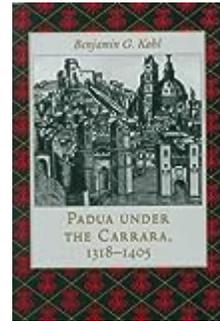


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Benjamin G. Kohl. *Padua under the Carrara, 1318-1405.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. xxvi + 466 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5703-4.



Reviewed by Duane J. Osheim (Professor of History and Associate Dean, Graduate Arts & Sciences, University of Virginia)

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Benjamin Kohl admits rather apologetically that his study of fourteenth-century Padua may seem unusually traditional and even too dependent on local chronicle traditions. Part of the reason is that the narrative sources are more complete than other private and public documents preferred by social and cultural historians. But in reading this primarily political and diplomatic narrative, another compelling reason for Kohl's choice emerges. Padua was a political creation under the Carrara, at the heart of which the ruling lords and local elites placed rather extravagant claims against a powerful Venetian neighbor.

Giacomo il Grande first became Lord of Padua in 1318, a move the Paduan tolerated primarily because continued factional struggles would probably have led to a conquest by Cangrande della Scala of Verona. The Carrara remained in power almost without interruption until Francesco Novello finally lost his lordship and life when the Paduans no longer found his rule preferable to Venetian domination. The most interesting and significant portions of the book, however, deal with Francesco il Vecchio, who (until he was finally driven from power by Scaligeri) made serious claims to much of the Trevisan March and to Friuli. With his marriage connections in Northern Italy and Germany, he nearly managed to isolate the Venetians from the major mainland communes

and, more seriously, from the trade routes to the North. Kohl's narrative makes clear just how volatile politics and diplomacy in northern Italy really were. Though cities may have claimed the traditional boundaries, and the Venetian citizens the traditional rights of trade and commerce, it is clear that crafty leaders like Francesco Carrara and Cangrande della Scala were as capable of creating new regional states as the Visconti or even the later Florentine and Venetian Republics. "Self-fashioning" in the Renaissance was not just for individuals.

Carrara power was built on a combination of family, marriage politics and patronage. As at Ferrara, the lords of Padua used their lands, power of appointment, and access to ecclesiastical and public offices to reward a network of friends and supporters. They also were lords of a city that was home to one of Italy's great universities and refuge to Petrarch and Giovanni Conversini. Yet, this cultural aspect of Carrarese Padua is relatively unknown, an especially surprising lacunae since Kohl has previously worked on both. Interestingly, Kohl does observe that Francesco il Vecchio seems to have carefully divided his court and palace areas into public and private space—the later being almost exclusively venue to Carrarese women.

One wishes for more from *Padua under the Carrara*,

1318-1405, especially since the lavish and judicious use of photographs (many taken by Kohl's wife) show the great sensitivity he feels for the connections of politics and the cultural life of Padua. This is not always an easy book to read, but Kohl manages to recreate the dramatic sense of potentially momentous change which accompanied the

dramatic rise and eventual fall of the Carrarese of Padua.

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