

5B. DANTE COLLECTION

The main part of the Dante Collection at the Berio Library is the collection of Evan Mackenzie, a cultured Scottish insurer well-known to the Genoese because of the castle built by Gino Coppedé on the hill behind Piazza Manin. In this neo-medieval castle, Evan Mackenzie aimed to gather the highest possible number of editions of Dante's works.

The wealthy collector gathered over 1,400 volumes and pamphlets, including several copies of the Divine Comedy, such as the first incunabula and almost all editions published from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, as well as several editions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In total, the collection includes as many as 344 editions of Dante's major work alone. To house the collection, the "Dantean room" was created on the top floor of the castle tower, frescoed with episodes from the Divine Comedy and furnished in Florentine style.

In 1939, Evan Mackenzie's daughter, Isabella Mackenzie De Thierry, donated her father's library and all the furnishings of the "Dantean Room" to the City of Genoa. However, the outbreak of World War II prevented their permanent arrangement, which was only carried out in 1958 with the transfer of the volumes to the Berio Library. The furnishings were lost during the bombings in the autumn of 1942.

Starting from the post-World War II period, the Dante Collection has been constantly enriched thanks to new acquisitions. Among them, the collection of the book lover Alberto Beer, which is especially rich in critical essays on Dante, and the over 300 bookplates on the same subject donated by Massimo Battolla.