



Santa Margherita Auditorium

Dorsoduro 3689 - 30123 (VE)

The Auditorium is a historic building from the IX century, once a church dedicated to Santa Margherita, then a theatre and also a cinema. Located in the Dorsoduro district on the north side of the campo of the same name, it faces the narrow street of the Church. Of the frescoes that adorned it there remains the prized painting of the ceiling depicting the martyrdom of the saint. The field of the same name in which it is located is one of the liveliest places in the city, and is easily accessible from Piazzale Roma and the train station.

History

The origins of the church of Santa Margherita are lost in legend: a tradition considers it to have been founded and consecrated in the year 853. The parish was suppressed in 1810: the territory was assigned to the parish of Carmini and the church was deconsecrated. Since then the building has had a troubled history: initially it was used as a tobacco warehouse and later (1839) as a marble deposit. From 1861 it housed the studio of the sculptor Luigi Borro and from 1882 on it was the location of an evangelical temple; in 1910 the Chamber of Labour was situated there. From 1921 to 1977 it hosted a cinema, popularly called *el vecio* ("the old"). Finally, from 1994 it hosted the Auditorium of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Building

In ancient times the church had a basilica-type structure with three naves. There is news of a chapel adorned with mosaics, probably dating back to the Byzantine period. The current layout is instead the

result of the seventeenth-century reconstruction, designed by Giovanni Battista Lambranzi: bare on the outside but with interiors enriched by splendid works and rich altars. Over time, most of the decorations were dispersed (there is still something left in the church of Santo Stefano), but on the vault it is still possible to admire the fresco by the painter Antonio Zanchi, which depicts the martyrdom of Saint Margaret of Antioch. The most significant changes took place in the early decades of the 1900s, when the deconsecrated church was turned into a cinema: the nave was shortened to make room for the foyer and the ticket office, three orders of loggias and theatre boxes were created and the presbytery was transformed into a stage. Furthermore, the fresco by Zanchi was covered with a cloth. In 1987 the Ca' Foscari University purchased the space. The restoration work pertained to the old decorative apparatuses, the Zanchi fresco as well as the safety of the building and the provision of cutting-edge technological systems.

The bell tower

A structure adjacent to the facade, the bell tower is the only element of the church that overlooks the campo. Its truncated form is very characteristic: the upper part, in fact, was demolished in 1808 because it was unsafe. Almost half of it remains, with the entrance portal intact and two embrasures. In the painting of Gabriel Bella "The entrance of a Piovan in Santa Margherita", kept in the Querini Stampalia art gallery in Venice, the bell tower is depicted as it must have been before the demolition.