



1 Vittore Carpaccio, *Miracle of the True Cross: The Healing of the Possessed Boy*, 1494.

tity for the Christian capital. Such was not the case in Venice where diversity in the population was matched, if not exceeded, by diversity in the visual realm. The Venetian aesthetic, a mélange of European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern motifs set within an aqueous surrounding created the singular environment that so captivated the visitors to the city, many of whom journeyed to city out of commercial, as opposed to artistic, interiors of the churches.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Venetian history was steeped in traditions of individual immigration, visual migration, and material acquisition. From the city's early settlement by religious refugees to the acquisition of the body of Saint Mark, these three essential facets of Venetian life supplied formative components for the culture's visual identity. But creating the physical environment that would become the Republic of Venice tells only half the story.



2 Giorgio Spavento, interior nave of San Salvador

Rather, Venetians carefully constructed their foundational history and visual identity to privilege these very qualities, and when necessary, utilized the written and visual record to eliminate any perceived deficiencies by they civic.

This chapter begins with a brief examination of the ways in which Venice's origins provided a structural and psychological foundation that invited variety--whether through racial diversity, aesthetic influence, or mercantile options--to the burgeoning city-state. It then considers the implications of the arrival of Saint Mark, arguably Venice's most famous "immigrant," and the diverse visual traditions influencing the appearance of his burial place, the Basilica of San Marco. Mark's arrival coincided with Venice's transformation from a small provincial outpost to a medieval maritime power. As a result, the sanctuary guarding his relics served as the primary venue upon which to promulgate visually Venice's growing political and military strength. As is demonstrated, Venetians achieved this goal through the incorporation of Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic ideas into the very fabric of the basilica.

By the late fifteenth century, when Casola and Comynes visited Venice, the Republic had reached the peak of her military power and, with that power, her political influence. Events from the period of 1492 to approximately 1527, both within and outside of the Republic, set into motion a wave of immigration into Venice. The chapter thus continues with a consideration of the motivations for immigration to Venice during this period. Whether forced to flee for religious beliefs, as were the Pontentine Jews of Spain, or interested in exploiting the



3 Jacopo Sansovino, interior, San Francesco della Vigna, Venice

commercial opportunities existing in the city, as were many German merchants, early modern Venice welcomed the world to her shores. Within these various immigrant communities, however, one group planned to separate themselves from the larger spectrum of stranieri resident in the city: those foreign individuals who hoped to attain the elite social designation of cittadino, or citizen of Venice. The chapter therefore concludes with a discussion of the legal process to attain Venetian citizenship as well as a consideration of material commitments inherent in this designation.

Yet, before discussing how a select group of sixteenth century immigrant merchants could become Venetian, we must first consider how the sandbars, islets, and marshy lagoons in the shallow water of the Adriatic basin could become Venice. This transformation envisioned and realized by immigrant Christians seeking refuge from the Lombard wars of the late Antique world, as well the subsequent development of the Area Marciana, provided an influential model for the self-fashioning of identity undertaken by centuries of immigrants to Venice to come.

### *Becoming Venice*

Marin Sanudo's late fifteenth century account of Venice's formative period, *De origine, situ e magistratibus urbis Venetae, ovvero la città de Venetia*, is striking for both its exactitude and ontological underpinning:

This city on the islands of the Rialto was first built, as was the first church of San Giacomo . . . in 421, on the 25th of



March the day of Venus, around the hour of nine in the morning, as the astrological sign appears, 25 degrees in the sign of Cancer. On this day, the divine literature testifies that God formed the first man, Adam; also on this day the Virgin Mary received the Annunciation from the Angel Gabriel, and thus, the son of God, Jesus Christ, in his immaculate conception, and according to the opinion of theologians it was on this day that the Jews crucified him and placed him on the great cross; it was a day of great importance, and thus our ancestors wanted to choose a date such as this for their building.

Sanudo's description reminds us that, according to tradition, Venice's miraculous foundation occurred on the Feast of the Annunciation in 421 C.E. Venetians viewed their auspicious date of origin as anything but coincidental. Rather, the fact that the foundation of their city occurred on the same date as the conception of Christ offered proof that Venice's miraculous foundation was likewise preordained and willed by God. As a result, Venetian depictions of the Annunciation, such as the representations of Gabriel and Mary who occupy aedicules atop the West façade of the Basilica of San Marco, served both the civic and religious needs of the city (fig. 1.2). This sculpted Annunciation, as well as myriad others associated with the Basilica of San Marco and found throughout the city, may be understood to represent the Incarnation of Christ while simultaneously symbolizing the foundation of the Venetian state.

Sanudo's account should not be dismissed as the fanciful musings of a vivid imagination. Rather, the diarist was relating the accepted history of Venice's early years, a narrative that had been meticulously crafted and refined for centuries and thus subject to vicissitudes of fortune, political necessity and, of course, authorial intent. Since Venice lacked a classical heritage, chroniclers, diarists, and historians alike took up the challenge of Venice's civic and "archeological self-fashioning." For example, in the eleventh century, the influential Venetian prelate John the Deacon composed his *Istoria Veneticorum*, the earliest extant account of Venice's foundation:

The Lombards entered into Venice, which was the first province of Italy, and conquered Vicenza and Verona and other cities, except Padua, Monselice, Oderzo, Mantua, and Altino. The inhabitants of these same provinces, refusing to be subjects to the commands of the Lombards, moved to nearby islands and thus gave to these very islands the name of Venezia, [after] the place from which they fled, and those who live there still call themselves Venetici.

Deacon's history emphasized the very founders of Venice as immigrants themselves who were bound together by religious devotion and an independent spirit. In the following century, the French chronicler Martin da Canal added a critical mercantile element to the city's history:

The Venetians went to sea and they bought merchandise . . . and from all places they brought it to Venice. And thus, the Germans and Bavarians, the French and the Lombards, the Tuscans and the Hungarians, all the peoples of commerce came there [to Venice] to buy it and they carried the merchandise to their home countries.

The medieval period century likewise witnessed the incorporation of the temporal element to the foundation tradition, specifically the date that so fascinated Sanudo. Thus, by the time Sanudo put pen to parchment, these elements of the Republic's origins had been repeated time and again, with emendations when necessary, in Venice's official history.

Documentary Evidence confirms habitations in the area of the Venetian lagoon by the sixth century, roughly one hundred years later than promoted by the chronicle tradition. Islands such as Caorle, Jesolo, and other landmasses scattered throughout the basin provided the foundations for the earliest settlements. Torcello emerged as a commercial center, while Malamocco served as the locus of civic authority. Even in this primordial state, Venice's unique characteristics attracted the attention of visitors. In September 537 C.E., while on an imperial mission for the Ostrogoth ruler Theodoric, praetorian prefect Cassiodorus pondered the new city:

Venetia the praiseworthy . . . here after the manner of the waterfowl have you fixed your home. The inhabitants have one notion of plenty, that of gorging themselves with fish. Poverty therefore may associate itself with wealth on equal terms. One kind of food refreshes all; the same sort of dwelling shelters all; no one can envy his neighbor's home; and living in this moderate style they escape that vice [of envy] to which all the rest of the world is liable.

To Cassiodorus, the similar appearance of the island dwellings indicated equality of living conditions and social status.

Cassiodorus' observations, especially his seemingly quaint dismissal of the sea dwellers' tendency to "live in this moderate style," developed into a fundamental element of Venice's governing philosophy: the ethos of *mediocritas*.

In the ancient world, proponents of the *aurea mediocritas* championed balance and moderation in all things as an ideal goal for a man of *virtù* to pursue. The celebration of consensus and collective identity purportedly evident in Venice from its very inception developed into a leitmotif promoted by centuries of Venetians to come. Nearly a thousand years after Cassiodorus offered his opinion, the Venetian humanist Gasparo Contarini echoed the same sentiments, likening the mature Venetian polity to an ideal musical interlude:

as in music the tune is marred when one string maintains a louder tone . . . so by the like reason, if you have your commonwealth perfect and enduring, let not one part be



4 Paolo Veronese, *The Marriage Feast at Cana*, 1572.

mightier than the other, but let them all (in as much as may be) have equal share in the public authority.

This ideology helped the government promote the notion of a community of equals, a concept that expanded well beyond government. Since the State recognized that visual imagery could be exploited for personal gain, the government likewise advocated aesthetic restraint in the private realm. As a result, individual display and self-referential adornment was discouraged in favor of tribute to society as a whole. Honor and virtue came from service and celebration of the state and its unique qualities, not celebration of oneself.

Certain elements of *mediocritas* stemmed from the physical challenges faced by the lagoon settlers. The necessity of land reclamation to accommodate the new population proved challenging. Living in flats hovering above marshland made life tenuous at best for early Venetians. The inhabitants of the various islands recognized that their survival depended upon cooperation with one another and the larger whole. If the wealthier members of society flaunted their wealth, they could very well have incited the resentment of the larger population. Social unrest could, in turn, lead to discord and perhaps even the failure of the early settlement efforts.

Upon first glance, the concept of equality essential to *mediocritas* seemingly contradicts the Republic's celebrated propensity toward diversity, but not when considered against the broader spectrum of Venice's relationship with the outside world. The decision to build over the water required that the islands remain in contact with the mainland, thereby insuring a constant international presence in the lagoon. Save for salt and fish, Venetians had to

look outside the lagoon for life's necessities, including food to eat, wood with which to build, and even water suitable for drinking. The irony of the latter condition was not lost on the city's inhabitants, "[t]here are barges taken round full of water for sale . . . And it is truly a joke, living in water and having to buy it." This need for goods mandated trade and travel, activities that would become cornerstones of Venetian life. Moreover, Venice's inability to independently sustain its own population resulted in a society acutely amenable to the acquisition of a variety of goods from outside sources. The influx of items from distant locales was matched by a variety of merchants arriving in the city to sell their wares to an anxious and needful population. In turn, these visitors brought with them new ideas, technologies, and artistic styles to Venice.

A similar phenomenon presents itself with regard to Venice's aqueous environment. Living on the "liquid plains" inspires distinct corporeal sensations and sensory experiences. In this physical kaleidoscope, the water reflects, refracts, and transforms the colors, shapes, and objects of the city. As a result, the visual perception and the physical ambient of a Venetian location shift on a daily, sometimes even hourly, basis (figs. 1.3 and 1.4). The constant flux of the natural surroundings led Gasparo Contarini to observe that Venice is "every day altering and changing according to the tides of the sea." The innate physical variety of the city's infrastructure—such as that remarked upon by Contarini—had a sustained influence on Venetian visual culture.

Yet for all the recognition of Venice's singular character and appearance, the early settlers did not, indeed they could not, eliminate all contacts with the mainland.

For example, rather than immediately establishing an independent political state, the communities pledged their obedience to the sole political authority on the Italian peninsula, the Byzantine exarchate in Ravenna. Byzantium's suzerain control of the islands remained intact until well past 697 C.E., when the inhabitants established an independent military force under the control of a local authority, the *dux*, or doge. Approximately a century later, in 810 C.E., the seat of governmental authority moved from the island of Malamocco to Rivo Alto. The geographic centralization of power signaled the first step in the duchy's decision to assert further her political autonomy from Byzantium. No sooner had the transfer of the capital taken place than the Venetians recognized the need to promote the State's newfound independence to her Italian neighbors. This symbolic venture played out, not at Rivo Alto, but slightly to the East, in a district that would become synonymous with Venetian political, civic, and religious authority: the Area Marciana. Throughout the Area Marciana, and most specifically realized at the Basilica of San Marco, these early tendencies toward diversity were transformed into the visual language of the burgeoning Republic and helped the state to craft a distinct visual identity.

#### Saint Mark and San Marco

Few, if any, buildings in Venice characterize the state's taste for visual diversity more than the Doge's private chapel, the Basilica of San Marco (fig. 1.5). Yet, the church that impresses visitors today may best be described as the architecture of accretion, realized through the continued addition of elements and ideas from throughout the Mediterranean world. Built to serve as a sacred reliquary to house the body of the evangelist Mark and a palatine chapel for the Doge, the Basilica encapsulates Venetian aesthetic values while highlighting the challenges inherent in developing a distinct visual language suitable for a state determined to promote singularity as a foundational principle.

Of the numerous historical events that can be used to demonstrate medieval Venetian statecraft, few prove as potent, or as telling, as the events surrounding the acquisition of the relics of St. Mark from Alexandria and the subsequent transfer to Venice. This process, known as the *translatio*, possesses all the duplicity and intrigue one expects in epic drama, making it a favorite subject of artists and chroniclers alike. The episode remains a seminal moment in Venetian history, for, as David Rosand notes, "in every sense, then, St. Mark came to represent Venice; St. Mark was Venice."

Prior to the *translatio*, St. Theodore—a Byzantine military hero—served as Venice's patron saint (fig. 1.6). As the Republic continued to grow and develop independently of Byzantium, Theodore's Byzantine heritage proved problematic as his presence provided a link to Venice's East-



5 Jacopo Sansovino, *Ca' Corner at San Maurizio*

ern origins that grew increasingly inconsistent with Venice's desire to establish itself as an autonomous state. To be a legitimate political power during the medieval period required a patron saint with an esteemed reputation. As author of one of the synoptic gospels, Saint Mark more than met this qualification. Furthermore, Mark enjoyed a privileged relationship with Saint Peter, the first pope, patron saint of Rome and the founder of the organized church. Indeed, Peter's own writings confirm the close bond between the two men as evidenced by Peter's first letter to the Apostles which concludes with a reference to "my son Mark."

As a developing political entity anxious to establish a prestigious Christian lineage, the Venetians recognized the potential political and religious potency



6 Paolo Veronese, *Allegory of Love*, 1588

associated with control of Mark's relics for the bodily remains of the saint contained his *praesentia*. Ultimately, the relics of "Peter's son" proved too tempting for Venetians to leave alone.

A Venetian tradition developed promoting Venice as the rightful owner of the saint's body. According to this belief, known as the *praedestinatio*, Mark's apostolic missions included a visit to the Adriatic basin. During his brief stay at the island of San Francesco del Deserto, Mark founded the Adriatic patriarchate. He then experienced a vision in which an angel prophesied that Venice would be the saint's final resting place. As was the case with the chronicle reports of Venice's origins, the *praedestinatio* too entered Venetian consciousness during the medieval period.

However, the predestined conflation of saint with city could not take place while Mark's relics remained in Alexandria. As had been the case many times before and since, the Venetian necessity for the acquisition of specific goods from afar was soon satisfied, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of two seafaring merchants. In 828 C.E., Tribunus da Malamocco and Rusticus di Torcello set sail to East but were thrown off course by a violent storm. The pair miraculously survived but, much to their surprise, ran aground in Egypt. They eventually arrived in Alexandria, the site of Mark's martyrdom. In the Church of San Marco, a graphic, albeit schematic, representation of Mark's martyrdom appears in the chapel dedicated to his "father" St. Peter (fig. 1.7). In this mosaic, Mark's stoic figure dominates the mosaic in striking contrast to his weeping companions. The bulging eyes, gaping teeth and overall hideous

representation of Mark's assassins conveys the medieval belief that an individual's exterior appearance indicated the personality and soul within. This negative visualization of Mark's pagan tormentors was matched by the promotion of harsh treatment of the saint's remains by the Muslim population of Alexandria. For example, Martin da Canal noted that the Muslims referred to the Saint not by his actual name, but rather as "Marquet" a diminutive, and thus derogatory, form of the name Mark.

Concerned by what they perceived as Muslim disrespect to the saint's body, the intrepid merchants devised an ingenious plan to liberate St. Mark's relics from seemingly assured desecration. They placed the sacred remains in a storage container and then covered the relics with pork (fig. 1.8). Upon viewing the *carne prohibiti*, Muslim customs' agents shrieked back in horror, and waived the pair quickly through customs, all the time completely ignorant of the holy cargo buried beneath. But the story was far from over. St. Mark saved the men from myriad disasters throughout their perilous return to Venice (fig. 1.9). The various miracles—from the initial shipwreck in Alexandria to the triumphant return of the merchants with their sacred cargo to Venice—served as St. Mark's tangible support of his desire to be transferred to Venice.

Key elements of the *translatio* ultimately found artistic expression in at least five areas of the Basilica of San Marco (fig. 1.10). Chronicle accounts and visual renditions of the *translatio* vary according to the needs and instructions of the artist(s) responsible for each cycle. Yet, certain elements receive prominence in all of the representations:



7 Venetian chest, lacquered wood and ivory, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Mark's foreign captivity (made clear by the emphasis on the pharos of Alexandria), the distinctive costume of the Muslim officials, and the divine assistance offered during the sea voyages. Viewed as an ensemble, these highlighted episodes privilege certain cornerstones of Venetian cultural ideology: divine favoritism, international interaction, and mercantile interests.

The visual and literary celebration of the *translatio* had an especially pronounced resonance with members of Venice's commercial community for the acquisition of the saint's bodily remains can be explicated according to the laws of supply and demand. The new Republic needed Mark's relics to assist in the creation of its new identity. Merchants Tribunus and Rusticus successfully procured a highly prized product thereby enabling Venice to begin the process of visually establishing that identity. That their excursion was brought about by miraculous intervention served to further highlight the notion of Venice's divine favoritism. In turn, the consistent visual celebration of the *translatio* seared this seminal event into the mindset of Venetians and visitors alike. Control over Mark's body symbolically defined the new Republic as the direct descendants of Rome. Not surprisingly, this relationship too found visual commemoration in the mosaic program. The Capella di San Pietro, located on the north side of the high

altar of San Marco, contains episodes from the lives of both Saint Peter and Saint Mark. The choices made for the chapel's iconography—most notably the depiction of Peter consecrating Mark—emphasizes yet again the relationship between the two men, and thus, by inference, that between Venice and Rome (fig. 1.11). Just as Peter had identified Mark as "my son", the Venetians—through their acquisition of Mark's relics—had become Mark's *primogeniti filii eius*, his first-born sons. With time, twelve of Venice's most ancient patrician families took the notion of Petrine and apostolic lineage one step further through their self-definition as "case apostoliche."

Certainly, the decision to replace St. Theodore with St. Mark as the state's patron signaled a dramatic shift in Venetian political deference to Constantinople. Yet, apostolic deference proved a different matter. Architectural typology dictated the use of central plan structures for apostolic shrines. By the ninth century, this style, also known as a Greek cross plan, was associated with the Eastern empire, while Western churches of the period commonly relied upon a Latin Cross design that hearkened back to ancient Roman basilicas. Since Italians believed Mark occupied an apostolic position, his burial shrine in Venice was thus designed according to the apostolic, and thus Eastern, plan. In all likelihood, Justinian's *Apostoleion*,



8 Anonymus, 'Celebration of Carlo Maggi's Homecoming', *The Codex Maggi*

dating to the mid-sixth century, influenced the subsequent renovations of San Marco. This structure, also known as the Church of the Twelve Apostles, housed the relics of St. Luke, St. Andrew and St. Timothy, making it an appropriate architectural model for Venetians to follow when designing their shrine to house the remains of the Apostle Mark. Having been destroyed during the Ottoman sack of 1453 C.E., Justinian's structure is known only through written accounts and illustrations, such as the illumination included in Ms. Vat. gr. 116 (fig. 1.12). A comparison between San Marco and the Paris manuscript reveals certain common traits. Both structures rely upon a cruciform plan topped by five domes. In addition, evidence indicates that, in its medieval phase, three bays defined the interior of the Basilica of San Marco, another design characteristic shared with the Apostoleion. In and of itself, the existence of a shared plan and crowning elements between the Basil-

ica of San Marco and the Apostoleion may not seem noteworthy. However, Venetians and visitors alike would have readily understood that the interior of the Basilica of San Marco did not resemble other churches in the West. Evidence concerning early ecclesiastical structures in the lagoon islands proves elusive, yet it appears that other churches relied upon a Latin Cross, or basilica plan, such as defines Santa Maria Assunta, the Cathedral of Torcello. A comparison between the interior spaces of the two structures illustrates the different spatial dynamic offered by the central plan structure (figs. 1.13 and 1.14). San Marco's cubed space and dual axes would have been immediately sensed upon entry. The physical alterity of San Marco would have been further emphasized by its status as a palatine chapel intended for religious and ritual use by the Doge of Venice and his retinue. After the 1204 Sack of Constantinople by Venetian Crusaders, elaboration on San

Marco's facade continued to promote Venetian supremacy through the prominent display of Byzantine spolia. Like the decision to build a domed, central plan structure, the exterior augmentation of the facade further differentiated San Marco from other churches in the Italian peninsula. Yet, rather than continuing to emphasize religious authority and lineage, the Venetians now turned their focus to the construction of a more comprehensive civic authority. In that regard, few objects from antiquity received as much praise as the Quadriga. Believed to have been cast for Alexander the Great, the four bronze horses decorated the roof of the Eastern Imperial box of the Hippodrome in Constantinople. The extension of San Marco's narthex accommodated the placement of the Quadriga on the balustrade above, thereby enhancing the Imperial associations of the ducal chapel (fig. 1.15). An equally powerful statement emerged from the decision to insert the Tetrarchs, a porphyry statuary group dating to the late Roman Imperial period, at the base of the southeast corner of the. The physical location of the Tetrarchs—situated at the southwest base of the Basilica—the Quadriga, as well as various other objects appropriated from Constantinople, celebrated Venice's defeat of the very political entity upon which the Republic originally depended.

A similar phenomenon presents itself in the articulation of the portals that define San Marco's facade. Of the original five lunettes, only the Porta Sant'Alipio, situated over the far left portal of the facade, retains its original decoration (fig. 1.17). Gentile Bellini's meticulous rendition of the medieval church in his Procession in Piazza San Marco confirms that all but the central mosaic depicted events from the translatio (fig. 1.18). However, rather than recognizing Venetian ascendancy over Byzantium and Rome, the mosaic portal decoration speaks to Venice's relationship with the Islamic world. As an artistic medium, mosaic had strong and specific Byzantine and Levantine affiliations. For the Byzantines, the inherent luminescence and opacity of mosaic made present the abstract notion of divinity.

Such was not the case for Islamic art. Upon their accession to the caliphate in the late seventh century, the Umayyad rulers of the Levant recognized the potency of mosaic as a means by which to establish their authority visually. Perhaps nowhere was this decision more evident than in the original decoration of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (fig. 1.19). Although renovated in the Ottoman period, the building's exterior originally boasted gold mosaics with meandering vines and decorative tendrils such as decorate the interior to the present day (fig. 1.20). Abd al-Malik's decision to decorate the exterior of this Islamic shrine in the traditional visual language of Byzantine authority denoted the power, authority, and wealth of the new Muslim political leaders in Jerusalem in



9 The Pentecost and Mother of God Mosaics

a media readily understood by the Christian inhabitants of this sacred city.

Given the novelty of exterior mosaic use in the West and the obvious expense associated with the media, San Marco's lunette mosaics prove among the most prominent features of the facade. Clearly, iconography detailing the liberation and arrival of Mark's relics in Venice would be well suited to his burial place. However, like the insertion of trophies from Constantinople into the actual fabric of the basilica, the mosaic istoria too conveys a message of supremacy: Venice's gain—that is, St. Mark appears as Alexandria's loss, a defeat heightened by its depiction in a