

Small Categories Series

Gondolas

This boat is mentioned for the first time in an official document in 1094. It is about a decree of doge Vitale Falier, which dispensed the citizens of a place in the south of Venice from giving a "gondulam". The origin of the name is very uncertain and discussed: some take it date back to the Latin "cymbula" (little boat). The first information we have about the appearance of gondola is due to the work of Renaissance artists as Gentile Bellini, Vittore Carpaccio and Giovanni Mansueti.

Like all the other lagoon boats, the gondola has a flat bottom which allows it to float in very shallow water. The most important characteristic of the gondola is its longitudinal asymmetry: the keel is not straight but curves towards the right so that the gondola lists to the right. This counterbalances the push of the single oar which would tend to direct the boat to the left.

But how was the gondola 'born'? There was no inventor nor designer; the boat that we see gliding in the Venetian canals was developed through the centuries with gradual and imperceptible variations. Some curious facts: the gondola weighs about 400 kg, is built using eight different types of wood; the degree of curvature is based on the weight of the gondolier. Before being used exclusively for tourism, the gondola made use of a removable cabin called a *felse* for use in the winter or during the night. It came with a door and sliding windows with Venetian blinds and curtains, a mirror and a charcoal burner. The *felse* was used to protect the passengers from the cold and from prying eyes. [http://www.venetia.it/boats/gond_eng.htm] Chester Crill, CA, had 267 as of April 2005.

