



Romanelli, Giandomenico. The Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone

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Romanelli, Giandomenico. *The Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone*. Venice: Lineadacqua Edizioni Eventi, 2021. Pp. 79 + 49 colour ill., 3 floor plans. ISBN 978-88-32066-54-8 (paperback) €12.

This slender, but very informative volume, is both a guide to, and brief history of the Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone, the Venetian confraternity that served the devotional, social, and charitable needs of immigrants and sojourners from the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea (Dalmatia) and even further inland (Slavonia). The volume is divided into four chapters and is richly illustrated with an abundance of excellent colour images.

In the first chapter, “The Venetian *Scuole*: Assistance, Devotion, Identity” (pp. 7–9), Giandomenico Romanelli provides a general introduction to Venetian confraternities (*scuole*) in which he points out that the *scuole* are “lay associations that were initially derived from the medieval *battuti* confraternities and companies, characterised by more or less radical motions to renew Church and its institutions” (7). The *scuole* brought together persons with common ethnic-territorial origins, or practiced a common profession, or shared a common devotion or a common liturgical practice. Within Venetian society, the *scuole* were very active in providing social assistance to their members or the community, so much so that they “became a very complex system of private or semi-public assistance, fully and completely controlled in every small detail by government offices, but also a widespread and pervasive police tool” (9).

The second chapter, “The Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone” (11–17), highlights the salient features of the history of the *Scuola Dalmata*, starting from its foundation on 24 March 1451 and with the social characterisation of its members, “all artisans employed in generally skilled activities of a high standard” (11). According to Romanelli, the *Scuola Dalmata* stood out for its strong ties with Dalmatia and its ability to finance Christian troops engaged in countering the growing Ottoman pressure in the Mediterranean. The *scuola* was located along the Rio della Pietà, overlooking the Calle dei Furlani, home to an industrious group of artisans from Friuli, and bordering on the better known and more powerful priory of the Order of the Knights of Malta. Romanelli then discusses the building itself, which is “the result of a radical restructuring, if not actual rebuilding, carried out under the direction of the ‘proto dell’Arsenale’ [...] Giovanni de Zan (influenced by Sansovino), who transformed the pre-existing building in 1551” (16–17).

In the third chapter, “Vittore Carpaccio in the *Scuola Dalmata*” (21–24), Romanelli focuses Carpaccio’s works in the *scuola*. These consists of two cycles consisting of three paintings each and a canvas dedicated to

the confraternity's patron saints, plus a painting of the Calling of Matthew and one on the Agony in the Garden, both from the early sixteenth century.

The final chapter, "The *Scuola's* Works of Art" (26–79) details the extensive collection of works of art at the *scuola*. It is organized by location: works on the ground floor, on the stairway, and in the upper hall. On the ground floor the cycle with the stories of Saint George, Saint Jerome, and Saint Tryphon stands out. According to Romanelli, "although divided into seven different canvases (plus two Christological subjects), this marvellous courtly tale constitutes a substantially unified vision of Carpaccio's poetics, giving life to a multi-faceted vision of the world" (29). The description of the works on the ground floor closes with the presentation of the other paintings: the *Risen Christ*, *Saint Francis*, and *Madonna and Child*. On the stairway there are canvases mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with subjects that "more or less relate to the *Scuola* and its devotions (*Saint Jerome*, the *Risen Christ*, *Madonna and Child*)" (67). The importance of these paintings lies in the fact that they "illustrate the devotions prevailing among the Dalmatians in Venice and their iconographic choices, and reveal the ties they always cultivated with their homeland and their desire to depict it whenever the opportunity arose" (67). In the upper hall, the rear wall "is dominated by the altar, the composition of which appears to be the result of arrangements made in successive periods with the reuse of materials taken from various parts of the *Scuola*" (69). Particularly interesting, in this sense, are the "two panels at the sides of the altar with Saints Jerome and Tryphon" that must "have come from a workshop such as that of the most senior of the Vivarini dynasty, Antonio, who in the middle of the century was engaged in commissions from Istria and Dalmatia" (70). The ceiling, on the other hand, is divided into "panels of mixed and varied shapes" that "are arranged around the central octagon with a standing Saint George, this time in the guise of a Roman warrior" (75). To close this volume, there is a description of the confraternity's valuable *mariegola*, "a parchment codex bound in red velvet, whose cover is decorated with elaborate three-dimensional silver corners, and with fine octagonal lobed studs in silver relief on both sides" (76). The text of the *mariegola* appears as a "humanistic codex in elegant text, enriched by splendid decorative miniatures and carefully illuminated initials on every page" (76–77).

Romanelli's volume, also available in Italian (ISBN 978-88-320-6652-4) is thus an excellent introduction and guide to the history of the *Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone* and to the many valuable works it houses.

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