

# Venetian Voices



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# A Mermaid's Tale

*A mermaid  
languishing off  
the Lido sees a sailor  
from a distant shore  
give his love a gift  
of seaweed.*

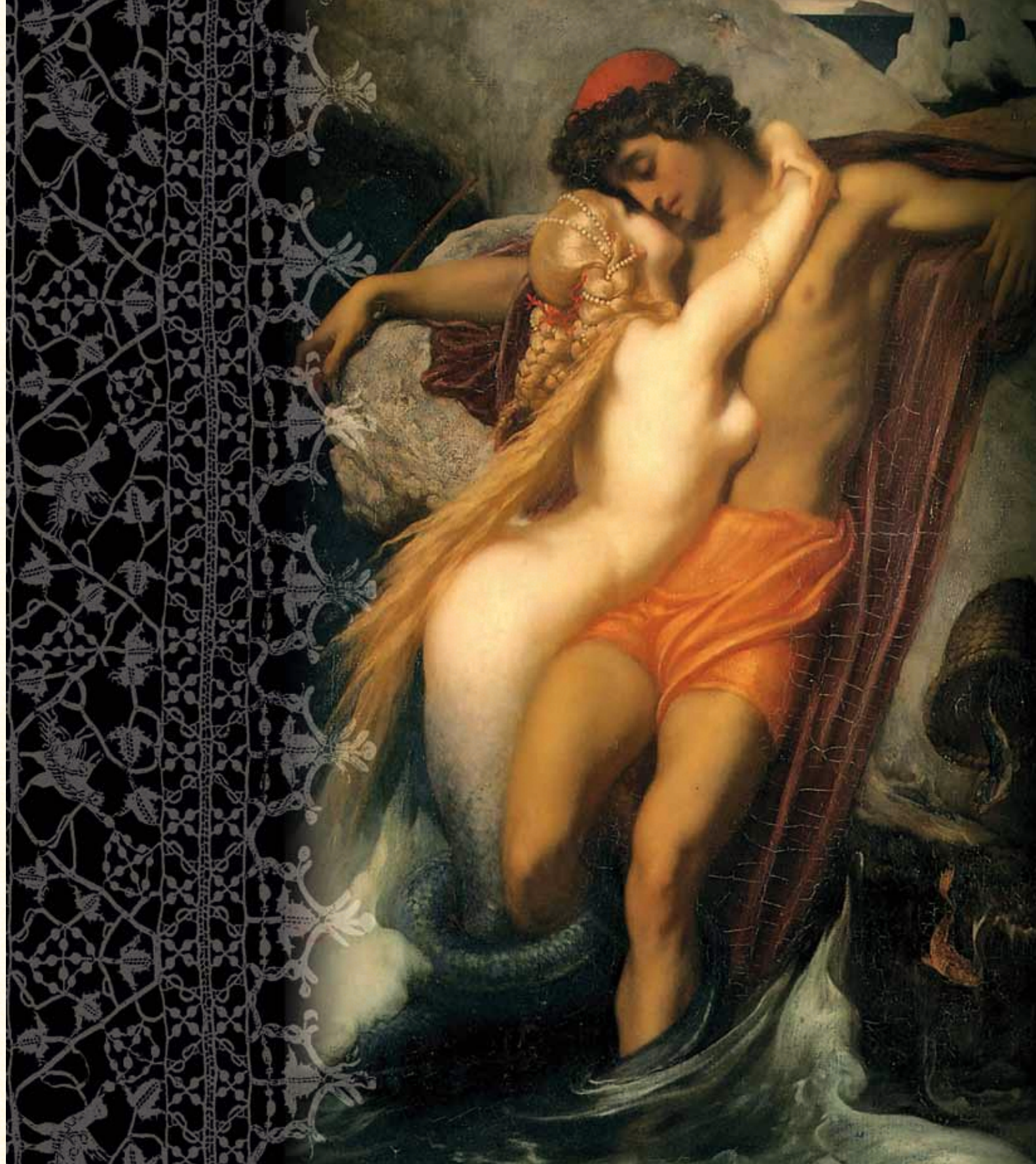
*Envious of its beauty  
she splashes their boat  
with her tail. The frothy foam  
laces the face of the sea  
in fragile filigree.*

The first lace-maker,  
is a fisherman's bride,  
her nuptial veil inspired  
by netted sea. Her art  
whetted by a mermaid's tail.

Each year at midnight,  
on a spring tide  
under moonlight,  
Burano fisherfolk  
call the sirens of the sea.

From the shore's littoral  
women wade ankle-deep  
casting lace necklaces across  
the waters  
for Neptune's mermaid daughters  
who wave-surf shorewards,  
in dolphin-drawn nautilus chariots.

*Frederick Leighton, 1830-1896  
The Fisherman and the Syren 1856-1858*





# THE POLOS LEAVE EUROPE FOR ASIA AND THE COURT OF KUBLAI KHAN IN CHINA

In this stylised image, from the 15th-century edition of his book, Marco Polo is setting out on his travels with his father and uncle. They are boarding a small rowing boat seen on the top right, and are surrounded by friends and wellwishers plus some local white swans. Various Venetian landmarks are distinguishable.



Li commence li liures du grant Taam qui parole de la grant Ermeine de perse  
et de tartars et d'inde. Et des granz merveilles qui p le monde sont.



# Aldus Manutius

15TH CENTURY

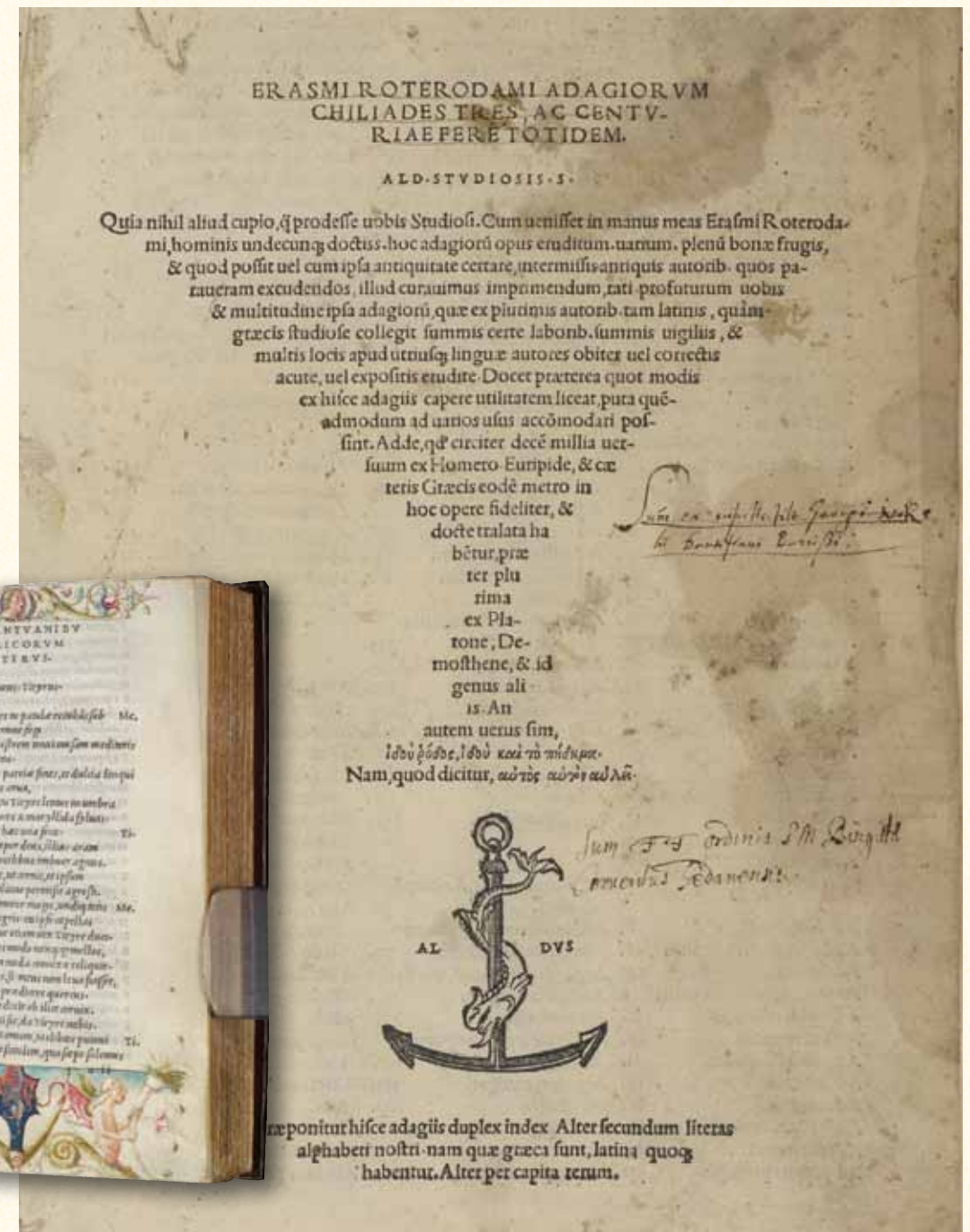
At the Aldine Press,  
under observant eyes,  
apprentices and journeymen  
handle a new Greek type,  
caress with reverence; its inky face  
created by the genius:  
Aldus Manutius in 1492,  
at the pinnacle of his profession.

He printed masterpieces from antiquity;  
priceless books crafted with pride  
bound in finest Morocco hide,  
then sold, shipped,  
to monks in scriptoria,  
collectors in castles,  
and to belfry bibliophiles.

The crest on the breast  
of each book  
emblazoned in glory:  
the dolphin and anchor,  
the maker's mark  
in the scholarly city of St Mark.



The first ever book issued in the octavo format was this edition of the works of Virgil, printed in 1501 by Aldine Press.



Aldus Manutius (*opposite top*) printed the second edition of Erasmus' *Adagia*, a large expanded volume of Latin and Greek sayings and ancient adages, collected by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536). This page is an example of Manutius' extraordinary typesetting. Printed in Venice in 1508.



# Caterina Cornaro

EX QUEEN OF CYPRUS

1489

Caterina Cornaro  
conducts court in Asolo,  
and remembers her time  
as queen and regent of Cyprus.

In old age, and plump as a partridge,  
she resides in luxury surrounded  
by a retinue of retainers.  
Caterina establishes a centre  
of culture across the lagoon  
from her childhood home  
on the Grand Canal.

Her garden of perfumes  
and twin pots of basil  
stir painful memories  
of her dead husband  
and poisoned son.

The chambers of her heart  
echo with emptiness.

On her wedding anniversary  
maids gather fragrant fruits  
and flowers  
to decorate loggias and bowers.  
Bergamo orange, lime  
and lemon blossom,  
scent the air  
wafting seductively  
through ghost-filled rooms.

All that's left  
is the faintest trace  
of a happiness lost  
on the citrus isle of Cyprus.

*Vecellio Tiziano (Titian), 1488–1576*  
Queen Caterina Cornaro (detail) 1542  
Portrait of the young queen in costume  
as St Catherine of Alexandria.







*Left:* Detail of the magnificent stucco gilded ceiling of the Golden Staircase in the Doge's Palace, painted with scenes from mythology. The architect Scarpagnino created the staircase of the Scala d'Oro.

*Below:* The magnificent Sala del Maggior Consiglio (Great Council Hall) in the Doge's Palace  
*Photograph: Riccardo Lelli*

*Opposite: Titian, c. 1488–1576*  
Portrait of Doge Andrea Gritti c. 1540  
Doge Gritti held office from 1523 to 1538





# In the Arsenale Shipyard

16TH CENTURY

In spring 1571, Sebastiano Venier,  
Commander of the Venetian fleet  
a venerable greybeard of seventy-five  
and his redoubtable Admiral  
Agostino Barbarigo visit the Arsenale.

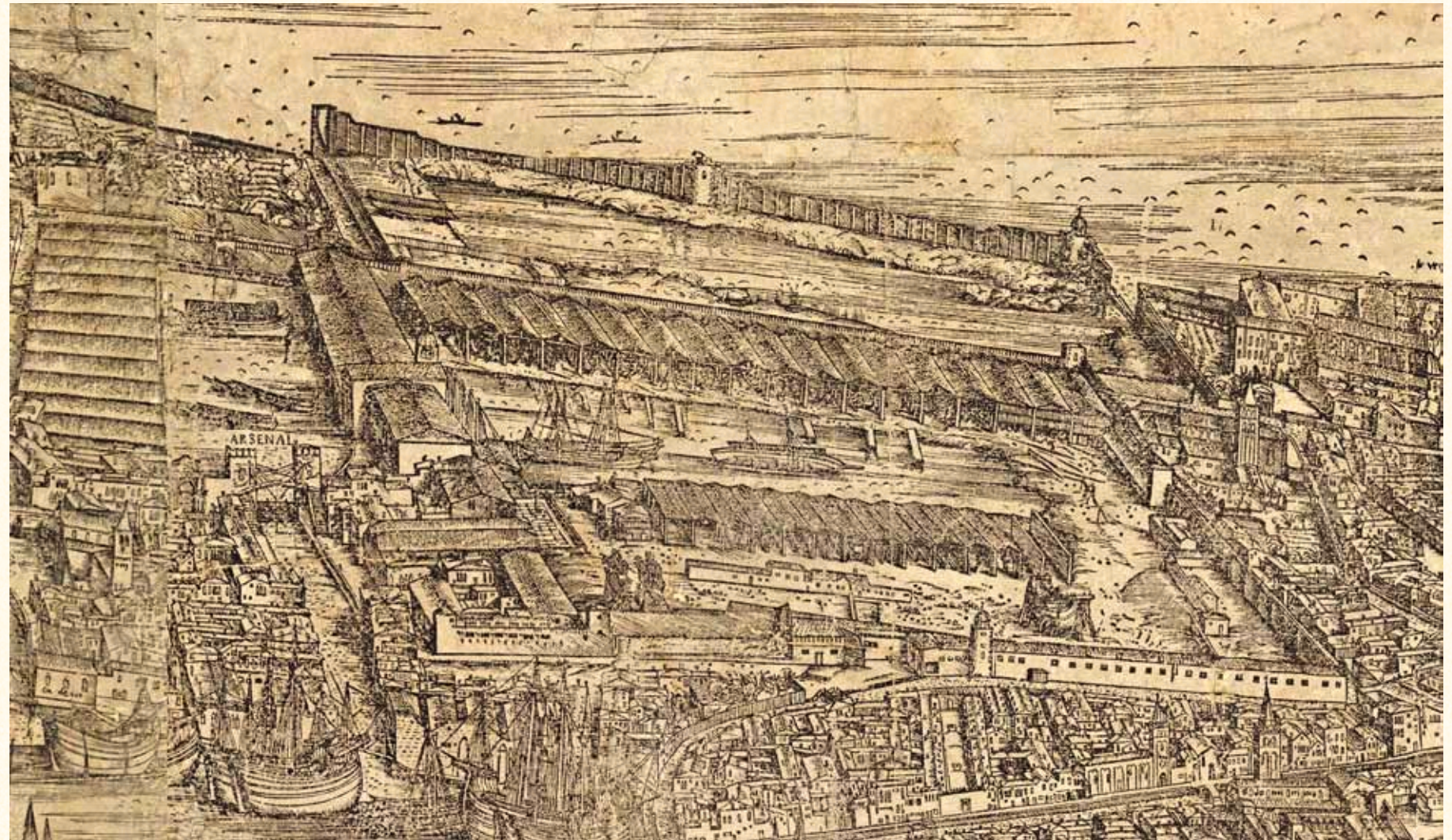
They hear the anvil chorus resound  
as mallets pound  
and Vulcan's forges spit fire.  
The great shipyard reverberates  
with frenetic activity.  
Sparks flash from forges  
Dante's *Inferno* alive.

Naval architects and shipwrights  
supervise men climbing  
down ladderways  
into stygian holds,  
and up cordage into clouds.

A forest of masts and spars growl,  
timbers creak, groan and squeak.  
Daily the number of ships  
in the slips grow,  
chandlery – ready to meet the foe  
– Ottomans  
at the Battle of Lepanto.

Jacopo de' Barbari c. 1460/1470–1516

Detail of the ship-building area from the plan of Venice 1500



This bird's-eye view shows the western basin, the first to be constructed in 1104, beyond the Arsenal gate. Bucintoro in the basin is recognisable in the top centre of the image. The shed-flanked central basin was constructed in 1473, and all three basins, extending further to the right, were engaged in the construction of galleys in a precursor production line. Workshops immediately to the right of the entrance canal manufactured rope, oars, masts and rigging. The munitions were moved to an outlying island after a major explosion.





# Painters through the Ages

Captured on canvas:  
the colours of the city  
and her people.  
Every mood reflected  
by the lagoon's light.

*Paolo Veronese, 1528–1588*  
*The Marriage at Cana (detail) 1563*  
The musicians seated below Christ  
have been identified as portraits of  
Titian, Tintoretto, Bassano and a  
self-portrait of Veronese himself,  
seated at the double bass.

Art lovers delight  
in the creations  
of a pantheon of painters  
whose masterpieces  
adorn gallery and palace walls,  
the skill of their palettes  
appreciated by connoisseurs;  
lauded, applauded.

These artists have left  
as their bequest:  
solace for the soul of man  
stimulus for the mind  
and passion for the heart,  
such is the power of great art.





