

Paola Zatti

VENEZIA ADAGIO

L'altra faccia della città cartolina



ENRICO DAMIANI EDITORE



ADAGIO

"Adagio" is a way of life: moving slowly along the roads of existence becomes a precious opportunity to discover something new within and outside oneself, and to be amazed again even by spaces we often inhabit distractedly. Its chosen landscape is the city: it is in fact amid the thousand urban stimuli that it takes shape, asking us to change pace and perspective, inviting us to pause, to dig beneath the surface of commonplaces, and to seek silence even where there is too much noise. Anyone who wants to try it will have to detox from the habit of rushing, and also resist the seductive pull of technology: in return, they will discover how pleasant it is to move against the current through the streets of their own city, visiting somewhere new – or somewhere extremely familiar – one step at a time, without the anxiety of having to see everything, but with the curiosity to grasp its authentic soul.

With this philosophy, in 2019 we began a tour of Italy that from Milan took us to Venice, Naples, Palermo, Brescia, Bergamo, Rome, Turin, Bologna and

Lecce, to offer readers a series of guides for discovering our extraordinary country in a different way. Not exhaustive compendiums, but author-led vade mecums that deliberately bring together experiences capable of giving the public an opportunity to slow down.

We started from Milan, because that is where urban adagio took its first steps with my flâneur walks; but over the years, thanks to the contribution of different authors, we have built a solid map for finding our bearings in a new world, overrun by mass tourism, where the need to live and travel more sustainably is increasingly widespread.

Enjoy your adagio.

Teresa Monestiroli
creator and editor of the *Gli adagi* series

ADAGIO

Excerpt from *Venezia adagio. L'altra faccia della città cartolina*
by Paola Zatti.

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VENEZIA ADAGIO: **The Other Side of the Postcard City**

by Paola Zatti

Perhaps it was reckless of me to think I could take on a publication about Venice. I did it by telling what this city is to me, aware that I am adding only a small tessera to the immense mosaic of writing about it – and with the regret that, for reasons of space, I had to select just a portion of the thousand possible subjects I had in mind.

Venice is a city I have come to know by living there for a long time, by having some of my dearest loved ones there, and by returning to it often in person – while in my thoughts, an uncountable number of times each day. This year of the pandemic, strange and terrible, unexpectedly helped me, because by stretching out our lives and our reflections it allowed me to think about Venice – where I could not return – with a particular intensity and, when it became possible, to cross it once more in a surreal, anguished, and at the same time magnificent atmosphere, in which it felt as though

I were seeing everything, down to the smallest details, for the first time. Compared to the rest of the world, Venice is slow. Of course. The city's rhythm of life is set by the water, and each person's pace by the fact that they can rely almost only on their own legs. A slowness claimed by the residents themselves, boldly aware of living in an extraordinary place and unmoved by the logic of tackling everything with great – very great – calm.

The Venice I want my reader to discover is born of this spirit – going beyond the dazzling, more immediate beauty – with the hope of helping people to catch some of those aspects that make the city and its lagoon unique places. And it was born from long pauses at the window of my kitchen, looking out onto the canal; made up of returns from the beach, sun-reddened, and thick fog in the *calli*; of 'oè' shouted early in the morning; of voices too loud and silences profoundly deep; of trips by boat, on foot and by bicycle; of swims in the *ghebi* and scorching dunes; of fritters, artichokes, *schie* and *masanette*; of slow walks along the Zattere, to Sant'Elena and through the islands; of days when water fell from the sky and rose up from the ground; of snow and *masegni*; of Redentore festivals on boats and over rooftops; of lagoon, sea and hinterland.

The guide is organised in the simplest way, by *sestieri* – the city's districts – trying to shape the entries for each individual story into possible sightseeing routes.

"Reflections" is the word that accompanies the pages I entrusted to fifteen friends, so that they could recount – better than I could have done – places, anecdotes, objects, and particular yet essential aspects of Venice's history and of its life, past and present, vanished and still alive.

There's an expression, '*andar a la sensa*', referring to moving or acting with the slowness with which Venetians were forced to walk through the dense crowds of San Marco during the Feast of the Sensa, the ritual that celebrates Venice's marriage to the sea. Enjoy your visit, then – *a la sensa* – through the *calli*!

BOILING BLACK WATER

A brief tour of the cafés in Piazza San Marco

On 29 December 2020, Caffè Florian turned three hundred years old. It took its name from Floriano Francesconi – a figure about whom little is known – and from the common habit, during their ownership, of calling the place “da Florian”, even though they had chosen the more grandiose “Alla Venezia Trionfante”. It was one of the coffee shops in Piazza San Marco, under the Procuratie Nuove. Opened during the Carnival of 1720, Florian is therefore one of the oldest still in existence in Europe. And it should be remembered that it is also the first public venue in history to admit women.

The spread of coffee in the West is linked to Venice because the drink, called “*acqua negra*” (“black water”) and made from the seed then known as *kahvè*, arrived here from Constantinople. At first it was considered medicinal, given its stimulating effect, and was sold as such from the end of the seventeenth century in a shop run by an Arab right in Piazza San Marco. What is striking is that within just a few years coffee spread through Venice in an extraordinary way, and the square came to count almost thirty of the more than two hundred cafés scattered across the city. Later, in 1750, Carlo Goldoni enshrined this Venetian habit by dedicating one of their best-known comedies to *The Coffee House*.

Florian – fascinating for its preserved interiors and an atmosphere that evokes the pages of history written in these very rooms (from nine-



teenth-century independence struggles to episodes linked to the Biennale, to name only a few) – is unfortunately very touristy. You need the luck of an off-season moment to truly enjoy its charm.

The same can be said of Quadri, also very old, dating back to 1775. It was founded by a Venetian merchant who, on returning from a stay in Corfu (then territory of the Serenissima), together with their spouse Naxina took over an old wine shop in the Procuratie Vecchie and turned it into a very fashionable café. Like Florian, it deserves a glance through the small rooms decorated in green and yellow, with little scenes of Venetian life.

A tour of the square's cafés ends with Lavena, bought in 1860 by the family of the same name, though it had existed since the eighteenth century. The story of this venue is tied above all to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when it was a destination for the most refined international intelligentsia – especially writers and musicians (Richard Wagner's passion is well known: a regular who, according to biographers, is said to have created some of their most famous compositions in these rooms). Here a stop is recommended. At the counter. It isn't cheap, but the Spritz, Americano and Hugo are well made and – unlike in most Venetian bars – come with generous snacks.

Caffè Florian

Piazza San Marco 57

Friday 11 am-7 pm, Saturday 10 am-8 pm, Sunday 10 am-7 pm

www.caffeflorian.com

Grancaffè Quadri

Piazza San Marco 121

Friday-Sunday 9 am-10 pm

www.alajmo.it/grancaffe-quadri

Gran Caffè Lavena

Piazza San Marco 133/134

Monday-Sunday 9.30am-12 am



IN CARLO SCARPA'S JAPANESE GARDEN

The Querini Stampalia Foundation

The Querini Stampalia Foundation – the Venetians' library – has just turned one hundred and forty years old. For anyone who studies, or has studied, in Venice, it's a piece of life that is not easily forgotten. One of the main treasures of this exceptionally rich institution is its library holdings of 350,000 volumes, both ancient (its collections of sixteenth-century books, incunabula and manuscripts are especially precious) and modern, 32,000 of which are on open shelves. Before the pandemic, the Querini was always open, even on holidays, and from Tuesday to Saturday it stayed open until midnight, to the delight of scholars and students. Today access is limited, but it is worth it, because guided tours are not enough to truly breathe in its charm: you have to try to live those sumptuous frescoed rooms, with their large tables and nineteenth-century wooden armchairs, and the creaking parquet floors that must be crossed on tiptoe so as not to disturb.

But the Foundation is also much more than that: first and foremost it is a museum – or rather a house museum – whose extraordinarily varied collection documents the wealth of one of Venice's most affluent, cultured and refined families, who left their immense patrimony to the city. It opened in 1869 and preserves works from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. About four hundred paintings are on display, including masterpieces such as Giovanni Bellini's Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, which alone would be worth the visit; then Pietro Longhi, and the decorative arts, with collections of globes and porcelain (the eighteenth-century Sèvres

centrepiece is spellbinding), textiles and tapestries, musical instruments, and up to modern sculpture, with Antonio Canova, Medardo Rosso, and finally Lorenzo Viani, as well as donations from artists still living today – testimony to the city's attachment to a place with an international reach but an intrinsically Venetian soul.

What makes the Querini Foundation a monument in itself is Carlo Scarpa's intervention on the ground floor and in the garden at the back. Here too, you feel you should move through these spaces – so sophisticated and measured – on tiptoe, losing yourself in the labyrinthine play of surfaces in stone, mosaic, concrete, copper, alabaster, marble and water. The water is free to enter and leave from the outside canal and to flow through the garden's multi-tiered basin, set beside a strip of grass that looks like velvet. It is a place to stand still, listen to the sound of the water, and observe every single detail in a rich catalogue of references that lead from Venice all the way to the Far East, so beloved by Scarpa. In the access areas redesigned by Mario Botta, a small café overlooking the garden and a bookshop with a strong selection make a visit to the Querini even more enjoyable. The website and social media presence are impeccably maintained. Worth highlighting is the availability of a coworking space.

Querini Stampalia Foundation

Campo Santa Maria Formosa 5252, Castello

Museum, Scarpa Area, Intesa Sanpaolo Collection and Exhibitions:

Tuesday-Sunday 10am-6pm

Booking required on weekends

www.querinistampalia.org

CONFINED MADNESS

San Servolo

In 1948, directors Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras shot a documentary titled *Islands in the Lagoon*. In reality, the thirteen minutes devoted to a world far removed from the picturesque image of the future tourist invasion are much more than a simple documentary. It is a world whose authentic and mysterious island life they manage to convey – helped by the emphatic narration of Gino Cervi – along with its poverty, poeticised in an unsettling, even somewhat sinister atmosphere, amid the skull-like silhouettes of electricity pylons in the fog and the remains of the Ossuary of Sant’Ariano. A fresco heavy with narrative rhetoric, yet evocative in its sequence of plotless images that bear sober witness to real life at the time. One scene in particular strikes more than the others: the one that frames the faces of two patients and a dog, leaning out behind a grille at one of the windows of the psychiatric hospital on San Clemente – an island between the Giudecca and the Lido, home to the women’s asylum from 1873 (closed in 1992). The image of the two faces, restless and distracted, is commented on with these words, still so far from any humane consideration of illness: “Here they rest, and their mysterious destiny ripens.”

The islands used as infirmaries were mostly concentrated in the southern lagoon: Santa Maria delle Grazie, or La Grazia, reserved for infectious diseases; the nearby Lazzaretto Vecchio, intended for isolating plague sufferers during epidemics; and Poveglia, which in the eighteenth century was used for health checks and, if necessary, the isolation of sailors arriving

in Venice. One of these realities is reconstructed in the Museum of the Asylum on San Servolo, inaugurated in 2006. It was the men's asylum and had its seat on this island, behind San Giorgio Maggiore towards the Lido, from the early eighteenth century onwards: home to the military hospital from 1725, the island began to take in people with mental illness from the first decade of the nineteenth century. Alongside the library and the old eighteenth-century pharmacy, and the reconstruction of an anatomy room (testimony to clinical studies on mental illness), a selection of documents, photographs and objects, and a rich set of captions (especially useful for school groups) trace a route that, from its very subtitle "Confined madness", aims to highlight the aspect of patients' isolation and marginalisation. You come across many testimonies – some of them striking – of how illness was managed and of the hospital's everyday life. An experience that ended in 1978, the year the Basaglia Law was approved, with the closure of these institutions. Today San Servolo carries an important historical meaning and responsibility, both in relation to its hospital past and as testimony to the complexity of the history of Venice and its lagoon. Besides hosting the Academy of Fine Arts, a Ca' Foscari college and the Venice International University, the island is now also home to the Franca and Franco Basaglia Foundation and its archive.

The island of San Servolo can be reached by vaporetto no. 20 from the San Marco – San Zaccaria "E" stop. Services are not very frequent (once an hour) and become even rarer after 15:30.

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