

Vita quotidiana e storia della SS. Annunziata di Firenze nella prima metà del Quattrocento - Everyday life and history of SS. Annunziata of Florence in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Many people ask me for a summary of the contents of my book *Vita quotidiana e storia della SS. Annunziata di Firenze nella prima metà del Quattrocento*. I hope that you can find the informations you wish. Write to me if you want other informations or to buy my book (Euro 15).

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The book has six chapters:

Chapter I. There are short informations about life of Servants of Mary of Santa Maria dei Servi of Florence (today SS. Annunziata) between the end of XIV century and the beginnings of XV century: their number (about 30), qualifications and offices. They were theologians, priests, clergymen and scholars, novices and laymen. The most important friars were fra Stefano Benucci, fra Niccolò d'Arezzo, fra Piero Silvestri, fra Matteo di Piero (then bishop of Cortona), fra Michele Pucci, fra Iacopo Rosso, the musician Andrea di Giovanni, the poet fra Domenico di Bartolo.

In 1404 Servants of Mary, gathered in the general chapter of Ferrara, decided on the reopening of the ancient convents of Montesenario and Pisa. Servants of Mary also took part in Pisa's Council in 1409. However their economic situation was not prospering, especially because of the wars of Commune of Florence against Visconti of Milan and because the Schisms in the Church before of Council of Constance; then, in the years after the election of pope Martino V in Constance (1417), the end of the Schisms in the Church and the end of wars, the situation of Servants of Mary of Florence was more prospering.

Unfortunately from Twenties of XV century there were new wars of Florence, Venice and Rome against Filippo Visconti of Milan, and a new pope – the less tactful Eugenio IV (1431). In 1434 Cosimo dei Medici became lord (signore) of Florence. The Commune and the allied forces won the enemy army in the battle of Anghiari (1440). From 1439 Eugenio IV transferred a new Council from Ferrara to Florence; so the card. Giuliano Cesarini lived as guest in the convent of S. Maria dei Servi. In 1441 the cardinal, after to have observed the mismanagement of the convent, after also the death of some important friars, and after a theft of silver vows in the chapel of SS. Annunziata by a friar, threw Servants out of their convent; Servants of the Congregation of Observance took place of them (1441-1447).

Chapter II. There are informations about the church, its chapels and altars, the cemetery, about the place in front of the church (today Piazza SS. Annunziata) and the streets, the houses of property of the convent near the place.

The church had not the tribuna yet (began in 1444 by Michelozzo), but an apse as Codice Rustici shows. There were a bell tower, a rose window, a portico. The cemetery were in the place of the modern oratory of Saint Sebastian (built in 1454 by Pucci family). Under the floor of the church there were also several tombs. The organ was built by fra Andrea di Giovanni (d. 1415) in 1379. In 1442 onn the high altar there was a golden wooden tabernacle made by Antonio di Giovanni. Names of the chapels were SS. Annunziata (built about mid XIV century), Saint Nicola, Saint Martino, Saint Antonio, Saint Lucia, Saint Donnino, Saint Michele, Saint Giovanni (in which in 1438 was built an asseto, that is a wooden floor), of Pietà (pity) patronage of Marco Rustici (1426), but named again of the Nativity in 1442. In Saint Lucia there was a table on wood painted by Orcagna; in S. Nicola a table on wood painted by Taddeo Gaddi.

In 1438 the bishop of Cortona fra Matteo di Piero donated some money for the building of the new Sacristy; the masons were Filippo and Benedetto Cera.

In Sacristy were kept the sacred vestments: copes, chasubles, and chalices, crosses (in silver or brass), and other precious things, bought by Servants of Mary or donated by many people or by families because of their patronage of the chapels (in 1438, 1441, for example).

In 1422 fra Jacopo Rosso wrote a list of the precious objects kept in the sacristy and of the books kept in the Library. Fathers ordered also the goldsmith Marco Rustici to make some silver objects in 1433, and the goldsmith Francesco di Paolo Tassini in 1442. Other precious objects were the books of the offices: breviaries, psalters and so on. Servants bought or sold books often in the stationery shops of Francesco or later of Piero Parigi (1434). Musical notes was written by fra Vincenti; a miniaturist was Matteo (manuale in 1431, psalter in 1434). There were important also the wax management and the relationship between friars and speziali (druggists) of Florence for wax or tallow candles.

Gift to the SS. Annunziata were: ivory tabernacle (1422), silver enamelled tabernacle by card. Cesarini (1449). Works: 1433 mason Meo - the roof; 1438 carpenter Papi - the roof.

Devotional objects donated to the chapel of SS. Annunziata were images, silver ore wax vows, silver, brass or earthen lamps. In 1436 a silver image of the Virgin was donated by card. Lucio dei Conti (goldsmith Marco Rustici); a silver horse by Gattamelata (who was a militar leader) in 1439.

Chapter III. Liturgy and devotion, that is calendar of saints and of the most important times of liturgical year: the Feast of Mary, the Holy Week and Holy Friday (Venerdì Santo), in which many believers came to the Sanctuary for the veneration of the Cross. Also priests and confraternities often came to the Sanctuary for devotion (for example 1405 Compagnia della Carità, 1428 Compagnia della Nunziata). The registers of administration of XV century enter also incomes and expenditures for funerals, and many testamentary legacies in order to celebrate masses or for ornaments of the chapels and of the convent.

Chapter IV. There are architecture and rooms of the convent and of the customs of the Servants of Mary of S. Maria dei Servi of Florence.

In 1427 the mason Geri d'Antonio constructed the portico of the convent; the registers also mention dormitory and other works for the cells. In 1434-35 the masons Lorenzo Ambrogio e Maso built the habitation in the convent of card. Lucio dei Conti; in 1439 card. Giuliano Cesarini lived in these rooms which were renovated (painter Chimenti di Lorenzo, lastraiolo - that is the man who paves - Andrea di Nofri; glazier ser Guido chaplain of the church of San Pier Maggiore of Florence).

This chapter mentions also the refectory and the customs about food and dishes of Servants of Mary during the most important feasts of Sanctuary and of convent.

In 1434 the mason Lorenzo di Filippo built a new kitchen..Other works: 1429 the mason Meo built a palco (box) in the barn; in 1427 the mason Geri d'Antonio built the portico of the garden; in 1440 built a new well. Other rooms of the convent were guest quarters (foresteria), pantry, Capitular room, library, infirmary. In 1425-28 a new infirmary with a chapel was built by the mason Geri d'Antonio and the carpenter Papi d'Andrea built the roof.

As to the cloisters in 1409 the mason Niccolò built a vault and raised the edge of the well; in 1427 other works were made by Geri d'Antonio; in 1428 by Nannino zoppo.

Chapter V. Religious life and qualifications and offices of Servants of Mary of S. Maria dei Servi: prior, subprior, procuratore (administrator), sindaco, Regent of the Studio, students, novices, laymen, menservants and secular workers, management of the properties: houses, fields, vineyards and farms in the country. The expenditures included taxes dues to Commune of Florence and to Order, everyday expenditures for food, dresses and shoes or for utensils etc.

Sometimes old mothers or alone sisters of some friar of Servants of Mary lived in the houses near the place, in order to help also when friars were seriously ill or for needleworks.

Chapter VI. The Sanctuary lived in a very beautiful town. The wars against other towns of Tuscany and of Italy needed some money and soldiers. Often a delegation of Commune came to the Sanctuary to pray Virgin Annunziata for the good of the town and its habitants, and donated money for the necessity of Servants of Mary. However Commune also taxed the convent or ordered friars to services in the public management.

There were relationship also between Servants of Mary and the courts of Podestà and of Bishop for various quarrels as to lands, wills, inheritances and legacies.

After this historical introduction the book presents many documents of Archivio di Stato of Florence (*Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese*, 119) ordinated according to the chapters and the arguments of each chapter.

Paola Ircani Menichini, on 6th november 2007.