

Recent Theses

Humphrey, Lyle. “The Illumination of Confraternity and Guild Statutes in Venice, ca. 1260–1500: Mariegola Production, Iconography, and Use.” Ph.D. thesis, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2007. Pp. 796.

Thesis supervisor: Prof. Jonathan J.G. Alexander

Contact: jh234@nyu.edu

Abstract: It is well known that the confraternities and guilds of Venice—the *scuole* and *arti*—played a fundamental role in the religious, social, and civic life of the Serenissima and were major patrons of art. This dissertation examines the cultural and artistic significance of the handwritten, illuminated statute books, or *mariegole*, created by and for the scuole and arti from ca. 1260 to 1500.

Mariegole texts and decoration tell us about the spiritual, moral, aesthetic, and professional concerns of a large, diverse segment of the Venetian populace. Written in the local vernacular, copied in Italian Gothic script, and illuminated with brightly coloured and gilded frontispieces, the mariegole were treasured by their patrons and remain esteemed objects even today. To confraternity and guild members the mariegola statute served as a record of the history and customs of their particular organization while its illuminations served as devotional aids. More importantly, the bound codex was turned into a para-liturgical object during solemn confraternity rituals.

This dissertation begins by investigating the social and religious role of the scuole and arti and the dispersal of their archives after Napoleon’s conquest of Venice. After surveying the scholarship on and collecting of mariegole since the early nineteenth century, it articulates a methodology for dating them. Chapter 2 focuses on the confraternities’ painstaking manufacture of the codices. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the textual inspiration for the distinctive iconography of mariegola paintings. The discussion is organized in terms of the two general types of imagery, iconic and narrative. While the iconic miniatures promote broad theological ideals expressed verbally in the manuscripts’ preambles, the narrative ones clarify specific mariegola laws and serve as exempla for confraternity behaviour.

Finally, a catalogue of mariegole illuminated for all types of Venetian confraternities in the period between ca. 1260 and 1500 (Appendix B) analyzes the material and artistic aspects of the codices. It reunites many excised leaves and fragments to their parent manuscripts and/or original owners and sheds light on the stylistic development of manuscript illumination in Venice from the late thirteenth through the end of the fifteenth century.