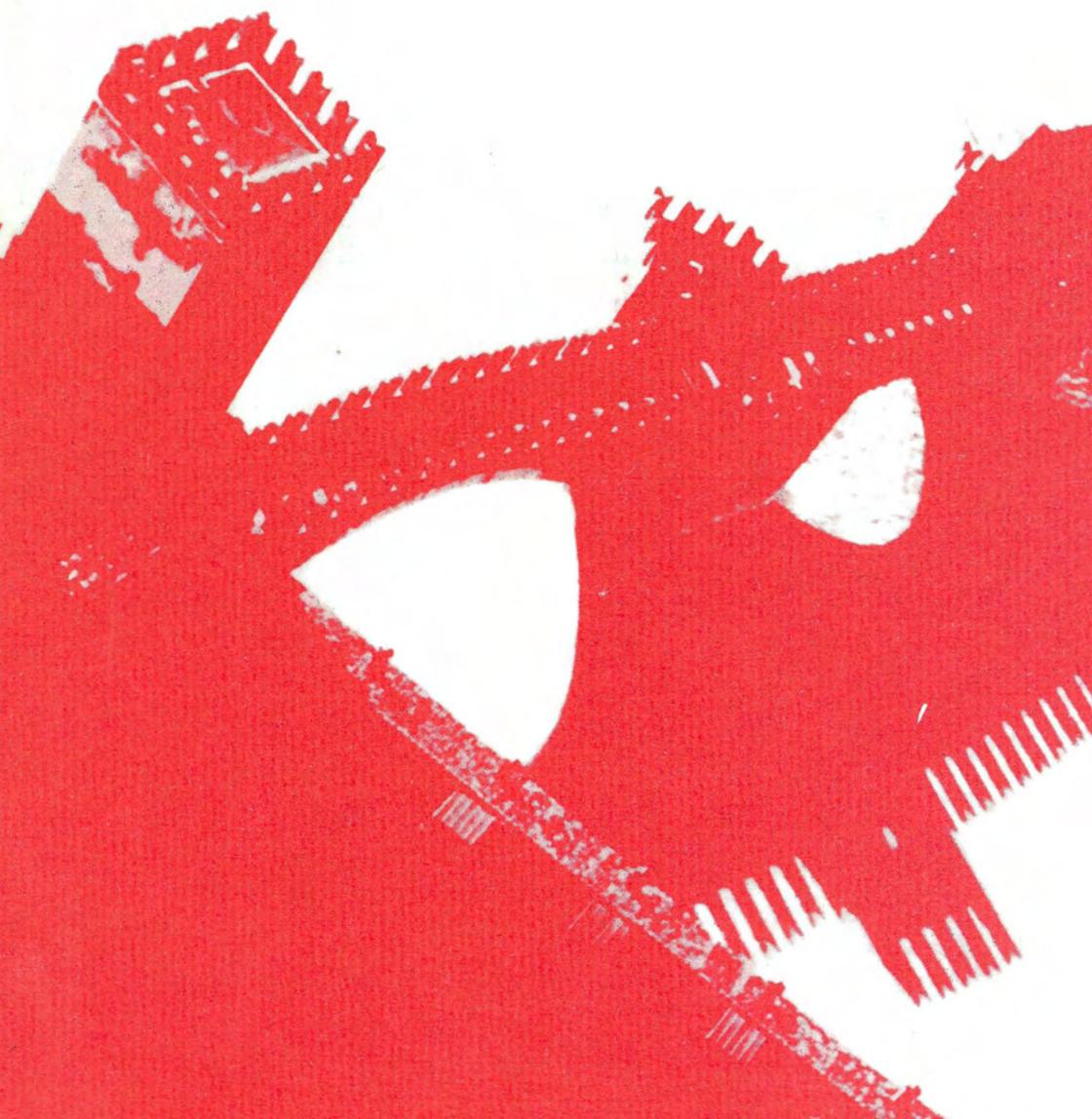
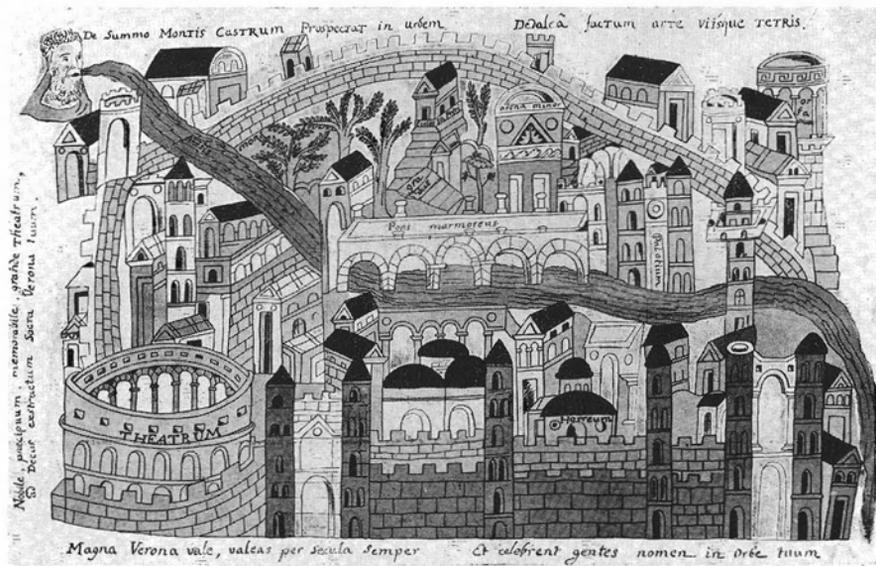


# THE WALLS OF VERONA



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by  
**James A. Gray**  
(a brief of a study written in 1954)

**venice committee**



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*Porta dei Borsari*

One often wonders why cities grew up where they are, but with Verona, the answer is obvious: The site lay astride the route into the Brenner Pass and, possibly more important, the most easily negotiated East-West route across northern Italy.

It is within relatively recent times that a system of dykes and drainage ways converted the Po Valley from an almost impassable swamp. East-West travel had to skirt the foot-hills of the Alps. North-South travel was easiest at a few points where the rivers ran deep and swift but permitted a quick crossing - such as at Verona where the Adige surges against a foothill (now holding Castel San Pietro) and then rushes back into the valley, forming a loop which encloses the heart of the city.

The Etruscans recognized the strategic and economic importance of the site and left there evidence of their high order of civilization. Excavations show that they occupied the right bank of the river between the present locations of the churches Santa Eufemia and San Fermo Maggiore. There is evidence of a wall around a portion of this area - probably built during the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B. C.

The Romans first occupied Verona during the Third Century B. C. and they initially had a cluster of buildings on San Pietro hill encircled by a wall. Subsequently, the cluster of buildings extended down the hill and across the river which was at that time spanned by a crude bridge. About the time of Christ, they dug a moat across the peninsula, paralleling it with a wall of which nothing remains (although historians have established its trace). A short time later the Romans built another wall which took in a greater part of the peninsula. Porta dei Borsari (not far from the Arena) is about all that remains of that wall.

It is believed that the Romans had their Capitolium where Castel San Pietro now stands, and that initially their civic activity was confined to the left bank of the river. A wall climbed the hill just East of Teatro Romano, encircled the Capitolium and descended by the most direct route to the river. At the west, the wall was opened by Porta Santo Stefano, and at the East near the Teatro, by Porta Organa Antica. During the relative peace of the Roman reign, the walls received little attention and were allowed to crumble away. An earthquake in 246 AD added to the decay and partially destroyed the Arena which had been built during the First Century AD.

Galliano, in 265 AD, improved the fortifications of Verona because of his concern about a barbarian invasion. He went about this reconstruction feverishly and, in a period of eight months restored the Roman wall and added a section around the Arena. In that this extension did not follow the shortest route, speculation has it that he took advantage of a partially completed wall or other buildings to save time. Galliano's wall was about six feet thick and twenty feet high except around the Arena where it was much higher (a portion still exists around the Arena). He also built forts outside the city but no trace remains. Near Ponte Scaligero, however, there are traces of towers which he constructed to defend his bridges. Galliano's works were timely but were not put to the test because the barbarian hordes were defeated by Claudio near Lake Garda.

Constantine besieged and took Verona in 312 AD, destroying portions of the walls in the process. His failure to repair his damage made possible the effortless entry of Alarico in Verona in 402. But when the latter too, failed to fix the walls, he was as easily displaced a short time later by Pollenzo. The walls were still unrepaired in 452



when the Huns of Attila invaded Italy. The invasion, however, united the quarrelling cities of Northern Italy and the Huns were driven off.

Teodoric apparently had little difficulty with the fortifications when he entered Verona in 489. During his reign (until 526 AD) he restored and improved the fortifications of this city which he loved. The streets and land had risen more than a meter during the centuries since its inception and the walls were relatively that much lower. Teodoric increased the height of the walls not only because of this "sinking", but because of new scaling techniques. He also had the walls thickened at the base to offset improved methods for battering a wall. He demolished the church of Santo Stefano because of its proximity to his defensive walls.

With the passing of Teodoric, the walls fell into a state of neglect for the next six centuries, or until Verona assumed a Communal form of government (12th Century). Walls of this latter period are still referred to as Communal Walls and include the wall which started near the present site of Ponte Garibaldi, encircled the church of San Giorgio, and climbed the hill to take in Castel San Pietro. From there it descended sharply to the valley and described an arc paralleling the river. A moat was dug along the trace of this wall and is visible today.

Frederick Barbarossa built a new wall (late in the 12th Century) which connected the present location of Ponte Aleardi with Castel Vecchio and enclosed an area called the "breit" (German for cultivated field). The word was subsequently corrupted to "Breida" and then simply "Bra" from which the piazza gets its name. (Porta Bra, which was cut through this wall in the 13th Century, was first called Porta Braidà). The wall was of the unre-



### Map of Verona

Showing the Various Stages of Walls Constructed within the City

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| RRR - First Roman Wall  | EEE - Wall by Alberto della Scala                                 |
| AA - Roman Wall constructed by Gallieno                         | F - Door of the Bishop (Porta del Vescovo) by Alberto della Scala |
| BB - Wall of the First Comune on the left of the Adige River    | CGHI - Scaligera Wall on the right of the Adige River             |
| CC - Wall of the First Comune on the right of the Adige River   | I - Porta Fura  |
| DDD - Wall of the Second Comune on the right of the Adige River | ..... - Wall of the First Comune                                  |
|   | ----- - Wall of the Second Comune                                 |

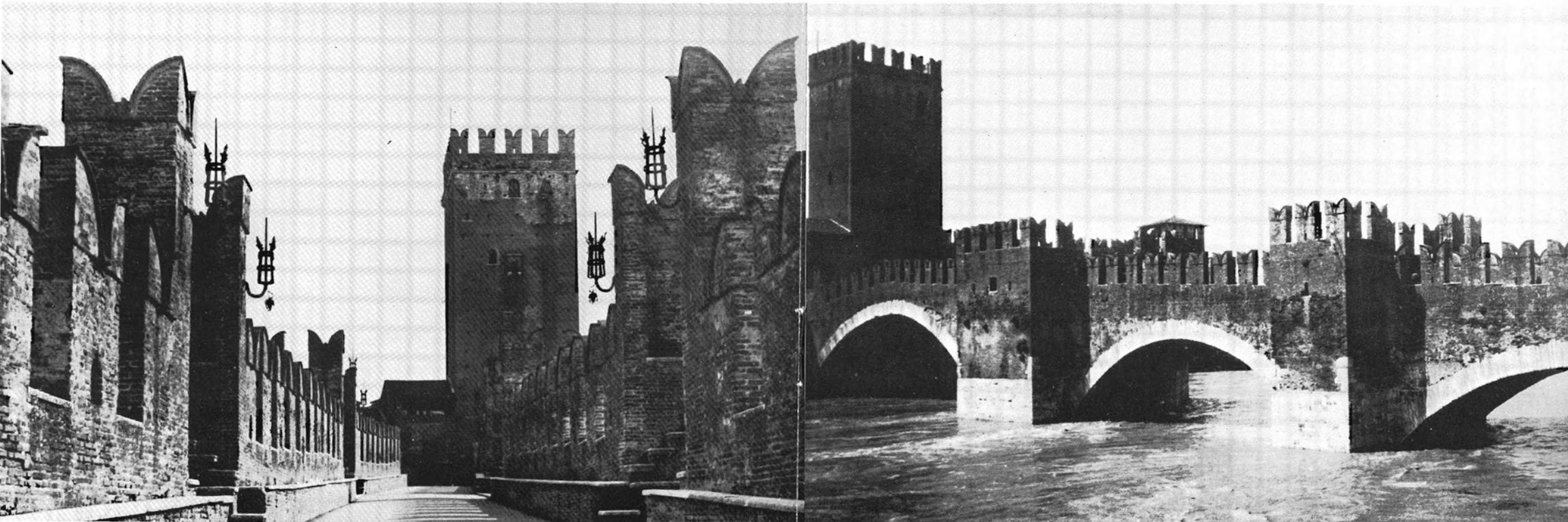
cedented height of 13 meters (40 feet) to make scaling more difficult. Towers were erected along the outer side of the wall to assist in the defense. Much of this wall is intact.

The Signoria Scaligera ruled Verona from 1262 to 1387 in what were its most prosperous and glorious years with vast improvement in the city's fortifications.

In 1283, Alberto della Scala, the first of the great Signoria, began an intensive rebuilding program which included stone bridges across the Adige and a new wall on the left bank taking in Castel San Felice. An improved feature of this wall was its defensive towers along the entire length. After Alberto's death and short reigns of lesser

*pages 8, 9 & 10: Three views of Ponte Scaligero*

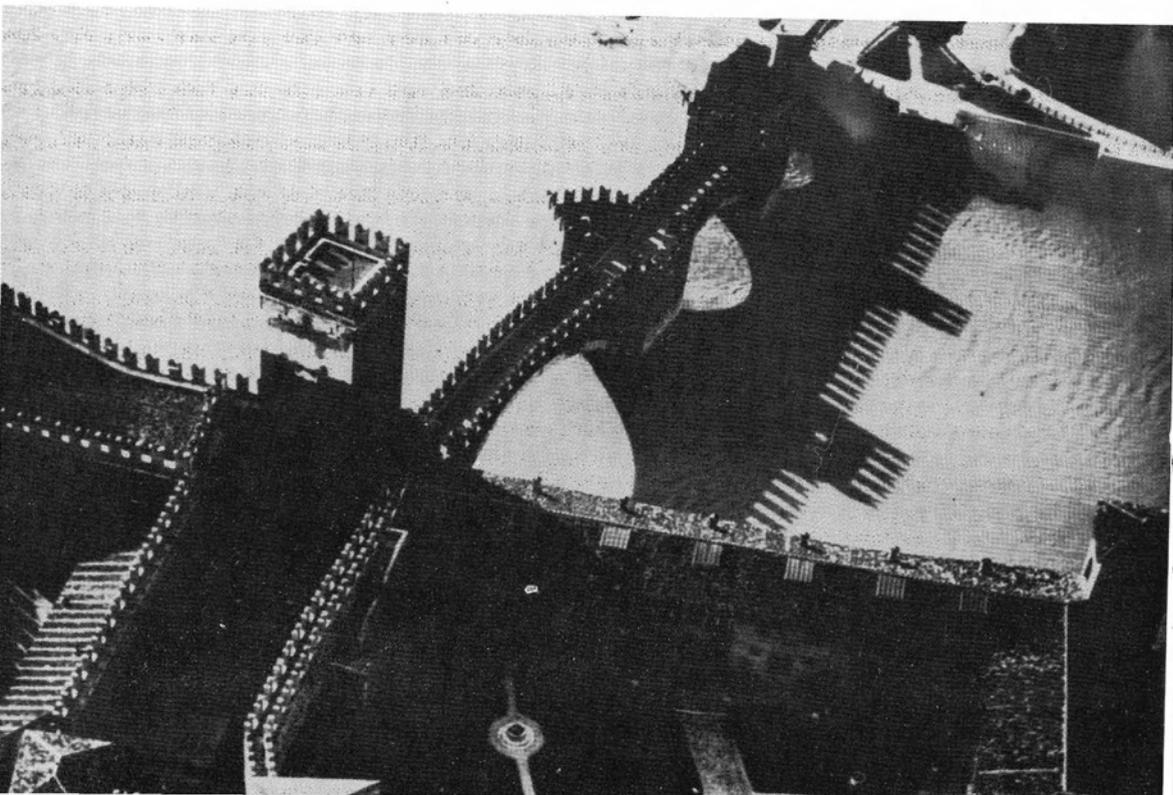
known Signoria, Cangrande della Scala took over in 1311 and Verona enjoyed a period of greatness. In 1324, Cangrande was threatened by the military alliance of Padua and Treviso with Federico of Austria and Enrico of Carinthia, but by sheer force of character, Cangrande persuaded Enrico to withdraw. Possibly because of the bellicose attitude of Padua and Treviso, Cangrande decided to strengthen the defenses on the eastern side of the city. With zealous drive he excavated a moat paralleling a new wall for its entire trace to the top of San Pietro hill. He built another wall just behind this joining that built by Alberto and another surrounding San Zeno on the right bank of the river (the existing Austrian wall follows the same trace). This new wall began with a tower (still there) in the middle of the river at Porta Fura and joined the Adige again near the present bastion of San Francesco. The



wall was only six meters high but the moat was wide and deep and flooded in the low-land portions by the river. These fortifications of Cangrande were to form the bulwark of Verona's security for more than a hundred years.

Upon his death in 1329, Cangrande's nephew Mastino took over and began fortifying the west of Verona, constructing the large turreted wall (still existing) between Villafranca and Nogara.

Cangrande II, who ruled from 1351 to 1359, was the least loved of the Signoria - an eccentric tyrant who distrusted everyone, particularly after an unsuccessful revolt led by his brother. But Cangrande II was a strong ruler and left behind a work of great historical value - Castel San Marino (now called Caltelvecchio) and its adjoining bridge. He had the castle built to protect



him from the unhappy populace and the bridge to give him an escape route to the Tyrol if things got out of hand. The bridge was completed in two years, a remarkable feat for the period. The engineer profited, no doubt, by the remains of a previous bridge and by the promptings and threats from Cangrande II.

In 1387, Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan drove out the last of the Scaligeri (Antonio) and immediately embarked upon a vast military construction program. By 1389 he had completed a presidio called the Cittadella in the area adjacent to the piazza of that name (southwest of Piazza Bra). This presidio was to house and protect his garrison from the hostile Veronese and was encircled by a high wall with adjacent moat and draw bridges. On the Piazza Bra side, the existing wall was used and a new wall was constructed along what is now Corso Porta Nuova. Visconti dug a moat along this latter wall for its length from Porta Bra to Castelvecchio.. He completely rebuilt Castel San Pietro and, in so doing, obliterated the record of the Roman fortifications at that point. He laid the foundation for Castel San Felice but trouble with the populace halted this work. With his death in 1402, Visconti's domain fell apart and his fortifications in Verona were partially obliterated. The wall on the Corso Nuova side of Cittadella was demolished and the moat filled in. The populace took over Cittadella and converted it to living quarters.

In 1405, tired of years of strife, the Veronese voluntarily placed themselves under Venetian rule which, except for two brief periods (1439 and from 1509 to 1516) endured until 1796. The Veronese soon regretted this step because the Venetians restored the Cittadella (and its recently destroyed wall), evicting the squatters and moving in its occupation troops.



On 9 February 1801, the treaty of Luneville partitioned Verona between the Austrians and the French, the River Adige forming the boundary. Before ceding the left bank to the Austrians, the French blew up the castles San Felice and San Pietro and destroyed the connecting walls and bastions. In October of the same year, the French began demolition of the fortifications on the right bank, and by January 1802, only those of San Francesco and Spagna remained, and these only because they served as powder storage points.

In 1803, as a measure of security against the unhappy populace, the French strengthened the fortifications of Castelvecchio. In 1805, along with other military successes, Napoleon again took over all of Verona. In 1813, when things were going badly, he feverishly started repairing the damages to the defenses on the left bank of the Adige. This availed him little because on 4 February 1814, the Germans entered the city under General Stefanelli.

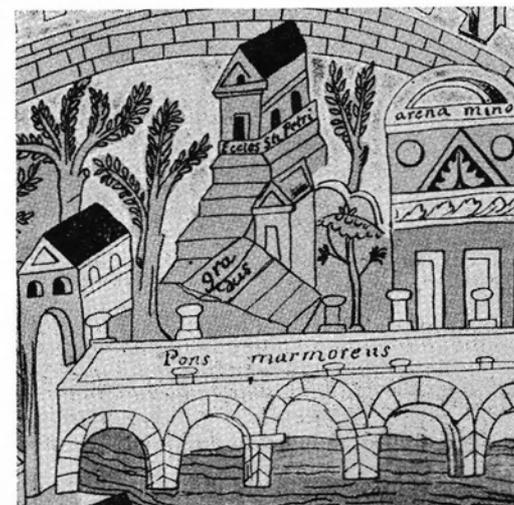
In 1830, the Austrians became concerned at the French sword rattling, and again undertook the repair of Verona's crumbling defenses. In 1833, Austrian military engineer de Schell began rebuilding the wall on the right bank, dismantling much of the older wall and bastions for the materials which they contained. The trace of the new wall remained the same but the design and size of wall and bastions was changed to keep abreast of changed tactics and improved artillery capabilities.

Concurrent with the work on the walls of Verona, the Austrians embarked on a vast program of fortifications to enclose the city within a network of forts as far distant as 25 miles. During my two years in Verona I frequently flew over the area in a helicopter. I marvelled at the vastness of these military fortifications and the

great labor that must have been involved - surely dwarfing that used to build the pyramids of Egypt, and just about as productive.

During an abortive revolt by the Italians in 1848, the Austrian Marshal Radetzky moved his troops out of Verona to engage the Italians under Carlo Alberto who was advancing from the West. Had the Veronese populace revolted at this moment, the Italian resurrection might have succeeded, but the Veronese sat on their hands while Carlo Alberto's forces were whittled away in fruitless fighting at Custoza.

In 1866, when Bismark started getting tough with Austria, King Vittorio Emanuele allied himself with Bismark and put his army into the field. The Austrians, on a crash basis, constructed two additional fortresses, but these served little purpose. Although the Austrians fought well against the Italians, successes of the Germans elsewhere, forced the capitulation of the Austrians on October 16, 1866 when the Italian Army triumphantly entered Verona.



Detail of  
Rateriana Iconograph



#### ANCHOR AND DOLPHIN SYMBOL

*When the famous XVI Century Venetian printer Aldo Manuzio received an ancient Roman coin from a friend, he so much admired its anchor and dolphin*

*design that he appropriated it for his printer's mark which, because of the high quality of his work, became possibly the best known typographic mark of the Renaissance.*

*In 1969, when Venice Committee was being organized, it sought as its symbol a design which was distinctive and representative. It decided upon the Manuzio anchor and dolphin and reproduced it with all of its ragged edges.*

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