturbances which followed, the French revolution had been quieted by the military occupation of the whole of the Italian Peninsula by the Austrians. They were originally printed in a miscellany called the “Tribute”, edited by the late Lord Northampton, a work which had little or no circulation, and is unknown except to those who originally subscribed for it³³. These lines will, I believe, be wholly new to most of our members.

³² Dante, *Paradiso*, XVII, 70-72.

³³ For the poem’s first publication: Cheney, 1837. The list of subscribers to the volume includes: Colonel Cheney; Mrs. Cheney; R.H. Cheney, Esq.; Edward Cheney, Esq.; Miss Cheney. Among the pieces printed, “On Our Childhood” by Mrs. Cheney (*ibid.*, 353-54).

The Tombs of the Scaligers, Verona
(by Robert Henry Cheney)

Where Verona's towers look down
On the valleys once her own,
Though her glory long has fled,
And the crown has left her head,
Traveller, there thou still may'st trace
Relics of a royal race.
Many a marble tomb is there,
Many a niche of sculpture rare,
Many a fretted canopy,
Where in death the mighty lie,
Princes of a race gone by.
In that lofty pillar'd shrine
Rests the chief of Scala's line:
There to guard the holy ground,
Sainted warriors stand around,
Imaged in the sculptured stone:
Soldiers they of Christ alone,
Who, their Christian warfare done,
Wear the crown their valour won.
On the mimic mail impress'd,
Still the cross adorns each breast;
And aloft each martial hand
Raises still his threatening brand,
Swift to flay, and strong to save,
Meet to guard the warrior's grave.

They have borne this mortal coil,
Stain'd by blood and worn by toil;
They have known the passions' force
Which beset the warrior's course,
Envy, hate, and wrath, and fear,
Vainly dogg'd their bright career;
Thirst of power and love of gain
Spread their gilded snares in vain:
They have triumph'd over sin,
Frauds without and lusts within.
They who stood the best can tell
How to pity those who fell.
Saintly band, a blessing crave
For a brother warrior's grave.

Soon his race of glory run,
Low has sunk La Scala's sun;
High he kept his heavenly way,
Bright his noon, but brief his day,
Not one lingering gleam of light
Left to gild the covering night.
All La Scala's power and pride
Frail and mouldering marbles hide;
And the stranger's iron hand
Rules La Scala's conquered land.

The tombs of the Scaligers at Verona

Hero saints, upraised on high,
Models to men's wavering eye,
How to live and how to die;
Rouse ye now the wise and brave,
Warn them from the warrior's grave,
That the warrior's crown to share
They the warrior's fate must dare –
You who would be Freedom's friends,
Learn how pure are Freedom's ends.
Selfish aims those ends obscure not,
Foreign aids those ends endure not;
By patriot hands her work is wrought
By patriot blood her triumphs bought;
You, who would be great and free,
First must merit Liberty;
Then may ye Freedom's banner wave,
And proudly ask a warrior's grave.

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Abstract

This contribution relates to two of Benjamin Kohl's interests recorded in the bibliography included in this volume: signorial lordships in the Veneto in the late Middle Age and the interpretation of that period of Italian history by historians of the Victorian and Edwardian era. Here the regime chosen will not be the one that occupied Ben Kohl for much of his researching and publishing life, the Carrara of Padua, but rather their near neighbours and frequent adversaries, the Della Scala of Verona. The English commentators on that dynasty whose accounts are presented here are not nearly as well known, nor were they as influential, as Julia Cartwright and Cecilia Ady, discussed by Ben Kohl towards the end of his career, but the Cheney brothers – and Edward Cheney in particular – were prominent members of the British community in Rome and Venice in the nineteenth century and did play a part in raising interest in the cultural history of Italy.

Keywords

Middle Ages; 14th-15th century; 19th century; Verona; sculpture; historiography; Della Scala family

John E. Law
Swansea University, United Kingdom
J.E.Law@swansea.ac.uk