

## 1. THE SIREN PARTHENOPE

The origins of the city of Naples, *maritima urbs*, as Tito Livio referred to it, are firmly rooted in the myth of the **Siren Parthenope**.

The story begins on the **island of Megaride** where, according to legend, **the original nucleus of the city** called Parthenope originated. According to ancient sources, this small settlement lay near the tomb of the young siren who had lived in the seas around the Sorrento peninsula. Legend has it that Parthenope, devastated at her inability to make **Ulysses** fall in love with her on his way back from Troy, was washed up on Megaride. It was only later that the first Greeks settled there. Some experts say that these were **sailors from Rhodes** and others link them to the **Greeks in Cumae**. During the Roman period, a luxury residential villa was built on the island, the **Villa di Lucullo**, which stretched from the Pizzofalcone promontory right down to the sea. Later, during the Norman period, the **Castel dell'Ovo** fort was built.

The Sirens, who were traditionally depicted as monstrous creatures, half bird and half woman, were called Parthenope, **Ligeia** and **Leucosia**, daughters of the Muse **Calliope** and the river **Acheloo**. They were wicked, monstrous creatures, transformed into winged monsters by **Demeter**, who wanted to punish them for failing to prevent the capture of her daughter **Persephone**. Their haunting song cast a spell on any passing sailors. These men became so entranced that they lost control of their ships and crashed onto the rocks. There were many shrines to the Sirens along the Campanian coastline, including, for example, those on the islands in the Sorrento Peninsula which are still known as the “**Sirunusse**” and “**scogli delle Sirene**” or the Sirens’ rocks. The myth of Parthenope has got mixed up with the stories and legends of the modern city, and the result is like a work of literature which is still being written.

**Strabone** and **Pliny the Elder** referred to the existence of the *virgin* Siren’s tomb in Naples, although it was never found. On the other hand, the poet **Giovanni Boccaccio** in his *Ninfale d’Ameto*, recalls how her tomb was found by the Cumaeans. It is also believed that Boccaccio wrote the legend about the love affair between the **river Sebeto** and the sweet Siren who is depicted, according to medieval tradition as a kind of animal, **half woman and half fish**.

During the XIX century, another story spread about the founder and namesake of the city. It told of her love affair with the Centaur Vesuvius, which made Zeus so jealous that he transformed him into a volcano and her into the city of Naples.