

GIANLUCA SPOSITO

CA' DARIO

500 YEARS OF MYSTERIES



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Mysteria Series

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Mystery is not a wall, but a horizon.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

INTRODUCTION

Ca' Dario is a historic residence overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice, unmistakable among all for the sloping shape (due to ancient collapse of the foundations), the elegant rose windows and polychrome marble.

That facade, where precious marbles take the place of the frescoes that decorated so many Venetian facades, is one of the first and most elegant manifestations of the Renaissance in Venice, which magnetically attracted great artists over the centuries; from Henri Régnier to John Ruskin and Claude Monet. From Henry James, who describes the palace as being composed of exquisite pieces like “a house of cards that hold together by a tenure it would be fatal to touch”; to Gabriele D’Annunzio, who portrays it as a courtesan that is bending over due to the weight of the jewels she wears.

Yet, so much beauty, opulence and admiration have always been accompanied by a sinister reputation. A real ‘curse’ that would chase its owners (and not only), and which already affected the heirs of its creator (1479) and first owner, Giovanni Dario, and then continued spreading murders, suicides, bankruptcies, misfortunes of all kinds among those who have tried to ‘own’ the Palace. Literates, diplomats, real and fake nobles, entrepreneurs, landowners; all of them, sooner or

later, seem to have had to deal with Ca' Dario. Until its last great owner: Raul Gardini, who committed suicide in 1993.

In 500 years of history, this extraordinary palace has been given bloody and frightening epithets and nicknames: from “the curse of Ca' Dario”, to “the cursed palace” and “the house that kills”. Venetian people describe it as a “palason senza el paron”, a palace that cannot find a master. Or, perhaps, it simply does not want one.

But what is true in all this? We will try to find out through historical documents, photographs, stories, rumors and legends, with a good dose of skepticism but also sincere curiosity.

Some thanks are due. To my friends the notary Marco Paladini, who helped me in the reconstruction of the ownership passages of the Palace, and Massimo Cascone, who made many of the photos in this book. To Jessica Cucchiarini and Callum Poyser for their advice and assistance with the translation To Arnaldo Fusello e Cristina Benassai, real estate agents of *Views on Venice Estates*, for their very kind collaboration and on-site assistance. A special thank to the last, ‘unknown’ owner of Ca' Dario, for the extreme kindness and cooperation in allowing me to access the wonderful places described in this book.

Finally, thanks to my father who - I am sure - would have liked to read this book.



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Gianluca Sposito (1973) is an Italian lawyer and a law historian. He teaches "Legal argumentation and trial rhetoric" at the University of Urbino.



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