

COLLEONI



Colleoni was born at Solza, in the countryside of Bergamo. His family was a noble one, exiled with the rest of the Guelphs by the Visconti. Bartolomeo's father Paolo seized the castle of Trezzo by wile and held it by force, until he was assassinated, probably acting on order of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan.

Colleoni was to direct service of the Venetian Republic, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga was nominally commander-in-chief, and Colleoni was in fact the true leader of the army. He recaptured many towns and districts for Venice from the Milanese, and when Gonzaga went over to the enemy, Colleoni continued to serve the Venetians under Erasmo da Narni, known as "Gattamelata" and Francesco Sforza, winning battles at Brescia, Verona, and on the Lake of Garda.

When peace was made between Milan and Venice in 1441, Colleoni went over to the Milanese, together with Sforza in 1443. Although well treated at first, Colleoni soon fell under the suspicion of the Visconti, and was imprisoned at Monza, where he remained until the duke's death in 1447. Milan then fell under the lordship of Sforza, whom Colleoni served for a time, but in 1448 he took leave of Sforza and returned to the Venetians. Disgusted at not having been elected captain-general, he went over to Sforza once more, but Venice could not do without him and Venice induced him to return.

In 1455 he was appointed captain-general of the republic for life. Although he occasionally fought on his own account, when Venice was at peace, he remained at the disposal of the republic in time of war until his death. He set his residence in the castle of Malpaga, which he had bought in 1465 and restored in the following years.

At his death in 1475 at Malpaga, he left a large sum to the republic for the Turkish war, with a request that an equestrian statue of himself should be erected in the Piazza San Marco. The statue was modelled by Andrea del Verrocchio and cast in bronze after his death by Alessandro Leopardi, but, as no monument was permitted in the piazza, it was placed near the Scuola Grande of St Mark outside the Church of SS Giovanni e Paolo.

