

erweist sich resümierend betrachtet als verhältnismäßig knapp, jedoch ist zu bedenken, dass diese Lücke mit dem in Kürze erscheinenden Glasmalereikorpusband geschlossen werden dürfte. Die relativ straffe kunsthistorische Bearbeitung steht im Gegensatz zur intensiven Berichterstattung zur Restaurierung, zum denkmalpflegerischen Umgang und zur materialtechnischen Untersuchung der Scheiben. Letztlich haben diese Themen jedoch in einer Publikation des Denkmalamtes naturgemäß einen wichtigen Stellenwert.

Zum Abschluss werden von Christian Nülken die Schritte des Wiederaufbaus des Chorraums der Marienkirche und von Jan Raue die Wiedergewinnung seiner historischen Farbigkeit beschrieben. Der mächtige Hallenumgangschor der Frankfurter Marienkirche – einer der frühesten dieses Bautyps<sup>10</sup> – kann heute wieder als herausragendes Gesamtkunstwerk des ausgehenden 14. Jahrhunderts wahrgenommen werden. Dies ist ein großartiges Ergebnis eines langen Prozesses, den verschiedene Beteiligte über Jahre hinweg vorangetrieben haben. Der Band, in dem die denkmalpflegerischen Aspekte eine zentrale Rolle spielen, ist als Teil dieses Prozesses zu werten.

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10 CHRISTIAN NÜLKEN: Frankfurt Oder – der Hallenumgangschor der Marienkirche. In: ERNST BADSTÜBNER, DIRK SCHUMANN (HG.): Hallenumgangschöre in Brandenburg (Studien zur Backsteinarchitektur Bd. 1); Berlin 2000, S. 221–257.

**Ann Roberts: Dominican Women and Renaissance Art. The Convent of San Domenico of Pisa. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World;** Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company 2008; xvi + 376 pp.; index; append; illus; bibl; ISBN 978-0-7546-5530-5; USD 99,95

Recent scholarship on nuns in Early Modern Italy increasingly shifted attention from the convent as a site in which women were deprived of basic human rights and liberties to pockets of opportunity that these women created within the confinement of their enclaustrated existences. It is certainly true that growing dowry rates in large parts of Italy prevented more and more women from marrying and as a consequence forced them to enter female monasteries even without feeling a genuine religious calling. Life for these nuns also became increasingly constrained as a result of the rigid implementation of strict enclaustration (*clausura*) following the monastic reforms of the late fifteenth century and the Council of Trent. Ironically, however, precisely because of the imposed limitation of exchange with the exterior world, *clausura* offered the nuns a certain degree of independence and power that was, in fact, unrivalled for women in Early Modern society. While a majority lived as wives in the shadows of their husbands and were excluded from most decision making processes outside the household, nuns were largely in charge of the complex social structures of their con-

vents. To be sure, they always relied on male factors, agents who took care of their worldly businesses, such as purchasing goods for the convent, collecting the rent for their properties, and executing their contracts. Yet, the factors usually only fulfilled orders and thus the nuns themselves administrated the microcosm they inhabited, created contacts and became active fundraisers. Moreover, since zealous women often founded the convents themselves, they were also responsible for shaping the spiritual identity of their houses, affiliating them with specific orders and actively participating in religious reform movements.

As art historians such as Jeffrey Hamburger and others have demonstrated, art constituted an important aspect of female self-realization facilitated by the convent. On the one hand, many nuns were artists in their own right, producing miniatures, decorating their church and convent, and at times even painting altarpieces. On the other hand, they became active patrons of art, providing architects and painters with detailed instructions to make sure that the commissions reflected the nuns' needs and concerns. After all, the design and decoration of their church and convent was an important medium for the nuns, enabling them to assert both publically and privately their spiritual agenda.

In her impressive monographic study of the Dominican convent San Domenico in Pisa, Ann Roberts convincingly argues that the expression of religious concerns was precisely the aim the nuns pursued with the architecture and decoration of their monastic fabric. Chiara Gambacorta founded the convent in 1382, when her father Pietro was still ruler of Pisa. Married in 1374, at age 12, to Simon da Massa from another important Pisan family, Chiara was already widowed three years later and managed to resist her father's plans for another political marriage. Possibly because she wanted to escape from a life that hitherto was largely directed by others, she felt a strong religious vocation and was determined to become a nun. In 1378 Pietro finally allowed his daughter to enter the Dominican convent of Santa Croce, in which Chiara, however, considered the conditions too lax. With the financial and political support of her powerful father she thus established a new, strictly observant house dedicated to St. Dominic on the outskirts of Pisa. Yet, in 1392 the Gambacorta government of Pisa was overthrown and Chiara's father Pietro assassinated. Thus deprived of her primary patron, Chiara subsequently became a shrewd networker and fundraiser, drawing money and assistance from various sources, including Francesco Datini, Simone Doria and Giovanni de' Medici. It certainly helped that San Domenico soon was widely recognized for its strict observance of the Rule and served as an example for several other Dominican communities. In fact, in 1419 allegedly 15,000 people came to the funeral of Chiara, who was immediately venerated as a *beata* (which she officially only became in 1830) and while never gaining saintly status, was widely considered as such. As a consequence, the convent continued to prosper throughout the fifteenth century, when large parts of the church and convent were built and decorated, before it was completely remodeled in the eighteenth century. The Napoleonic invasions began the destruction of the convent and years of confusion and unrest were accompanied with the confiscation of large parts of the works of art, until finally, in 1896, San



Domenico was turned into a hospice and sections of the convent were either destroyed or completely altered. The final blow followed in 1943 when bombs severely damaged the monastic complex. After the war, the remainders of the convent were turned into a commercial center while the church now serves the Knights of Malta.

The almost complete dispersal and loss of this once-so-important fabric has forced Roberts to reconstruct much of San Domenico's original appearance. Yet due to her extensive archival research, she manages to offer a good idea of its architecture, provides an inventory of works of art and other objects kept in the convent in 1808, identifies and situates many of these works, and analyzes their purpose for the nuns. As a result, Roberts brings this largely neglected female monastery back to life and reveals an astonishingly complex and coherent spiritual program that guided the nuns' artistic campaigns from the foundation of San Domenico up to its dissolution. She arrives at this coherent picture by strictly discussing the individual paintings and objects in their original context and by asking for the specific meaning these may have held for the nuns. While many of these works could be considered minor, Roberts' contextualization reveals their historical significance and therefore provides a case for broadening the scope of art historical investigation.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first tells the story of Chiara Gambacorta's foundation of San Domenico but also offers a brief characterization of Dominican (male and female) monasticism and its specific expression in the Pisan convent. Roberts therefore underlines the central role of studying and the production of books that went along with it. While all of these books must be considered lost, documents confirm that the erudite nuns frequently bought and received books as well as copied manuscripts and illuminated them. In the second chapter, Roberts discusses the advantageous location of San Domenico – on the outskirts of Pisa but within the protective city walls – and reconstructs the design of its convent and church. The latter consisted of a simple single-nave plan that was divided by a horizontal wall into two separate, successive spaces, one serving for the laity and the other for the nuns. Accordingly, neither the nuns nor the public had access to the entire church, which had important consequences for the decoration.

These consequences surface in the third chapter, which deals with the impact of Chiara Gambacorta on the decoration of the church during her lifetime and after. Roberts emphasizes that while lay people often commissioned the paintings, the nuns always made sure that the iconography corresponded to their specific spiritual concerns. Thus while the altarpiece of the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria, attributed to Giovanni di Pietro di Napoli, includes the portrait of an anonymous male donor, the subject was of specific significance to the women, who owned a relic of St. Catherine and who as nuns were also spiritual brides of Christ. According to Roberts, the nuns thus „certainly ... determined the subject (73).“ In fact, the picture might have been the companion piece of a representation of the Mystic Marriage of Catherine of Siena, which Millard Meiss identified as the first representation of an event from Catherine's legend. Chiara Gambacorta exchanged letters with the future

Dominican saint and had therefore a definite stake in the cult of Catherine of Siena. Because of the personal significance of these scenes for the nuns rather than for lay visitors, Roberts argues that both paintings hung together in the choir (76). The high altarpiece of the public church, instead, promotes the cult of St. Birgitta of Sweden, whom Chiara considered her role model. Rather than displaying the standard events from the princess' life, such as the founding of her order, which would have been of special relevance to the nuns, the altarpiece's predella scenes emphasize Birgitta's writing, visions, and miracles in order to demonstrate „to the laity the important role that religious women played in the lives of secular men and women (94).“ According to Roberts, Chiara would „be involved not only in the content, but the form (93)“ of all of these paintings.

Immediately after her death in 1419, Chiara was venerated as a saint. Her vita was written and she received a marble tomb slab with a full-length effigy. What is more, within two decades of her death Chiara's body was exhumed and her tongue was found intact. From this moment, her body became a relic and a shrine was built consisting of a wall niche for her effigy decorated with a Crucifixion scene. The location and iconography of the shrine raises unanswered questions, however. While the shrine was certainly meant to facilitate Chiara's ascension to sanctity it was situated in the nuns' choir and not in the public church where it would have been much more visible. Also, the Crucifixion does not include representations of Chiara's role models, Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden, who more recently became saints and thus provided examples for the process of sanctification that the nuns of San Domenico anticipated for their own prioress. In fact, they never buried their hopes and as late as in the eighteenth century initiated another, albeit futile, campaign for their founder.

In the fifteenth century the nuns continued to decorate their choir with a group of paintings, which Roberts discusses in chapter 4. These paintings were produced over a long period of time not only by different artists but also, surprisingly, in different countries. The representation of St. Catherine of Alexandria was painted by an artist working in Bruges, since the use of oak panels was common in Flemish art while highly unusual in Italy. The Baldovini family, which may have had ties to Flanders, donated the altarpiece. All the more striking is the homogeneity of these paintings, all of which display individual full-length saints standing in a frame with a pointed arch topped by a gable and narrative scenes of the lives of the saints in the predella below. The nuns thus „had definite ideas about what they wanted, and used their male interlocutors to make their wishes known to the artists they hired (241).“

Often these ideas derived from the nuns' observant identity, the subject of Roberts' chapter 5. A fresco of the Crucifixion from the Benozzo Gozzoli workshop in the refectory displays clear similarities with Fra Angelico's depictions of the topic in San Marco in Florence. Rather than attributing these to a lack of creativity, Roberts argues that Gozzoli's allusions to Fra Angelico were deliberate in order to visually underline San Domenico's recent and much welcomed affiliation with the Dominican observant reform movement led by San Marco (182). At the same time, however, the nuns insisted on their own, significant contribution to the Observant tradition and

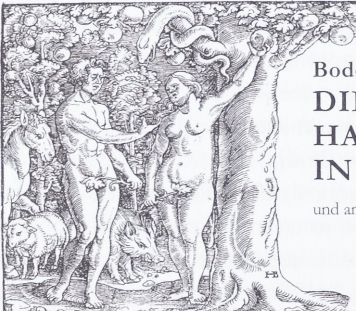


had Gozzoli include in the Crucifixion representations of Chiara Gambacorta and Maria Mancini, another nun from San Domenico who gained the status of a beata. „If the style and composition of these frescoes in the Refectory of San Domenico express their [i. e., the nuns'] connection to the Observant house of San Marco, the prominence given to the two Beate of the convent, Chiara Gambacorta and Maria Mancini, in the Crucifixion fresco reflect the convent's position in the history of the Observant movement (204).“

In the last two chapters Roberts once again discusses the close cooperation between the inhabitants of San Domenico and the factors and donors for the decoration of the convent, and she concludes her study with a fascinating investigation of the nuns' own contribution to the decoration. She convincingly argues that the nuns painted the wings added to the aforementioned Flemish St. Catherine of Alexandria altarpiece, transformed an existing depiction of the same saint into a representation of St. Ursula, and produced at least one other devotional panel. All of these works rely heavily on popular prints as well as on paintings from the convent, for these were the only sources available to the self-trained artists.

In some respects, Roberts' approach must be considered traditional, for she is largely concerned with issues of attribution and date, and spent considerable time in the archive while hardly engaging with feminist theory that might have been expected given her subject matter. Yet the discussion of the nuns' art in particular reveals the great merits of Roberts' approach. By studying the function and the circumstances of the production of these paintings that certainly lie outside the canon of art history, she uncovers their historical significance as documents of female self-realization in Early Modern Italy. Comprehensive monographic investigations of lesser-known objects or even complexes such as this convent become increasingly rare, in part because there is no market for them but also because scholars quite understandably shy away from the painstaking work they often require. Roberts' study, however, demonstrates that these efforts can be extremely rewarding.

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