

# Mythical Serenity

## Introduction

Mythical Serenity, much like its predecessor *Myths of Venice*, is an exploration of the rich tapestry of myths, legends, and historical narratives that have shaped the identity of the Most Serene Republic. However, *Mythical Serenity* is a unique and independent work, with its own distinct perspective, approach, and focus.

While *Myths of Venice* primarily concentrates on the visual representation of Venetian myths and legends through the works of renowned artists, *Mythical Serenity* takes a broader approach, delving into the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that have influenced the formation and evolution of these myths. It examines how these narratives have been shaped by the unique circumstances of Venice's history, geography, and political system.

Furthermore, *Mythical Serenity* seeks to explore the impact of these myths and legends on the Venetian people themselves. How have these narratives shaped their sense of identity, their values, and their aspirations? How have they influenced the way Venetians have governed themselves, conducted business, and interacted with the world around them?

*Mythical Serenity* is not a comprehensive history of Venice. Rather, it is a thematic exploration of the myths and legends that have played a pivotal role in shaping the Venetian experience. It is a journey through the labyrinthine streets of Venice, where the past and present intertwine, where myth and reality blur, and where the legacy of the Serenissima Republic continues to inspire and intrigue.

*Mythical Serenity* is written in an engaging and accessible style, making it suitable for a wide range of readers, from casual history enthusiasts to scholars of Venetian history and culture. It is a valuable addition

to the body of literature on Venice, offering a fresh perspective on the factors that have shaped this extraordinary city.

## Book Description

Mythical Serenity is a captivating exploration of the myths, legends, and historical narratives that have shaped the identity of the Most Serene Republic of Venice. This book takes a unique and comprehensive approach to understanding the role of these narratives in shaping Venetian society, culture, and politics.

Unlike other works that focus solely on the artistic representation of Venetian myths and legends, *Mythical Serenity* delves into the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that have influenced their formation and evolution. It examines how these narratives have been shaped by the unique circumstances of Venice's history, geography, and political system.

Furthermore, *Mythical Serenity* explores the impact of these myths and legends on the Venetian people themselves. It investigates how these narratives have

shaped their sense of identity, values, and aspirations, and how they have influenced the way Venetians have governed themselves, conducted business, and interacted with the world around them.

Mythical Serenity offers a fresh perspective on the factors that have shaped this extraordinary city. Written in an engaging and accessible style, it is a valuable resource for casual history enthusiasts and scholars of Venetian history and culture alike.

In Mythical Serenity, readers will discover:

- The origins of Venice's founding myths and legends
- The role of religion in shaping Venetian identity
- The impact of trade and commerce on Venetian society
- The structure and function of the Venetian government
- The daily lives of Venetian citizens

- The rise and fall of the Venetian Empire
- The impact of the Renaissance and the Reformation on Venice
- The legacy of Venetian art, architecture, and music

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# Chapter 1: A Mythical Origin

## The Legends of Venice's Founding

The origins of Venice are shrouded in myth and legend, a tapestry of stories that have been woven together over centuries to create a rich and captivating narrative. According to one popular legend, the city was founded by a group of Trojan refugees fleeing the destruction of their homeland. Led by the hero Antenor, these refugees set sail across the Adriatic Sea and eventually arrived at the marshy lagoon where Venice now stands.

Another legend tells of a group of fishermen who were shipwrecked on the lagoon and, finding the islands to be a safe haven, decided to make it their home. These humble beginnings are often contrasted with the grandeur and opulence of the Venetian Republic at its peak, creating a sense of wonder and awe at the city's transformation.

The most famous legend of Venice's founding, however, is the story of Saint Mark the Evangelist. According to this legend, Saint Mark was traveling to Aquileia, a city on the mainland, when he was caught in a storm and forced to take refuge on one of the islands in the lagoon. While there, he had a vision in which an angel told him that Venice would become a great city and the center of a powerful empire.

Inspired by this vision, Saint Mark stayed in Venice and became its first bishop. He is credited with bringing Christianity to the city and establishing the foundation for its future prosperity. The winged lion, which is the symbol of Venice, is often depicted with a book in its paw, representing the Gospel of Saint Mark.

These legends, while fantastical and embellished with mythical elements, reflect the deep-seated belief among Venetians that their city was founded under divine guidance and destined for greatness. They also speak to the importance of trade and commerce in Venice's



history, as the city's location at the crossroads of the Mediterranean Sea made it a natural hub for merchants and traders from all over the world.

# Chapter 1: A Mythical Origin

## The Role of Religion in Shaping Venetian Identity

Religion has played a profound and multifaceted role in shaping the identity of Venice, leaving an indelible mark on its culture, politics, and society. From its earliest origins, the city has been deeply entwined with religious beliefs and practices, which have influenced everything from its physical appearance to its political institutions.

In the early days of the Venetian Republic, the city's patron saint, Saint Mark the Evangelist, became a symbol of its independence and a source of spiritual guidance. The Basilica di San Marco, dedicated to the saint, was constructed as a testament to the city's devotion and quickly became a focal point of Venetian life. The basilica's opulent design and magnificent mosaics reflected the city's growing wealth and power,

while its strategic location in the heart of the city served as a constant reminder of the importance of faith.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Venice's religious identity continued to evolve and solidify. The city became a center of pilgrimage, attracting devout Christians from across Europe who sought to visit the relics of Saint Mark and other holy sites. This influx of pilgrims brought not only spiritual enrichment but also economic benefits, as Venice became a hub of trade and commerce.

The Venetian Republic itself was deeply intertwined with the Catholic Church. The doge, the city's highest-ranking official, was required to swear an oath of loyalty to the pope, and the church played a significant role in shaping the city's laws and policies. This close relationship between the state and the church contributed to the development of a unique Venetian

brand of Catholicism, which emphasized civic responsibility and social welfare.

Religion also played a crucial role in shaping Venetian art and architecture. The city's churches and palaces are adorned with exquisite works of art, many of which depict religious scenes and figures. Artists such as Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese created masterpieces that reflected the deep religiosity of Venetian society.

The legacy of religion in Venice is still visible today. The city's churches, monasteries, and convents continue to attract visitors from around the world. Religious festivals and processions are still held throughout the year, providing a glimpse into the deep-rooted traditions of the Venetian people.

# Chapter 1: A Mythical Origin

## The Myth of Venetian Exceptionalism

Venice, the city of canals and bridges, has long been shrouded in myth and legend. One of the most enduring of these myths is that of Venetian exceptionalism, the idea that Venice was a unique and special city, unlike any other in the world. This myth has been perpetuated for centuries by Venetian chroniclers, artists, and statesmen, who sought to glorify their city and its history.

There were several factors that contributed to the development of the myth of Venetian exceptionalism. First, Venice's unique geographical location made it a natural fortress. Built on a group of islands in a lagoon, Venice was virtually impregnable to attack. This isolation allowed the city to develop its own unique culture and way of life, free from outside interference.

Second, Venice's early success as a trading power contributed to its sense of exceptionalism. In the Middle Ages, Venice became one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities in Europe. Its merchants controlled trade routes throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. This wealth and power gave rise to a strong sense of civic pride among Venetians.

Third, Venice's republican government was also a source of pride for its citizens. Unlike most other cities in Europe, which were ruled by monarchs or oligarchies, Venice was governed by a popularly elected Doge and a council of nobles. This system of government was seen as a model of democracy and good governance.

The myth of Venetian exceptionalism had a profound impact on the city's history. It inspired Venetians to great achievements, both in war and in peace. It also helped to maintain social and political stability within the city. However, the myth also had its dark side. It led

to a sense of complacency and arrogance among Venetians, who believed that they were immune to the problems that plagued other cities. This ultimately contributed to Venice's decline in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Despite its decline, the myth of Venetian exceptionalism continues to live on today. Venice remains a popular tourist destination, and its history and culture continue to fascinate people around the world.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

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