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Lesson #1: Venezianità: “The otherness of the Venetians.”

1. Why was Venice Founded?

The fall of the Western Roman Empire and following invasions by Germanic tribes and Huns led to the establishment of Venice. People from mainland Italy escaped the instability and bloodshed in the 5th and 6th centuries, finding sanctuary on the marshy islands of the Venetian Lagoons. The lagoon served as a natural barrier against invaders, and the city of Venice was gradually constructed on wooden pilings hammered into the marshy terrain by these refugees.

2. How did the first settlers in the Venetian lagoon organize themselves (who were their leaders?)

Justice is the equitable and unbiased treatment of people in accordance with established rules and values. The Duke of Venice and his court have the authority to determine what is just in *The Merchant of Venice*. The play's subject of justice is still relevant today because it contrasts moral and legal justice, raising the issue of whether the rule of law always results in just outcomes. As long as civilizations

continue to debate whether judicial systems are impartial and fair, this issue will be significant.

3. Venice was supposed to have been founded on March 25—the Annunciation. Why do you think the association of the Feast of the Annunciation and the founding of Venice would have been significant to the Venetian people? (Recall that the Feast of the Annunciation is that in which Mary is asked by the Angel Gabriel to be the mother of Jesus and humbly accepts.)

For a number of reasons, the Venetian people would have considered the connection between the Annunciation Feast and the creation of Venice to be important. The Annunciation Feast, which honors the occasion when the Angel Gabriel informed Mary that she would become pregnant with the Son of God, is a significant Christian holiday. This affiliation with a holy occasion would have given the city a sense of heavenly protection and favor. Also, because Mary is frequently linked to ideas of humility, grace, and compassion, establishing the city on her feast day may have helped the Venetian people internalize these characteristics as guiding principles.

4. Summarize the importance of the early Byzantine connections (at Constantinople, which included both the Church and the State there) to Venetian artists and architects.

The city's distinctive aesthetic and architectural character was greatly influenced by the early Byzantine links with Venetian artists and architects. Due to its importance as

a commerce hub and a passageway between the Eastern and Western civilizations, Venice maintained close links to the Byzantine Empire. Through this connection, Byzantine art, which was distinguished by its vibrant colors, elaborate mosaics, and religious imagery, was introduced to Venetian artists and architects. Many of Venice's most famous structures, like St. Mark's Basilica, which combines Byzantine and Western architectural styles, are clearly influenced by the Byzantine era. This blending of creative elements contributed to the development of Venice as a thriving and international hub of culture and innovation.