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“In centro et oculis urbis nostre”: La chiesa e il monastero di San Zaccaria.
Bernard Aikema, Massimo Mancini, and Paola Modesti, eds.
Chiese di Venezia 4. Venice: Marcianum Press, 2016. xii + 426 pp. €39.

The Church of San Zaccaria in Venice, a short walk from Piazza San Marco, attracts countless tourists each year and has long been studied for its artistic treasures by Bellini, Tintoretto, and Castagno, among others. By contrast, the large monastic complex to which it is attached – now headquarters of the Carabinieri – has remained hidden from both the scholarly and touristic eye. The sixteen essays in this volume are fruit of a 2014 conference dedicated to both visible and hidden aspects of this important conventual foundation. Part of the series *Chiese di Venezia*, this undertaking combines

perspectives of art and architectural historians, musicologists, archaeologists, and historians of monasticism. Nearly all contributions are in Italian, with English summaries.

Since its establishment in the ninth century, San Zaccaria has been characterized simultaneously by both visibility and enclosure. The Benedictine convent and its aristocratic nuns were intimately linked to the world outside the cloister by social, economic, and religious ties: "in the center and eyes of our city." The doge's annual procession to San Zaccaria for Easter vespers affirmed its elevated civic and political importance, which Silvia Carraro traces here to its earliest days. The nuns maintained, as Gary Radke has written, "a symbiotic and necessarily permeable relationship [with] the city at large." ("Nuns and Their Art: The Case of San Zaccaria in Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.2 [2001]: 431). The essays in this book engage both explicitly and implicitly with these themes and their tensions, as they explore the institution's history, the life of its occupants, and its architecture, decoration, and urban presence.

The contributions emphasize neglected or understudied aspects of San Zaccaria's history. Anna Rapetti studies the convent community and administration in its first five centuries, exposing the network of relationships that radiated from its cloistered world. Mario L. Paolo Fassera sets conventual life at San Zaccaria in the context of Benedictine rule, Venetian monasticism, and the patriarchal reforms of the 1520s. Well after the imposition of *clausura*, strict enclosure, the nuns continued to assert their status and public role through works of art. The last decades of the seventeenth century saw the completion of a cycle of lunette paintings for the church walls, whose celebratory iconography is untangled here by Andrea Gott dang.

The principal node of research is the monastery fabric in all its rich complexity: from the *opus sectile* pavement of the twelfth century church to the Quattrocento choir stalls, and from archaeological excavations to modern conservation efforts. Michela Agazzi charts the urbanistic transformation of the site, while Gianmario Guidarelli unveils the secretive spaces of the monastic complex with its two Renaissance cloisters. Gianpaolo Trevisan reconstructs the church structure as it was built after the 1106 fire. Only its crypt is visible today, below the mid fifteenth century Gothic *chiesa vecchia*, or old church. The latter became the nuns' private church when the building we recognize today was adjoined to its north aisle starting in 1458. With its triumphal stone facade, the *chiesa nuova* became the monastery's public space, where pilgrims could venerate the institution's important relics. In separate essays, Paola Modesti and Paola Placentino illuminate the forms, functions, and distinct histories of the "old" and "new" parts of this double church.

This volume is not meant to offer a general introduction to San Zaccaria and assumes a scholarly audience possessing some familiarity with its history and architecture. Rather, as the editors intended, it lays a solid foundation for future research. This aim is supported by the appendix of original documents, including the fifteenth century *cerimoniale* and the contract for the choir stalls, and four independent sections of

photographs by Francesco Turio Böhm, which publicize lesser known parts of the monastery.

The individual authors present rigorous research but rarely pause to reflect on the wealth of information. Two brief essays by Giorgio Tagliaferro and Deborah Howard, which are conceived as responses to Gott dang and Guidarelli, respectively, offer tantalizing hints of larger arguments to be made about the convent's significance. But this reader would have wished for a greater effort at synthetic interpretation, either by the editors in the introduction or in a separate essay. The nuns of San Zaccaria used art and architecture to make an argument about their place in Venetian culture and society. Such an addition would do the same for the authors' important but still somewhat cloistered scholarship.

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