Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

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Palazzo Ducale

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The Palace.

HISTORY

Tintoretto, *Il Paradiso*

Paolo Veronese, *Dialettica*

Vittore Carpaccio, *Leone di San Marco*

A masterpiece of Gothic architecture, the Doge's Palace is an impressive structure composed of layers of building elements and ornamentation, from its 14th and 15th century original foundations to the significant Renaissance and opulent Mannerist adjunctions. The structure is made up of three large blocks, incorporating previous constructions. The wing towards the St. Mark's Basin is the oldest, rebuilt from 1340 onwards. The wing towards St. Mark's Square was built in its present form from 1424 onwards. The canal-side wing, housing the Doge's apartments and many government offices, dates from the Renaissance and was built between 1483 and 1565.

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The origins

The first Doges

The first stable settlements in the lagoon probably came just after the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476). Gradually, these became more established and are considered as outposts of the Byzantine Empire. At the beginning of the 9th century, Venice enjoyed a reasonable level of independence. In 810, Doge Angelo Partecipazio moved the seat of government from the island of Malamocco to the area of Rivoalto (the present-day Rialto), when it was decided the Palazzo Ducale should be built, however, no trace remains of that 9th century building.

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Il Palazzo

The Old Castle (10th–11th Century)

It is probable that the Palazzo Ducale, being protected by a canal, stout walls and massive corner towers, was an agglomeration of different buildings destined to serve various purposes. Reached by a large fortified gateway where the Porta della Carta now stands, the buildings within these walls housed public offices, courtrooms, prisons, the Doge's apartments, stables, armories, and other facilities.

The Doge Ziani's Palace (1172–1178)

In the 10th century, the Doge's Palace was partially destroyed by a fire, and subsequent reconstruction works were undertaken at the behest of Doge Sebastiano Ziani (1172-1178). A great reformer, Doge Ziani radically changed the layout of the entire St. Mark's Square area. Two new structures were built for his palace: one facing the Piazzetta – to house courts and legal institutions – and the other overlooking St. Mark's Basin – to house government institutions. These new palaces probably had all the Byzantine-Venetian architecture characteristic features (such as the Fondaco dei Turchi, which today houses the Natural History Museum), but unfortunately, only few traces of this period remain (e.g. parts of the ground-level wall in Istrian stone and some herringbone-pattern brick pavement).

The 14th century palace

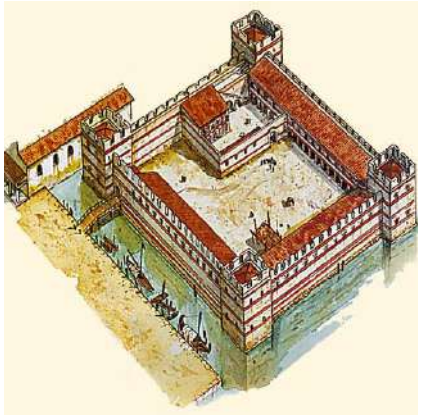
At the end of the 13th century it became necessary to extend the palace once more. Political changes in 1297 led to a significant increase in the number of people who had the right to participate in the legislative assembly meetings. The works, which would result in the building that we can see today, started around 1340 under Doge Bartolomeo Gradenigo (1339-1343) and concerned mostly the side of the palace facing the lagoon. In 1365, the Paduan artist Guariento was commissioned to decorate the east wall of the Great Council Chamber with a large fresco, while the room's windows works were done by the Delle Masegne family. The Great Council met in this chamber for the first time in 1419.

Doge Francesco Foscari's Renovations and the 15th century

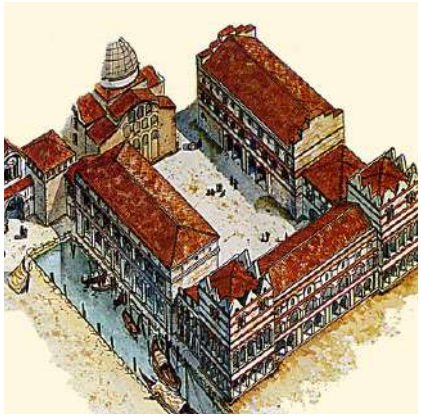
Only in 1424, when Francesco Foscari was Doge (1423-1457), was it decided to continue the renovation works on the side of the building overlooking the Piazzetta San Marco. The new wing was designed as a continuation of that overlooking the lagoon: a ground-floor arcade on the outside, with open first-floor balconies running along the façade and the internal courtyard side of the wing. The vast Sala dello Scrutinio, formerly the Library, was built at the same floor as the Great Council Chamber, and its large windows and the pinnacled parapet took up the same decorative motifs as had been used previously. The Piazzetta's façade was completed with the construction of the Porta della Carta, a work by Giovanni and Bartolomeo Bon. Works on the other wings of the Palace would not come until later. These would start with the construction of the Foscari entrance beyond the Porta della Carta, culminating in the Foscari Arch. This work was not completed until Doge Giovanni Mocenigo's time (1478-1485).

The other wings of the Palace and the various fires in the building (1483-1574)

In 1483, a violent fire broke out in the canal-side of the Palace, which housed the Doge's apartments. Once again, important reconstruction works became necessary and Antonio Rizzo was commissioned, introducing the new Renaissance architectural language to the building. An entirely new structure was raised alongside the canal, from the Ponte della Canonica to the Ponte della Paglia. Works were completed by 1510, and in the meantime Rizzo was replaced by Maestro Pietro Lombardo, who reviewed the decoration of the façade and of the Giants' Staircase in the internal courtyard of the palace. In 1515, Antonio Abbondi, also known as Lo Scarpagnino, took over from Lombardo, finally completing the works by 1559. The 1565 erection of Sansovino's two large marble statues of Mars and Neptune at the top of the Giants' Staircase marked the end of this important phase. However, in 1574, another fire destroyed some



Giorgio Albertini, *Illustrazione dell'antico castello di Palazzo Ducale* (X–XI)



Giorgio Albertini, *Illustrazione di Palazzo Ducale all'epoca del doge Ziani* (1172-78)

of the second floor rooms, fortunately without undermining the structure. Works began immediately to replace the wood furnishings and decorations of these rooms. In 1577, when works had just been finished, another huge fire damaged the Sala dello Scrutinio and the Great Council Chamber, destroying masterpieces by artists such as Gentile da Fabriano, Pisanello, Alvise Vivarini, Carpaccio, Bellini, Pordenone and Titian. Reconstruction works were rapidly undertaken to restore it to its original appearance, completed by 1579-80.

The prisons and other 17th century works

Until then, Palazzo Ducale housed not only the Doge's apartments, the seat of the government and the city's courtrooms, but also a jail. It was only in the second half of the 16th century that Antonio da Ponte ordered the construction of new prisons, built by Antonio Contin around 1600, which were linked to the Doge's Palace by the Bridge of Sighs. This transfer of the prisons left the old space on the ground floor of the palace free, and at the beginning of the 17th century works began to restructure the courtyard. A colonnade was created in the wing that houses the courtrooms similar to that of the Renaissance façade, while on the inner side a marble façade was constructed alongside the Foscari Arch, decorated with blind arches and surmounted by a clock (1615), a design by Bartolomeo Manopola.

The palace after the fall of the Venetian Republic

Palazzo Ducale was the heart of the political life and public administration of the Venetian Republic. Therefore, when the Republic fell in 1797, its role inevitably changed. Venice was firstly subjected to French rule, then to Austrian, and ultimately, in 1866, it became part of a united Italy. Over this period, the Palazzo Ducale was occupied by various administrative offices and housed important cultural institutions such as the Biblioteca Marciana (from 1811 to 1904). By the end of the 19th century, the structure was showing signs of decay and the Italian government set aside significant funds for an extensive restoration. Many original 14th century capitals were removed and substituted and the originals now form the collection in the Museo dell'Opera. All public offices were moved elsewhere, with the exception of the State Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments, which is still housed in the building, but under the current name of Superintendence of the Environmental and Architectural Heritage of Venice and its Lagoon. In 1923, the Italian State, owner of the building, appointed the City Council to manage it as a public museum. In 1996, the Doge's Palace became part of the Civic Museums of Venice network.

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THE COURTYARD AND LOGGIAS

Entrance

1 The Museo dell'Opera

2 Courtyard

3 Stair of the Censors

The Museo dell'Opera

Museum Areas currently not open to the public

The Courtyard

Having entered the palace by the Porta del Frumento, the oldest side of the building, you can see the Piazzetta wing to the left and the Renaissance wing to the right. The north side of the courtyard is closed by the junction between the Palace and St. Mark's Basilica, which used to be the Doge's chapel. At the center of the courtyard stand two well-heads dating from the mid-16th century. Used for formal entrances, the Giants' Staircase is guarded by Sansovino's two colossal statues of Mars and Neptune, which represents Venice's power by land and by sea. The rounded arch dedicated to Doge Francesco Foscari (1423-1457) alternates bands of Istrian stone and red Verona marble and links the Giants' Staircase to the Porta della Carta through which visitors today leave the palace. Members of the Senate gathered before government meetings in the Senator's Courtyard, to the right of the Giants' Staircase. At the opposite end of the Renaissance façade, the wide Censors' Staircase leads visitors to the loggia floor above where the tour to the upper floors begins.

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The Loggias

The visit itinerary walks you through the Renaissance wing, from the Censors' Staircase to the Gold Staircase, leading you to the upper floors, where various State Government offices were situated. Two plaques here are worthy of note: one, from 1362, has Gothic lettering dating from the papacy of Urban V and promises indulgences to those who give alms to the incarcerated; the other plaque, a work by Alessandro Vittoria which stands by the Giants' Staircase and can be more easily seen at the end of the visit, celebrates French King Henri III's visit to Venice in 1574.

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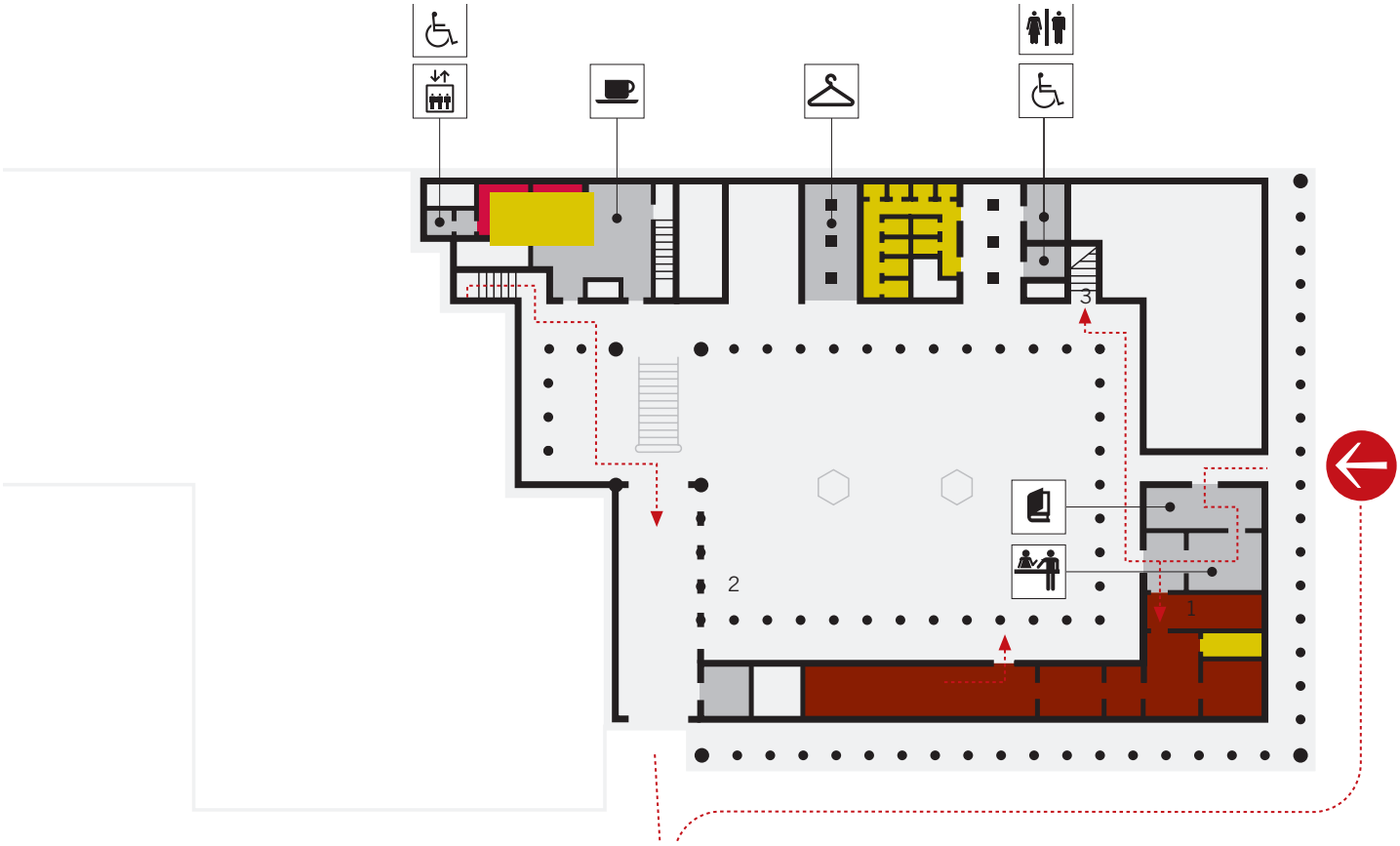

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THE MUSEO DELL'OPERA

Room VI of the Museo dell'Opera

Capital *Creazione di Adamo, pianeti e loro domicili* (part.), with Mars as a warrior seated on Aries. At his back the Scorpion

Room I

This room houses six capitals together with their columns from the 14th century arcade of the Palace, on the lagoon-front. They thus form part of the earliest project of decorative sculpture for the building, started in 1340.

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Room II

houses 4 capitals with columns from the 14th-century section of the arcade on the Piazzetta side. The magnificent carvings of these capitals are rich in allegorical and moral significance, presenting themes connected with work, the products of the earth, and astrological correspondences. On the entrance wall is situated the late-16th century filling of the one of the arches of the arcade towards the Ponte della Paglia. This was done to consolidate the building, compromised by the fire of 1576.

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Room III

Room III has 3 capitals with columns; 2 are from the 14th century and the third from the 15th century. Particularly noteworthy is the large and famous corner capital with the Creation of Adam, the Planets and the Zodiac. This capital is the one that supported the cornice and the feet of Adam and Eve in the sculptural group at the corner of the Palace, surmounted in turn by the statue of the Archangel Michael with drawn sword.

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Room IV

In Room IV, in addition to 2 shafts of columns from the arcade, one can see the massive wall in large rough blocks of living rock. It dates from a previous version of the present Palace and provides significant evidence, even if not clear in all respects, as to the character and location of the ancient building.

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Room V

Room V has 3 shafts of columns from the arcade; against the left-hand wall are a column and foliated capital of the upper loggia on the Piazzetta side corresponding to the tondo with Venice in the form of Justice on the facade. There are pieces of stonework from the tracery of the upper loggia with the capitals, ogival arches and intricately interweaving quatrefoils; above this is the cornice with rosettes. In the spandrels between the arches, one can see the lion heads that run all the way along both Gothic sides of the Palace.

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Room VI

Room VI contains 26 capitals from the arches of the loggias on the first floor of the Palace, carved by various masons in the 14th and 15th centuries. Both for the subjects represented and for decorative reasons, the capitals can be divided into homogeneous groups: certain typologies recur, with human faces emerging from leaves, figures of children and musicians, faces of different races, animals etc. Many capitals present traces of protective patinas and polychromy. Along the walls are arranged various stone fragments from the facades: pinnacles and arches of the coping; the balustrade with cylindrical columns; elements of the arches of the upper loggia and capitals. These features too were removed as damaged or precarious and were replaced by copies. Against the far wall is the architrave of the Porta della Carta bearing an inscription with the name of the mason and designer, Bartolomeo Bon, who created this important work together with his father Giovanni. The bust is of Doge Cristoforo Moro (1462-1471), a fragment of the group with the Doge and Lion of St. Mark that used to occupy the niche opposite the Giants' Staircase. The head is all that remains of the group with Doge Francesco Foscari (1423-1457) kneeling before the Lion of St. Mark that was placed over the Porta della Carta: both these sculptures were demolished, like many other signs of the aristocratic regime, after the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797.

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PRISONS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE INSTITUTIONAL ROOMS

3 Loggias

4 Golden stair, first flight

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Institutional Rooms

35 The Chamber of Censors
36 The Chamber of the State Advocacies
37 The "Scrigno" Room
38 The Chamber of the Navy Captains
33 The Bridge of sights

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Prisons

32 Prisons Entrance
33 The Bridge of sights
34 Prisonsi

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Management and Offices

Prisons

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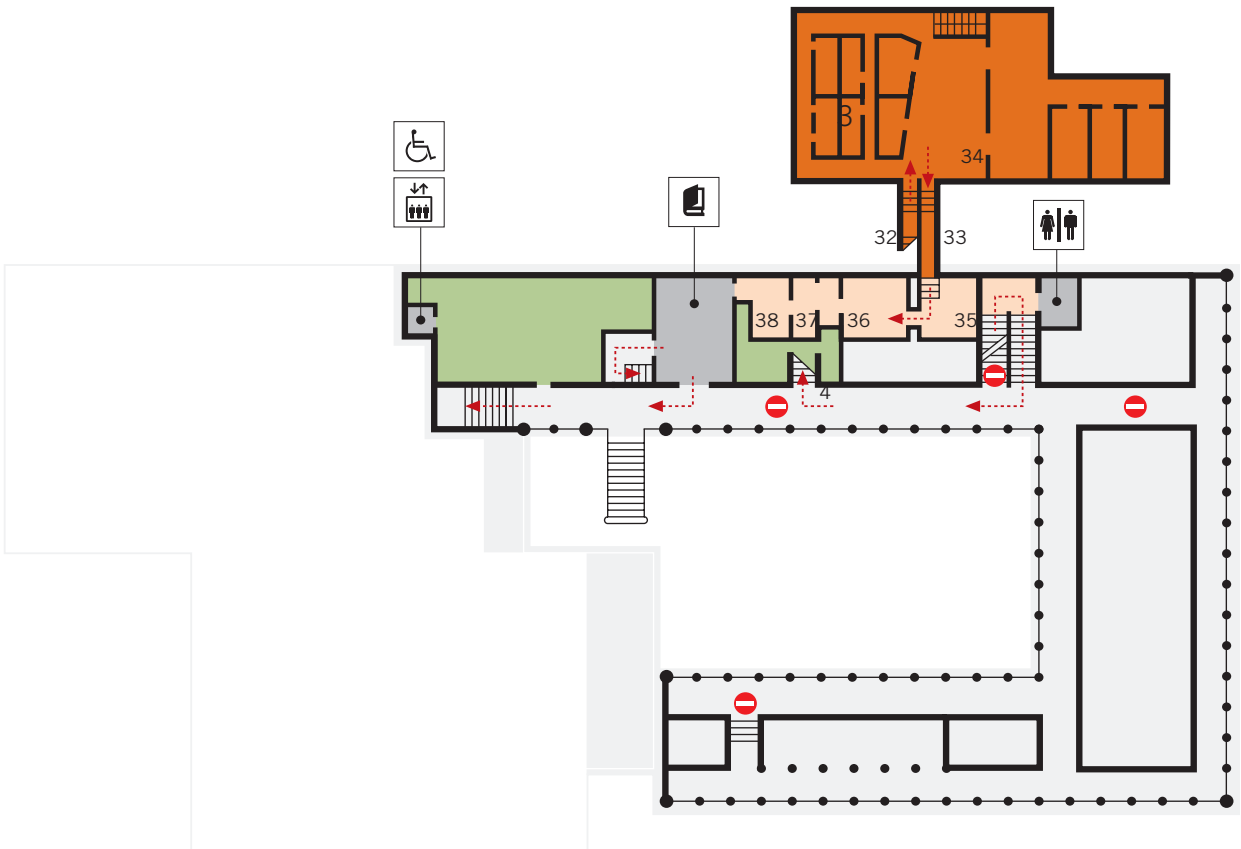
The Bridge of Sighs

This corridor leads over the Bridge of Sighs, built in 1614 to link the Doge's Palace to the structure intended to house the New Prisons. Enclosed and covered on all sides, the bridge contains two separate corridors that run next to each other. That which visitors use today linked the Prisons to the chambers of the Magistrato alle Leggi e la Quarantia Criminal; the other linked the prisons to the State Advocacy rooms and the Parlatorio. Both corridors are linked to the service staircase that leads from the ground floor cells of the Pozzi to the roof cells of the Piombi. The famous name of the bridge dates from the Romantic period and was supposed to refer to the sighs of prisoners who, passing from the courtroom to the cell in which they would serve their sentence, took a last look at freedom as they glimpsed the lagoon and San Giorgio through the small windows.

The New Prisons

Seat of all government and judiciary functions within the Republic, the Doge's Palace also housed prisons. In the mid-16th century it was decided to build a new structure on the other side of the canal to the side of the palace which would house prisons and the chambers of the magistrates known as the Notte al Criminal. Ultimately linked to the palace by the Bridge of Sighs, the building was intended to improve the conditions for prisoners with larger and more light-filled and airy cells. However, certain sections of the new prisons fall short of this aim, particularly those laid out with passageways on all sides and those cells which give onto the inner courtyard of the building. In keeping with previous traditions, each cell was lined with overlapping planks of larch that were nailed in place.



1.
INSTITUTIONAL ROOMS

Doge's Appartments

5 The Scarlet Room
6 The Shield Room
7 Grimani Room
8 Erizzo Room
9 The Stucco Room
10 The Philosophers Room
11 Corner Room
12 The Portraits Room
13 The Equerries Room
14 The Golden Stair,

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Institutional Rooms

24 Liagò
25 The Chamber of Quarantia Civil Vecchia
26 The Guariento Room
27 The Chamber of the Great Council
28 The Chamber of the Scrutinio
29 The Chamber of Quarantia Criminal
30 The Cuoi Room
31 The Chamber of the Magistrato alle Leggii

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Prisons (entrance)

The tour through the various Institutional Chambers in the Palace begins in the Square Atrium. These were the rooms which housed the organs of a political and judicial administrative which was the envy of Europe for centuries, due not only to its immutability (in spite of the absence of a written constitution) but also to its ability to resist the passage of time and still maintain social peace and harmony.

Liagò

In Venetian dialect liagò means a terrace or balcony enclosed by glass. This particular example was a sort of corridor and meeting-place for patrician members of the Great Council in the intervals between their discussions of government business. The ceiling of painted and gilded beams dates from mid 16th century, while the paintings on the walls are from the 17th and 18th century. The gallery also contains three important works of sculpture: Adam, Eve and The Shield-Bearer. These are the originals sculpted between 1462 and 1471 by Antonio Rizzo to adorn the façades of the Foscari Gateway in the courtyard of the palace.

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The Chamber of Quarantia Civil Vecchia

The Council of Forty (Quarantia) seems to have been set up by the Great Council at the end of the 12th century and was the highest appeal court in the Republic. Originally a single forty-man council which wielded substantial political and legislative power, the Quarantia was during the course of the 15th century divided into 3 separate Councils: the Quarantia Criminal (for sentences in what we would call criminal law); the Quarantia Civil Vecchia (for civil actions within Venice) and the Quarantia Civil Nuovo (for civil actions within the Republic's mainland territories). This room was restored in the 17th century; the fresco fragment to the right of the entrance is the only remnant of the original decor. The paintings hanging here date from the 17th century as well.

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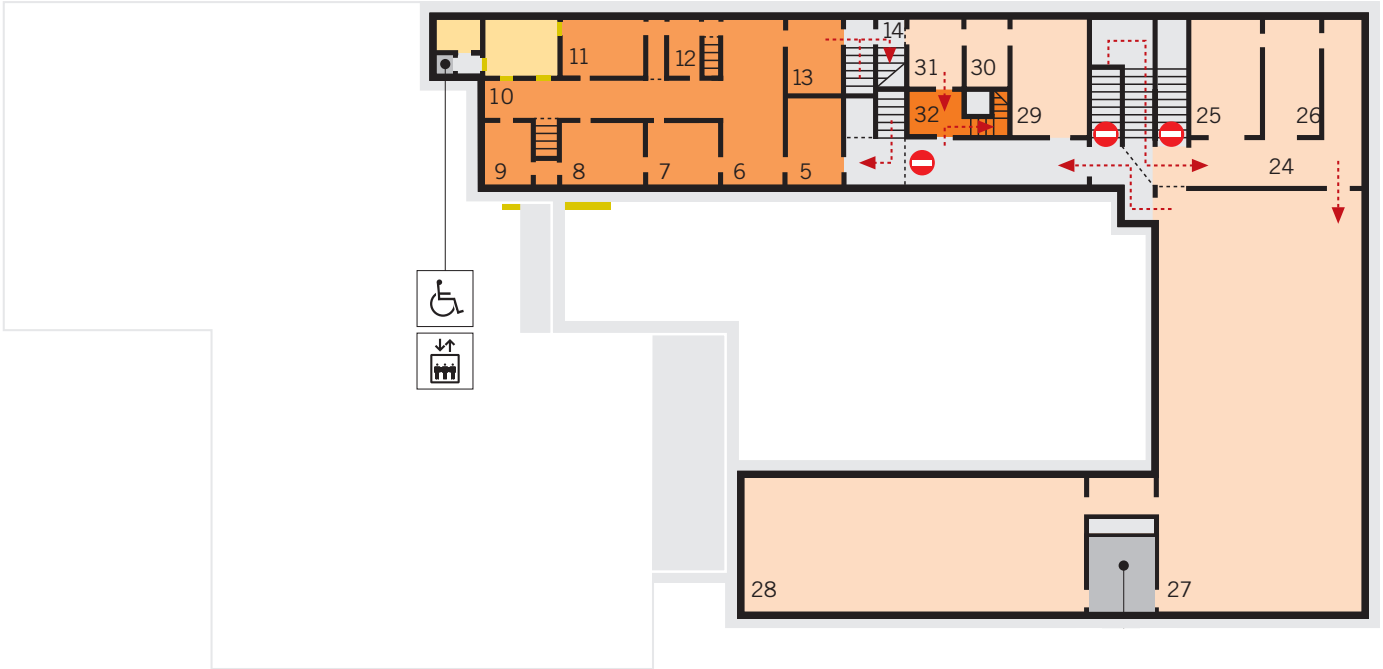
The Guariento Room

The first name is due to the fact that this room was once linked to the Armory by a staircase, and the second name to the fact that it now houses a fresco painted for the Hall of the Great Council by the Paduan artist Guariento around 1365. Almost completely destroyed in the 1577 fire, the remains of that fresco were, in 1903, rediscovered under the large



The Chamber of the Scrutionio

The Chamber of the Great Council

canvas *Il Paradiso* which Tintoretto was commissioned to paint for the same wall. Guariento's fresco, too, depicts Paradise. In the center there is an enthroned Virgin being crowned by Christ, while, to far left and right, are aedicule like those from a portico church façade, under which one can see the figures of the Annunciation: the Angel Gabriel on the left, and the Virgin Mary on the right. Angels playing musical instruments surround the central figures and the Evangelists are shown before the throne; saints, prophets and martyrs are depicted alongside in individual stalls with gothic tracery. The heat of the fire reduced the surviving fragments to a near monochrome, while in places where the plaster has fallen, one can see the red traces of the preliminary drawing. What we have now gives a scarcely adequate idea of what must have been a sumptuous work, glittering with color and gilding.

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The Chamber of the Great Council

Restructured in the 14th century, the Chamber was decorated with a fresco by Guariento and later with works by the most famous artists of the period, including Gentile da Fabriano, Pisanello, Alvise Vivarini, Carpaccio, Bellini, Pordenone and Titian. 53 meters long and 25 meters wide, this is not only the largest and most majestic chamber in the Doge's Palace, but also one of the largest rooms in Europe. Here, meetings of the Great Council were held, the most important political body in the Republic. A very ancient institution, this Council was made up of all the male members of patrician Venetian families over 25 years old, irrespective of their individual status, merits or wealth. This was why, in spite of the restrictions in its powers that the Senate introduced over the centuries, the Great Council continued to be seen as bastion of republican equality. The Council had the right to call to account all the other authorities and bodies of the State when it seemed that their powers were getting excessive and needed to be trimmed. The 1,200 to 2,000 noblemen who sat in the Council always considered themselves guardians of the laws that were the basis of all the other authorities within the State. This room also housed the first phases in the election of a new Doge, which in the later stages would pass into the Sala dello Scrutinio. These voting procedures were extremely long and complex in order to frustrate any attempts of cheating. Every Sunday, when the bells of St. Mark's rang, the Council members would gather in the hall with the Doge presiding at the center of the podium and his counselors occupying double rows of seats that ran the entire length of the room. Soon after work on the new hall had been completed, the 1577 fire damaged not only this Chamber but also the Sala dello Scrutinio. The structural damage was soon restored, respecting the original layout, and all works were finished within few years, ending in 1579-80. The decoration of the restored structure involved artists such as Veronese, Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto, and Palma il Giovane. The walls were decorated with episodes of the Venetian history, with particular reference to the city's relations with the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, while the ceiling was decorated with the Virtues and individual examples of Venetian heroism, and a central panel containing an allegorical glorification of the Republic. Facing each other in groups of six, the twelve wall paintings depict acts of valor or incidents of war that had occurred during the city's history. Immediately below the ceiling runs a frieze with portraits of the first 76 doges (the portraits of the others are to be found in the Sala dello Scrutinio); commissioned from Jacopo Tintoretto, most of these paintings are in fact the work of his son, Domenico. Each Doge holds a scroll bearing a reference to his most important achievements, while Doge Marin Faliero, who attempted a coup d'état in 1355, is represented simply by a black cloth (a traitor to the Republic, he was not only condemned to death but also to damnatio memoriae, the total eradication of his memory and name). One of the long walls, behind the Doge's throne, is occupied by the longest canvas painting in the world, *the Paradiso*, which Jacopo Tintoretto and workshop produced between 1588 and 1592 to replace the Guariento fresco that had been damaged in the fire.

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The Chamber of the Scrutinio

This immense room is in the wing of the Doge's Palace built between the 1520s and 1540s during the dogate of Francesco Foscari (1423-57). It was initially intended to house the precious manuscripts left to the Republic by Petrarch and Bessarione (1468); indeed, it was originally known as the Library. In 1532, it was decided that the Chamber should also hold the electoral counting and/or deliberations that assiduously marked the rhythm of Venetian politics, based on an assembly system whose epicenter was the nearby Great Council Chamber. After the construction of Sansovino's Library though, this room was used solely for elections, starting with the most important, that of the Doge. The present decorations date from between 1578 and 1615, after the 1577 fire. The rich ceiling was designed by the painter-cartographer Cristoforo Sorte.
Episodes of military history in the various compartments glorify the exploits of the Venetians, with particular emphasis on the conquest of the maritime empire; the only exception being the last oval, recording the taking of Padua in 1405. The walls recount battles won between 809 and 1656.
The painting on the eastern side showing *The Battle of Lepanto* by Andrea Vicentino, of 1571, is particularly evocative. It is framed by other battle scenes: *the Venetian Victory over the Turks at the Dardanelles* by Pietro Liberi, painted between 1660 and 1665, and *the Venetian Victory over the Turks in Albania* by Pietro Bellotti, of 1663.

The Guariento Room

The Chamber of Quarantia Criminal

The western wall also retells military stories, including *The Conquest of Tyre* by Antonio Aliense, of 1590 ca. and *the Venetian Naval Victory over the Egyptians at Jaffa*, by Sante Peranda, painted between 1598 and 1605.

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The Chamber of Quarantia Criminal or the Cuoi room

Housing one of the three Councils of Forty, the highest appeal courts in the Venetian Republic, this is another room used in the administration of justice. The Quarantia Criminal was set up in the 15th century and, as the name suggests, dealt with cases of criminal law. It was a very important body as its members, who were part of the Senate as well, also had legislative powers. The wooden stalls date from the 17th century. The room beyond this served as an archive, and was presumably lined with shelves and cupboards.

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The Chamber of the Magistrato alle Leggi

This chamber housed the Magistratura dei Conservatori ed esecutori delle leggi e ordini degli uffici di San Marco e di Rialto. Created in 1553, this authority was headed by 3 of the city's patricians and was responsible for making sure the regulations concerning the practice of law were observed. In a mercantile city such as Venice, the courts were of enormous importance. And the administration of justice in the city was made all the more special by the fact that it was not based on Imperial, Common or Roman law but on a legal system that was peculiar to Venice. This Chamber now houses the extraordinary Hieronymus Bosch triptych that Cardinal Domenic Grimani left to the Republic in 1523 – a work that for many years hung in the Chamber of the Three Heads of the Council of Ten (which today can only be visited as part of the Secret Itineraries Tour). The pictures have all the characteristic features of Bosch's painting: painstaking rendition of details and landscapes; delight in anecdote; disturbing and mysterious symbols, and that playful satirical tone with which the artist denounces the folly of humanity and the demonic influence at work in human affairs. Dealing with such themes as temptation, sin, redemption, punishment and vices, Bosch's work is one of the greatest expressions of the obsessive moral concerns behind that new mysticism which emerged as the Renaissance first began to make itself felt in the medieval world of Northern Europe – a period when culture was still heavily influenced by mystical yearnings, superstitions and moral severity.

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1.
THE DOGE'S APPARTMENTS

A series of temporary exhibitions are held here

The Shield Room

The Grimani Room

The Doge's rooms were always located in this wing of the Palace, between the Rio della Canonica – the water entrance to the building – and the present-day Golden Staircase and the apse of the Basilica of Saint Mark, which was the ducal chapel. The entire area was destroyed in a fire in 1483 and then rebuilt in the Renaissance style. The restructuring of the so-called Doge's Apartment goes back to this period and includes the rooms, now part of the itinerary in the museum, which stand out with their engraved wooden ceilings, monumental marble chimneys with lavish, delicate carved decoration, painting friezes and stuccoes. Until the seventeenth century, the rooms that were used for the Doge's private life were mostly located in the mezzanines above and below the main floor. The core of the apartment formed a prestigious, though not particularly large, residence. It was therefore not at all uncommon that prior to his election the Doge had had a much larger house with more lavish services than the one foreseen by the Republic, almost as if the intention was to emphasise that although he was the symbol of the State, he was, first and foremost, its first servant.
In the private apartments proper, the Doge could set aside the trappings of office to retire at the end of the day and dine with members of his family amidst furnishings that he had brought from his own house and which, at his death, would be promptly removed by his heirs, to make way for the property of the Doge elect).
Today the visitable rooms have technological panels and systems that allow a more dynamic use for exhibitions whilst highlighting their original decorations. This meant it was possible to create an itinerary that could basically concentrate on the historical and iconographical development of the figure of the doge and the main symbolic portrayals of the city, with a series of works from the vast collections of the Venetian museums – paintings, sculptures, illuminated codices, coins, medals, some of which were restored for the occasion and on display for the very first time. These include winged lions, metaphores of justice and good government, images of 'real' doges and sometimes their wives, doges idealised according to specific repertoires, portrayals of the city and its territories until the fall of the Republic in 1797.
This is an itinerary that helps the visitor to understand the extent and wealth of the iconographic apparatus of the other large institutional rooms in the palace, where these symbols are to be found in a variety of forms.

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The Scarlet Room

Once used as an ante-chamber for the Doge's councillors, its name might come from the colour of their robes.
The carved ceiling is part of the original decor; probably designed and produced by Biagio and Pietro da Faenza, bearing the coat-of-arms of Andrea Gritti (Doge from 1523 to 1538). Characterised by fine carvings of cornucopia, acanthus leaves and putto heads, the fireplace is the work of the workshop of Antonio and Tullio Lombardo in the early sixteenth century. The Barbarigo (doges from 1485 to 1501) coat-of-arms can be seen on the hood. The marble relief above the entrance door with Leonardo Loredan (doge from 1501 to 1521) praying is also by the Lombardo circle.

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The Shield Room

The name of this hall comes from the fact that the coat-of-arms (on a shield) of the reigning Doge was exhibited here whilst he granted audiences and received guests. The coat-of-arms currently on display is that of Ludovico Manin, the Doge reigning when the Republic fell in 1797.
This is the largest and most airy room in the Doge's apartments, and runs the entire width of this wing of the Palace, from the canal to the courtyard; in a sense it is the continuation at right angles of the Philosophers' Hall, forming that 'T' shape which was a typical feature of the most traditional Venetian residences.
The room is decorated with large geographical maps that portray the domains of the Republic, areas to which they laid claim, or distant lands that had been explored or discovered by Venetians. The original version of the maps adorning the two main walls is datable to the sixteenth century. They were re-worked in 1762 by the cartographer and polymath Francesco Rossellini, who was commissioned by the scholar-doge Marco Toscanini to add other paintings that described the voyages of the most famous Venetian explorers: Nicola and Antonio Zen, who went as far as Greenland; Petro Queering, who was shipwrecked in the fjords of Norway, and Advise ad Most, who discovered the Cape Verde Islands. The two revolving globes in the centre of the hall date from the same period; one shows the sphere of the heavens, the other the surface of the Earth.

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Grimani Room

The carved ceiling in this room is datable to the Doges Barbarigo (1485/1501), but the late sixteenth-century coat-of-arms in the centre is that of the Grimani family, who gave three doges to the Republic, after whom the room is named. Of great note is the fireplace, which can be attributed to the workshop of the Lombardo family and is decorated with the Barbarigo coat-of-arms and an elegant decorative band with the lion of Saint Mark surrounded by divinities and marine figures; the stucco-work over the coping dates from the period of Doge Pasquale Cicogna (1585-1595). Completed at the end of the 1500s under the rule of Doge Marino Grimani, on the frieze below the ceiling are allegorical figures and diverse personages including Venice and Saint Mark and the lion.

The Erizzo Room

The Philosophers Room

Erizzo Room

Named after Francesco Erizzo, doge from 1631 to 1646, as in the other rooms there is a carved gilded ceiling with a blue background and a Lombardy-school fireplace that go back to the late fifteenth century. The Erizzo coat-of-arms between Venus and Vulcan surmounting the hood is of a later date. A frieze along the walls with putti and symbols of war alludes to the undertakings of Doge Erizzo, who was elected especially thanks to his military feats.

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The Stucco Room

The stucco-work that adorns the vault and lunettes goes back to the period of Doge Marino Grimani (1595-1605) while the coat-of-arms on the fireplace surmounted by allegorical figures goes back to Doge Antonio Priuli (1617-1623). It was another Grimani, Pietro (1741-1752), who commissioned the stucco decorations on the walls carried, including the frames for the paintings that have been displayed here ever since; they depict various episodes in the life of Christ, a portrait of the king of France, Henry III, perhaps by Jacopo Tintoretto; the king was given a lavish reception in Venice in 1574 on his way from Poland to France when he was returning to take his place on the thrown that had been left vacant by his brother Charles IX. Two terrible fires broke out in the Doge's Palace, one in that year and another three years later. The first caused serious damage to the rooms of the Senate, College and Council of the Ten on the second floor of the east wing; the second in 1577 destroyed the room of the Great Council. It was therefore necessary to restore the rooms straight away and we can still admire those furnishings today. Sebastiano Venier was Doge in 1577, having been elected for his outstanding feats in war; in fact, just a few years earlier in 1571, he had led the Venetian fleet in the victorious battle of Lepanto against the Turks.

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The Philosophers room

Named after the twelve images of ancient philosophers who were placed here in the eighteenth century but later replaced by allegories and portraits of doges, this room is directly connected to the Shield Room. With one's back to the Shield Room, in the left wall of this chamber one can see a small doorway that led to a staircase which enabled the Doge to go rapidly from his own apartments to the Halls on the upper floors, where the meetings of the Senate and the Full Council were held.

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The Vault Room

Probably used for private functions, this room is one of the few without a fireplace or other original furnishing. In the seventeenth century the doge's apartment was expanded and, from the Stucco Room we have just left, a pensile corridor was created (demolished in the nineteenth century) as a connection with the nearby Saint Mark's Presbytery (now the seat of the Venetian Patriarch's palace). Here there was room for a spacious banquet hall and a series of rooms for the doge, his family and servants.

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The Audience Room

This room might have been one of the three in this area used for audiences. Of particular note is the Carrara marble fireplace, carved with winged putti on dolphins and the lion of Saint Mark in the centre, and the carved wooden frieze below the ceiling; both date back to the end of the fifteenth century.

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The Ante-Audience Room

As in the previous room, the function of this room is not known and it certainly changed over the years. Once again, the magnificent fireplace is the original.

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The Equerries Room

This was originally the room that led to the doge's apartment. The palace equerries were appointed for life by the Doge himself, and eight of them had to be here at his disposal at any time. Their duties ranged from serving as antechamber attendants to bearing the symbols of the Doge in public processions. The room no longer has its original furnishings and the most important features here now are the two doorways (end 15th cent.): one leading into the Shield Room and the other to the Golden Staircase.

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2.
INSTITUTIONAL ROOMS

Sale Istituzionali

15 The Square Atrium
16 The Four Doors Room
17 Antechamber to the Hall of the Full Council
18 The Council Chamber
19 The Senate Chamber
20 The Chamber of the Council of Ten
21 The Compass Room

—

Armoury

22 Armoury
23 The Censors Room

—

Secret Itineraries

a Tooms of the Ducal Notary and of the Deputato and, upstairs, of the Segretario alle Voci and of the Grate Chancellor
b Chamber of the Three Head Magistrates
c Chamber of the Inquisitors

The Square Atrium

The room served largely as a waiting room, the antechamber to various halls. The decoration dates from the 16th century, during the period of Doge Girolamo Priùli, who appears in Tintoretto's ceiling painting with the symbols of his office, accompanied by allegories of Justice and Peace. The four corner scenes, probably by Tintoretto's workshop, comprise biblical stories – perhaps an allusion to the virtues of the Doge – and allegories of the four seasons. The celebratory decor of the room was completed by four paintings of mythological scenes, which now hang in the antechamber to the Hall of the Full Council. Their place here has been taken by Girolamo Bassano's The Angel appearing to the Shepherds and other biblical scenes that are, with reservations, attributed to Veronese.

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The Four Doors Room

This room was the formal antechamber to the more important rooms in the palace, and the doors which give it its name are ornately framed in precious eastern marbles; each is surmounted by an allegorical sculptural group that refers to the virtues which should inspire those who took on the government responsibilities. The 1574 fire in this area damaged this room and those immediately after severely, but fortunately with no structural damage. The present decor is a work by Antonio da Ponte and design by Andrea Palladio and Antonio Rusconi. The coffered ceiling – with stucco decoration by Giovanni Cambi, known as Bombarda – contains frescoes of mythological subjects and of the cities and regions under Venetian dominion. Painted by Jacopo Tintoretto from 1578 onwards, this decorative scheme was designed to show a close link between Venice's foundation, its independence, and the historical mission of the Venetian aristocracy – a program of self-celebration that could already be seen in the Golden Staircase. Amongst the paintings on the walls, one that stands out is Titian's portrait of Doge Antonio Grimani (1521-1523) kneeling before Faith. On the easel stands a famous work by Tiepolo; painted between 1756 and 1758, it shows Venice receiving the gifts of the sea from Neptune.

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Antechamber to the Hall of the Full Council

Formal antechamber where foreign ambassadors and delegations waited to be received by the Full Council, which was delegated by the Senate to deal with foreign affairs. This room was restored after the 1574 fire and so was its decor, with stucco-works and ceiling frescoes, similar to what one finds in the Hall of Four Doors. The central fresco by Veronese shows Venice distributing honors and rewards. The top of the walls is decorated with a fine frieze and other sumptuous fittings, including the fireplace between the windows and the fine doorway leading into the Hall of the Full Council, whose Corinthian columns bear a pediment surmounted by a marble sculpture showing the female figure of Venice resting on a lion and accompanied by allegories of Glory and Concord. Next to the doorways are four canvases that Jacopo Tintoretto painted for the Square Atrium, but which were brought here in 1716 to replace the original leather wall paneling. Each of the mythological scenes depicted is also an allegory of the Republic's government. The Antechamber contains other famous works, including Paolo Veronese's *The Rape of Europe*.

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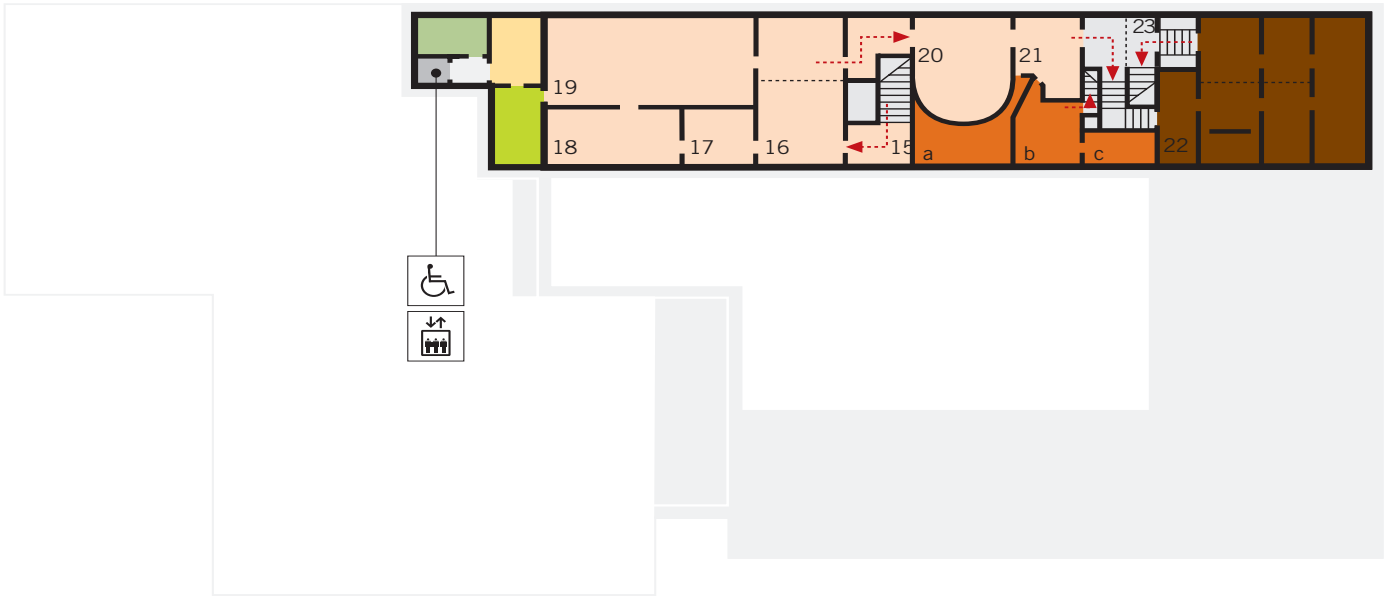
The Council Chamber

The Full Council which met in this room was comprised of two separate and independent organs of power, the Savi and the Signoria. The former was in its turn divided into the Savi del Consiglio, who



The Council Chamber

Senate Chamber

concerned themselves mainly with foreign policy, the Savi di Terraferma, who were responsible for matters linked with Venice's empire in mainland Italy; and the Savi agli Ordini, who dealt with maritime issues. The Signoria was made up of the three Heads of the Councils of Forty and members of the Minor Council, composed of the Doge and six councilors, one for each district into which the city of Venice is divided. The Full Council was mainly responsible for organizing and coordinating the work of the Senate, reading dispatches from ambassadors and city governors, receiving foreign delegations and promoting other political and legislative activity. Alongside these shared functions, each body had their own particular mandates, which made this body a sort of "guiding intelligence" behind the work of the Senate, especially in foreign affairs. The decor was designed by Andrea Palladio to replace that destroyed in the 1574 fire; the wood paneling of the walls and end tribune and the carved ceiling are the work of Francesco Bello and Andrea da Faenza. The splendid paintings set into that ceiling were commissioned from Veronese, who completed them between 1575 and 1578. This ceiling is one of the artist's masterpieces and celebrates the Good Government of the Republic, together with the Faith on which it rests and the Virtues that guide and strengthen it. The first rectangular panel shows the St. Mark's bell-tower behind the figures of Mars and Neptune, Lords of War and Sea respectively. The central panel shows the *Triumph of Faith*, and the rectangular panel closest to the tribune, *Venice with Justice and Peace*. Around there are some eight smaller, T- or L-shaped panels that depict the virtues of government. Veronese again produces the large canvas over the tribune in celebration of the Christian fleet's victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571 – a victory to which Venice made an essential contribution. The other paintings are by Tintoretto and show various Doges with the Christ, the Virgin and saints.

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Senate Chamber

This hall was also known as the Sala dei Pregadi, because the Doge asked the members of the Senate to take part in the meetings held here. The Senate which met in this chamber was one of the oldest public institutions in Venice; it had first been founded in the 13th century and then gradually evolved over time, until by the 16th century it was the body mainly responsible for overseeing political and financial affairs in such areas as manufacturing industries, trade and foreign policy. In effect, it was a more limited sub-committee of the Great Council, and its members were generally drawn from the wealthiest Venetian families. The refurbishment after the 1574 fire took place during the 1580s, and once the new ceiling had been completed work started on the pictorial decoration, which seems to have been finished by 1595. In the works produced for this room by Tintoretto, Christ is clearly the predominant figure; perhaps this is a reference to the Senate 'conclave' which elected the Doge, who was then seen as being under the protection of the Son of God. The room also contains four paintings by Jacopo Palma il Giovane, which are linked with specific events of the Venetian history.

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The Chamber of the Council of Ten

The Council of Ten was set up after a conspiracy in 1310, when Bajamonte Tiepolo and other noblemen tried to overthrow the institutions of the State. Initially meant as a provisional body to try those conspirators, it's one of those many examples of Venetian institutions that were intended to be temporary but ended up becoming permanent. Its authority covered all sectors of public life and this power gave rise to the fame of the Council as a ruthless, all-seeing tribunal at the service of the ruling oligarchy, a court whose sentences were handed down rapidly after hearings held in secret. The assembly was made up of ten members chosen from the Senate and elected by the Great Council. These ten sat in council with the Doge and his six counselors, which accounts for the 17 semicircular outlines that one can still see in the chamber. The decoration of the ceiling was the work of Gian Battista Ponchino, with the assistance of a young Veronese and Gian Battista Zelotti. Carved and gilded, the ceiling is divided into 25 compartments decorated with images of divinities and allegories intended to illustrate the power of the Council of Ten that was responsible for punishing the guilty and freeing the innocent. Veronese's paintings – from that of the old oriental figure to that showing Juno scattering her gifts on Venice – are particularly famous. The oval painting in the center, depicting Jove descending from the clouds to hurl thunderbolts at Vice, is however a copy of the original Veronese which Napoleon took to the Louvre.

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The Compass Room

This is the first room on this floor dedicated to the administration of justice; its name comes from the large wooden compass surmounted by a statue of Justice. This room was the antechamber for those who had been summoned by these powerful magistrates. It has a magnificent decor to underline the solemnity of the Republic's legal machinery. The decor dates from the 16th century, and once again it was Veronese who was commissioned to decorate the ceiling. Completed in 1554, the works he produced are all intended to exalt the "good government" of the Venetian Republic; the central panel, with St. Mark descending to crown the three Theological Virtues, is a copy of the original, now in the Louvre. Sansovino designed the large fireplace in 1553-54. Within the palace, all rooms that served in the exercise of justice were linked vertically.

2.

INSTITUTIONAL ROOMS/ THE LOGGIA FLOOR

Sale Istituzionali

15 The Square Atrium
16 The Four Doors Room
17 Antechamber to the Hall of the Full Council
18 The Council Chamber
19 The Senate Chamber
20 The Chamber of the Council of Ten
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—

Armoury

22 Armoury
23 The Censors Room

—

Secret Itineraries

a Tooms of the Ducal Notary and of the Deputato and, upstairs, of the Segretario alle Voci and of the Grate Chancellor
b Chamber of the Three Head Magistrates
c Chamber of the Inquisitors

The Chamber of Censors

The State Censors were set up in 1517 by Marco Giovanni di Giovanni, a cousin of Doge Andrea Gritti (1523-1538) and nephew of the great Francesco Foscari. The title and duties of the Censors resulted from the cultural and political upheavals that are associated with Humanism. In fact, the Censors were not judges as such, but more like moral consultants, being their main task the repression of electoral fraud and the protection of the State's public institutions. On the walls hang a number of Domenico Tintoretto's portraits of these magistrates, and below the armorial bearings of some of those who held the position.

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The Chamber of the State Advocacies

This particular State Advocacy department dates from the time when Venice was a commune (12th century). The 3 members, the Avogadori, were the figures who safeguarded the very principle of legality, making sure that the laws were applied correctly. Though they never enjoyed the status and power of the Doge and the Council of Ten, the Avogadori remained one of the most prestigious authorities in Venice right up to the fall of the Republic. They were also responsible for preserving the integrity of the city's patrician class, verifying the legitimacy of marriages and births inscribed in the Golden Book. The room is decorated with paintings representing some of the Avogadori venerating the Virgin, the Christ and various saints.

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The "Scrigno" Room

The Venetian nobility as a caste came into existence because of the "closure" of admissions to the Great Council in 1297; however, it was only in the 16th century that formal measures were taken to introduce restrictions that protected the status of that aristocracy: marriages between nobles and commoners were forbidden and greater controls were set up to check the validity of aristocratic titles. There was also a Silver Book, which registered all those families that not only had the requisites of "civilization" and "honor", but could also show that they were of ancient Venetian origin; such families furnished the manpower for the State bureaucracy – and particularly, the chancellery within the Doge's Palace itself. The Golden and Silver Books were kept in a chest in this room, inside a cupboard that also contained all the documents proving the legitimacy of claims to be inscribed therein. The cupboard which one sees here nowadays extends around three sides of a wall niche; lacquered in white with gilded decorations, it dates from the 18th century.

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The Chamber of the Navy Captains

Made up of 20 members from the Senate and the Great Council, the Milizia da Mar, first set up in the mid 16th century, was responsible for recruiting crews necessary for Venice's war galleys. Contrary to what one might expect, the bulk of these crews were made up of paid oarsman drawn from the Venetian manufacturing industries. Another similar body, entitled the Provveditori all'Armar, was responsible for the actual fitting and supplying of the fleet. The furnishings are from the 16th century, while the wall torches date from the 18th century. The next room, now the bookshop, used to house the Lower Chancellery of Palazzo Ducale.

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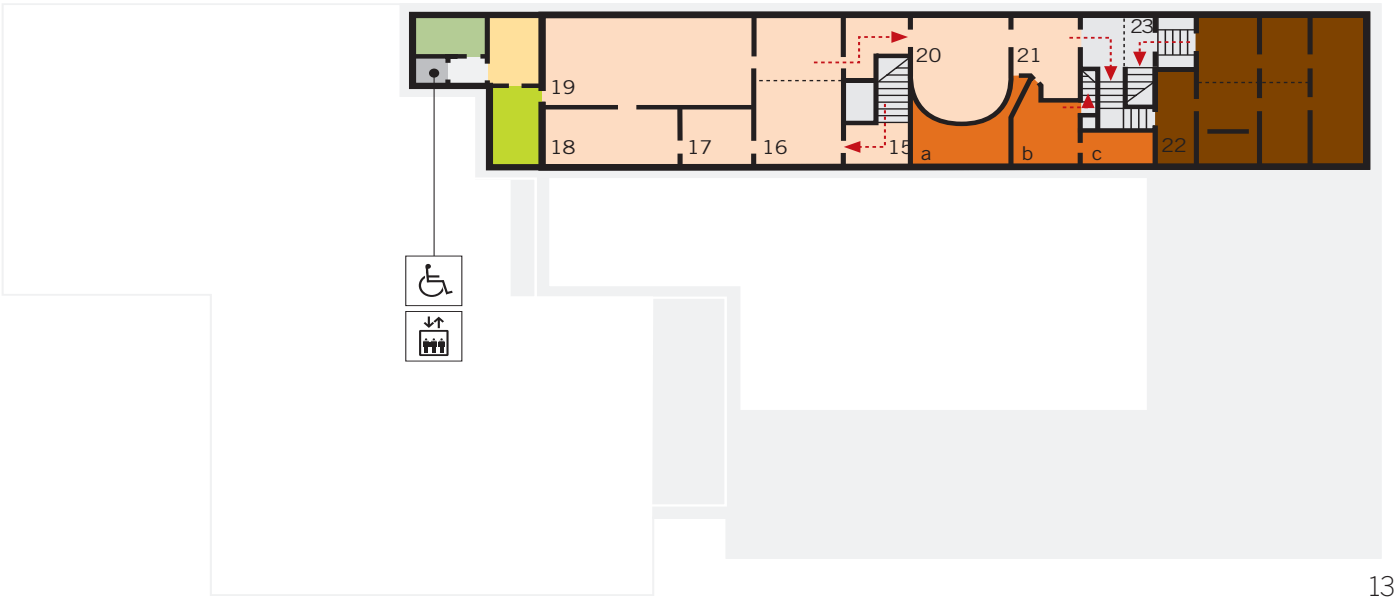

2.
ARMOURY

Armoury, Room II

A detail of one of the showcases in room II containing swords and a crownpiece

The rooms of the Armoury contain a valuable historical collection of weapons and armaments from several sources. The core of the collection is already documented as existing in the 14th century; and at the time of the Republic the Armoury, under the control of the Council of Ten, was stocked with weapons that would be readily available for the Palace's guards. On particularly delicate or important occasions, these guards might be joined by the arsenalotti, the highly-trained workforce from the shipyards of the Arsenale (e.g. when a Doge died, all the gates to the Palace were sealed and placed under the guard of the arsenalotti). Comprising various valuable pieces, the collection of arms was partially dispersed after the fall of the Republic, but it still contains over 2000 exhibits. These include very famous examples of 15th and 16th century suits of armour, along with swords, halberds, quivers and crossbows. These often bear the inscribed or painted monogram CX – for "Council of Ten" – which also appears on the door jambs; further evidence of the might of the Council. The Turkish pieces are also interesting; comprising weapons, standards and ships' lanterns, these were taken from the enemy during battle. Other pieces in the collection include: extraordinary examples of 16th and 17th century firearms; implements of torture; a chastity belt; and a series of small but lethal weapons that were prohibited by law.

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Room I

This first room is known as the Gattamellata Room as it contains a finely-chased suit of armour which once belonged to the condottiere Erasmo da Narni, who was nicknamed Il Gattamelata. There is also a series of other, heavy and light, 16th century suits of armour for horsemen and foot soldiers, as well as other suits used in tournaments. One curiosity is the miniature suit of armour founded on the battlefield at Marignano in 1515, which may have been for a child or a dwarf. The room also contains a variety of swords from various periods and a number of cross-bows, with their typical quivers in painted or embossed leather. The ship's lamps decorated at the top with a crescent-moon motif were seized in battle from Turkish ships

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Room II

The main feature here is another Turkish artefact: the triangular standard taken at the famous Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The borders are embroidered with verses from the Koran, whilst the inscription in the centre renders homage to Allah and his prophet Mohammed. There is also a noteworthy suit of armour which Henri IV of France donated to the Republic in 1604. Other items in this room are 15th century armoured protection for horses' heads; some large swords and two richly-decorated halberds.

Room III

This takes its name from the bust of Francesco Morosini in a niche at the end of the room. A Venetian admiral, Morosini became supreme commander of the Venetian fleet during the 1684-1688 war against the Turks, and his re-conquest of the Peloponnese would lead to him being known as Il Peloponnesiaco. Elected Doge in 1688, Morosini's military victories were such that he was the only person in the entire history of the Venetian Republic to be honoured with a public monument whilst still alive. This room contains numerous swords, halberds, crossbows and quivers that are either inscribed or painted with the letters CX, initials which also appear on the doorjambs – all confirming the extensive power of the Council of X. Another noteworthy piece is the culverin, a small finely-decorated cannon dating from the middle of the 16th century. The twenty-barrel harquebus, with 10 long and 10 short barrels, may be considered a predecessor of the modern machine-gun.

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Room IV

This room contains a extraordinary examples of 16th and 17th century firearms. There is also a lethal "devil's chest" that fired off four hidden pistols when opened, and a poisoned arrow. The collection includes some instruments of torture as well, together with a chastity belt and some weapons that were forbidden because they were so small they could be hidden about the person (all these once belonged to the Carrara family of Padua, which Venice conquered in 1405).

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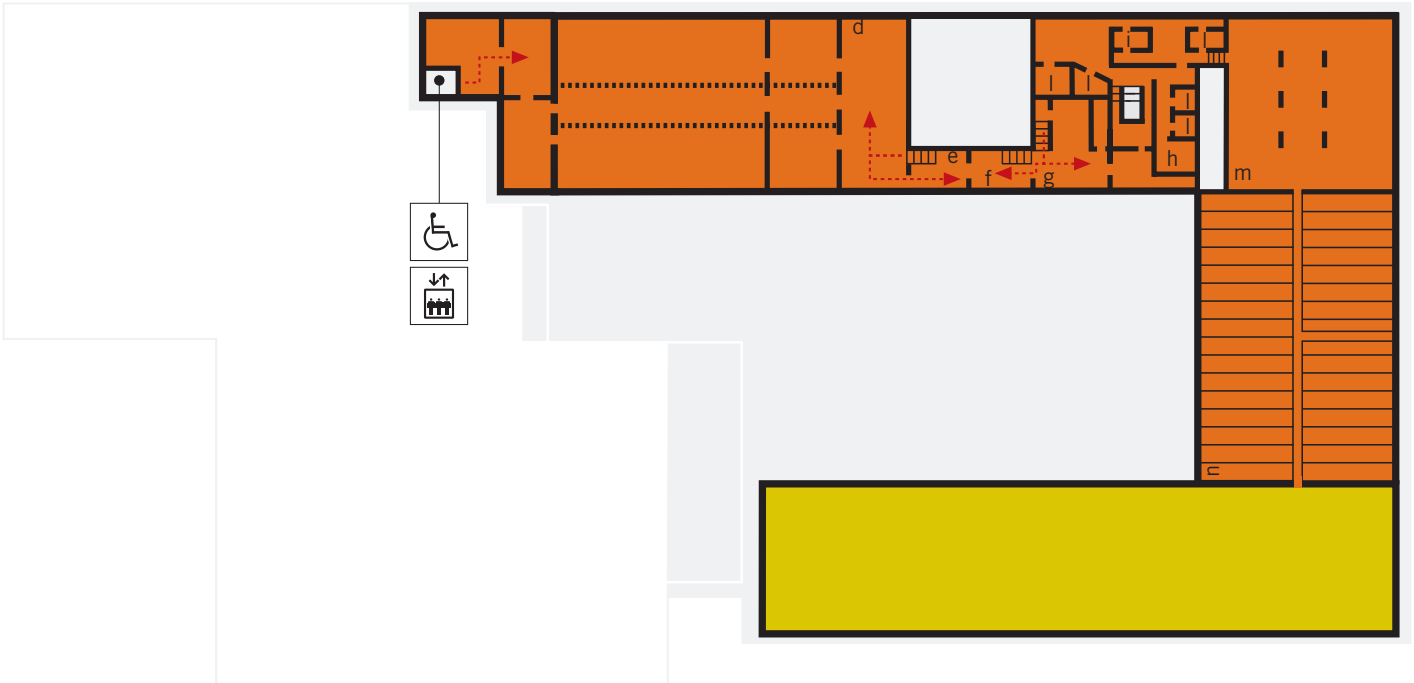
3.
SECRET ITINERARIES

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. These spaces offer an interesting insight into and acknowledgement of the civil and political history of the Venice Republic, its public organisations, and its institutional bodies deputed to government and justice.
The visit must be booked in advance, and can only take place accompanied by an accredited guide. 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.
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 of the Council of Ten. The Notary functioned as a sort of secretary to the various magistrature within the Republic, whilst the Deputato alla Segreta kept a special and secret archive for the Council of Ten.
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. The mirrored upper doors are decorated with the coats-of-arms and names of the various chancellors appointed from 1268 onwards.
Passing through the small room of the Regent to the Cancelleria one comes to the Torture Chamber, also known as the Chamber of Torment; this disturbing place is linked directly with the Prisons. The interrogations were held here in the presence of the judges, and the most commonly used instrument of torture was the rope, from which the person being interrogated was hung and pulled by his arms tied behind his back. 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.
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. Both cells that were occupied by Casanova, now reconstructed, are part of the tour.
From the Piombi you pass directly under

Itinerari Segreti

d Siperior Cancellor Office
e Room of the Vice-Ruler
f Room of the Ruler
g Torture Chamber, downstairs, The Chamber of the State Advocacies
h Casanova's First Cell
i Casanava's Second Cell
l Piombi
m Room of weapons
n Ceiling of the Room of the Great Council



Torture Chamber

A Prison

the roof to the attic, with its attractive wooden trusses, 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. Exhibited here are numerous weapons "da botta" (blow) and "da taglio" (cut), crossbows, lances, Venetian and Ottoman, mostly of the 16th century as well as precious metal armatures, shields and gauntlets.
From this attic, two long flights of stairs take you to the Chamber of the Inquisitors, a much-feared magistratura that was set up in 1539 to protect state secrets (its full title was "Inquisitors of the propagation of the secrets of the State"). Two of the three inquisitors were chosen from the Council of Ten, the third from among the district councillors who attended upon the Doge. Required to be objective, efficient and competent in the performance of their duties, the Inquisitors had to maintain total secrecy with regard to any information they might discover during the course of their work – information they could obtain using all the means at their disposal, including resort to informers and torture. The ceiling is decorated with works by Tintoretto, painted in 1566-1567. 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 (they themselves were responsible for assessing which should be given priority). The decoration of the ceiling dates from 1553-54. 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.
In the Chamber of the Three Head Magistrates you may notice a secret passageway in a wooden cabinet, linked directly to the Chamber of the Council of Ten.
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