

Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

— Secret Itineraries in Palazzo Ducale



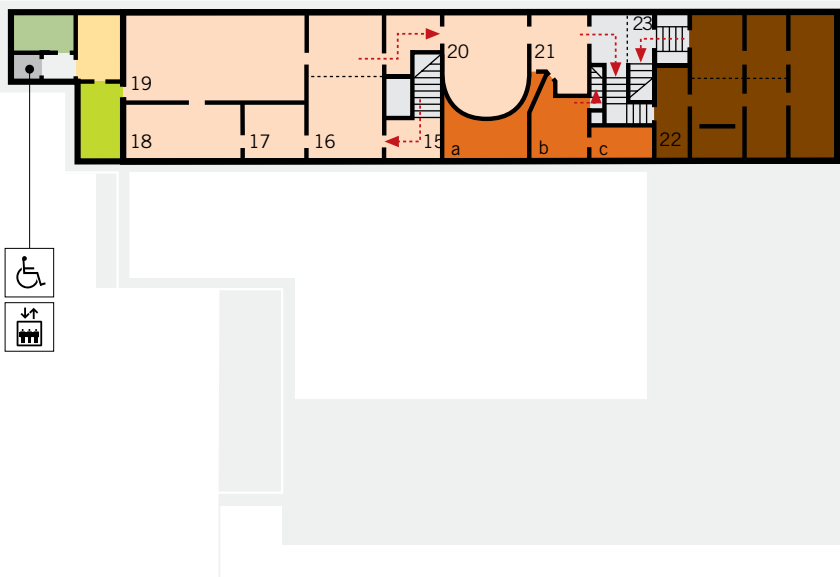
Secret itineraries in Palazzo Ducale

The itinerary

The Secret Itinerary through the Doge's Palace covers the rooms and chambers where the delicate work of some of the most important bodies in the Venetian administration was carried out. The tour offers an interesting insight into the civil and political history of the city, its public organisations and administration of justice. The visit must be previously booked, and can only take place at certain times and conditions and in the company of a special tour guide who will explain all features of each individual room.

Palazzo Ducale

Floor 2



Secret itineraries

- a Rooms of the Ducal Notary and the *Deputato alla Segreteria* and the Chamber of the Secret Chancellery
- b Chamber of the Three Head Magistrates
- c Chamber of the inquisitors

Istitutional Chamber

Armoury

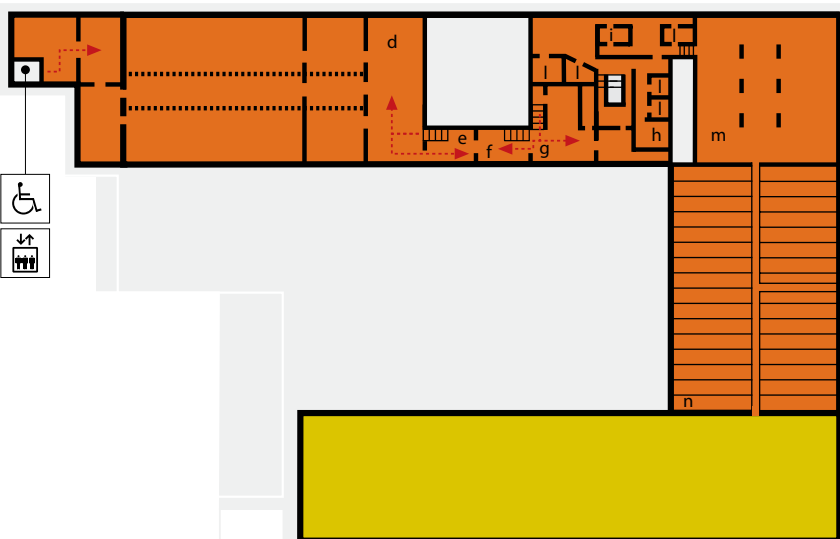
Didatic Rooms

Museum areas currently not accessible

Direction and Offices

Palazzo Ducale

Floor 3



Secret itineraries

- d Higher Chancellery
- e Chamber of the deputy of the Chancellery
- f Chamber of the Deputy
- g Torture Chamber e, sotto, Chamber of the *Avogadore di Comune*
- h First Cell of Casanova
- i Second Cell of Casanova
- l Piombi
- m Armoury
- n Chamber of the Great Council

Museum areas currently not accessible

From the large and bright courtyard of Palazzo Ducale, rich in precious marble decorations, going through a narrow door on the ground floor, you'll find yourself in the *Pozzi* (wells). They were terrible places of detention, consisting of small wet cells, barely lit by oil lamps, ventilated only through round holes in thick stone walls and closed in by locked doors with solid bolts. In each cell there was a wood litter, a shelf for the few things the detainee could keep and a wooden bucket with a lid to contain human excrement. From some writings and some drawings on the walls we can imagine the feelings of despair and the desire for freedom of the prisoners.

Rooms of the Ducal Notary and the *Deputato alla Segreta*

A narrow staircase takes you up to the two small rooms that housed important officers of the institutional machinery: the Ducal Notary and the *Deputato alla Segreta*. Interconnected, these lead into the Square Atrium.

The Notary functioned as a sort of secretary to the various magistrature within the Republic, whilst the *Deputato alla Segreta* kept a special archive for the Council of Ten, containing reserved material.

From here one passes up to the Office of the Great Chancellor, head of what today would be known as the General Archives. Due to the delicate nature of his work, this was the only public figure to be elected directly by the Great Council.

This staircase leads to the large and beautiful Chamber of the Secret Chancellery, whose walls are lined with cabinets containing public and secret documents relating to the work of most of the Venetian magistrature.

Passing through the small room of the Deputy to the Chancellery one comes to the Torture Chamber, also known as the Chamber of Torment; this disturbing place is linked directly with the Prisons.

Though torture was practised in Venice, it was not particularly savage or gruesome, and from the 17th century onwards it was gradually abandoned; by the 18th century it had practically been abolished altogether.

The *Piombi*

From the Torture Chamber you pass to the so-called *Piombi*. The name comes from the lead [piombo] covering on the roof.

These cells were used exclusively for the prisoners of the Council of Ten, either those accused of political crimes, those awaiting sentence or those serving short prison terms.

Located directly under the roof, the 6 or 7 cells were formed of wooden partitions to which were nailed sheets of iron. Though so vividly described by Giacomo Casanova, the *Piombi* did in fact offer prisoners much better conditions than those in the *pozzi* (the wells), the terrible cells on the ground floor of the Doge's Palace.

From the *Piombi* you pass directly under the roof to the attic located at the corner of the building between the waterfront and canal-side facades. This was the site of one of the corner towers of the much earlier castle occupied by the Doge. The cabinets contain a number of weapons, most of them 16th century.

From this attic, two long flights of stairs bring one to the Chamber of the Inquisitors, a much-feared magistratura that was set up in 1539 to protect state secrets (its full title was *Inquisitori alla propagazione dei segreti dello Stato*). Two of the three inquisitors were chosen from the Council of Ten, the third from among the district councillors who attended upon the Doge.

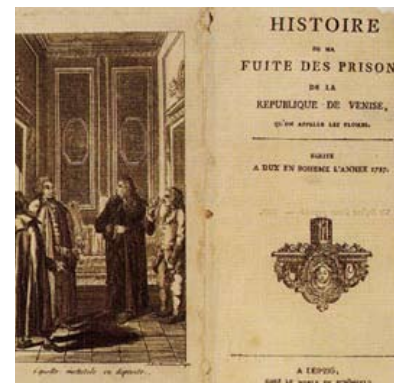
The ceiling is decorated with works by Tintoretto, painted in 1566–1567.



Rooms of the Ducal Notary and the *Deputato alla Segreta*



Chamber of the Secret Chancellery



Giacomo Casanova, Frontespizio del libro *Histoire de ma fuite des prisons de la République de Venise qu'on appelle les Plombs*, 1788



The *Piombi*

Chamber of the Three Head

From here one passes through to the Chamber of the Three Head Magistrates, chosen every month from amongst the members of the Council of Ten. They were responsible for preparing court cases and seeing that the Council rulings were carried out as quickly as possible. The decoration of the ceiling dates from 1553–1554.

The octagonal central panel with *The Victory of Virtue over Vice* is the work of Giambattista Zelotti, whilst the side compartments are by Giambattista Ponchino and Paolo Veronese.



Giovan Battista Zelotti
Il Tempo, la Virtù e l'Invidia liberati dal Male