

VISITOR'S GUIDE



Città metropolitana  
di Venezia

# TORCELLO MUSEUM



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Città metropolitana  
di Venezia

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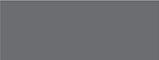
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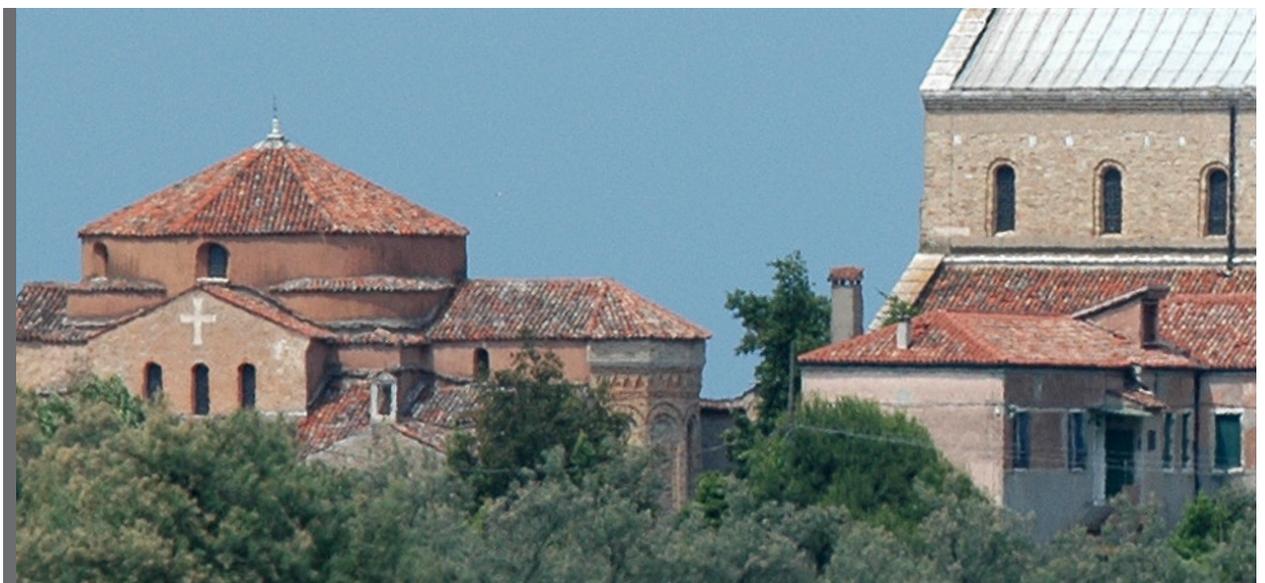
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The unique square-shaped bell tower leads the way to the charming mooring of Torcello, both coming from the river Sile, amongst sandbanks, brackish plants and “bricole” or crossing the lagoon between the islands of Burano, Mazzorbo and San Francesco del Deserto.



Archaeological researches show strong bonds between Torcello and the nearby Altino, roman town connected to the main roads (the Via Annia and the Via Claudia Augusta) and to the maritime course along which the islands offered moorings and middle stops, therefore favouring the population of the lagoon.

From the 5th to the 7th Cent, the inhabitants of Altino moved to Torcello itself in order to escape the barbarian invasions.

The island experienced its greatest development between the 7th and the 10th Cent, thanks to the flourishing commercial exchanges, first fed by the salt mines and the by winder and winder traffics.





During the following centuries all the main productions were moved to Rivoalto, today's Venice, leading to a slow but inexorable economic and demographic decline of Torcello, accentuated in the 15th Cent by the compromised healthiness of the area due to the lagoon turning into a marsh.

The history of the museum began in 1870 when Luigi Torelli, prefect of Venice, purchased the Palazzo del Consiglio to use it to house a centre of archaeological artefacts from Torcello, the adjacent islands and nearby mainland.

In 1872 the building was given by Torelli to the Province of Venice, thus the Provincial Museum was founded, the direction being entrusted to the researcher Nicolò Battaglini. In 1887 Cesare Augusto Levi took his place: he continued the collection of findings which were found on the location and the surroundings and he added others to the Museum which he gathered during his travels, especially in Rome. In 1887 he bought Palazzo dell'Archivio, restored it and housed the archaeological collection there, naming it Museo dell'estuario, and donating it to the provincial authorities. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, the Provincial Museum was inaugurated. In 1909 Levi was succeeded by Luigi Conton who discovered various necropolis in Adria from where he probably brought some findings to Torcello. Between 1928 and 1930 the collections were rearranged under the management of Adolfo Callegari, the director until 1948. Thanks to his interventions of inventory, cataloguing and restoration were undertaken and the publication, in 1930, of the





catalogue *Il museo di Torcello*. In 1949 the direction was entrusted to Giulia Fogolari who, with the assistance of Guido Zattera, supervised the museum till 1997.

In 1974, after a radical restoration of Palazzo del Consiglio and of the objects exhibited there, the medieval and modern sections were opened. In the following years the Palazzo dell'Archivio was restored and the present archaeological section was inaugurated in the summer of 1990 with a new layout.

In 2005 the Palazzo del Consiglio has been object of restoration and adaptation to the emergency norms.



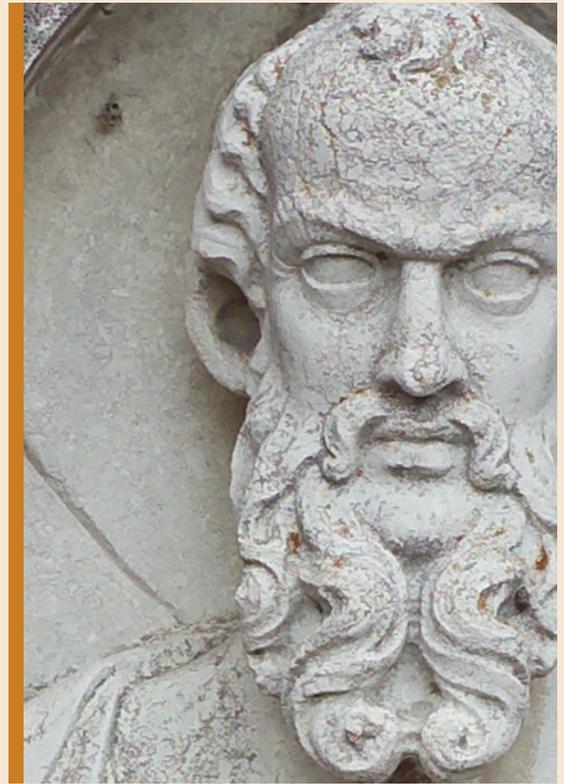


The museum houses a collection of works reflecting the history of the Venetian lagoon from private collections, archaeological finds and artefacts purchased by collectors, as well as articles uncovered in Torcello, the adjacent islands and the neighbouring mainland.



The collections are organised in two main sections: the archaeological finds and the medieval and modern exhibits.

The archaeological collection housed in the Palazzo dell'Archivio contains artefacts from the prehistoric period to the Paleochristian one.

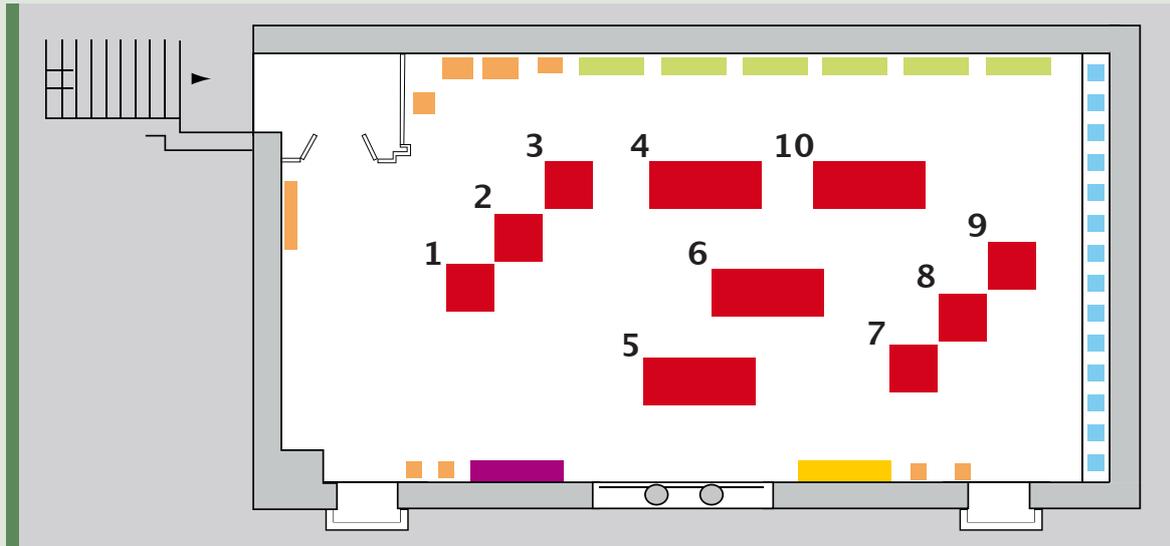


The mediaeval and modern collection housed in the Palazzo del Consiglio includes works dating from the sixth to the fourteenth century, largely relating to the history of Torcello as an urban centre.

The Archaeological Section, which is housed in the Palazzo dell'Archivio, contains items from finds in the area of the Lagoon together with relics from other areas and covering a timespan from the Palaeolithic Age to the Late-Roman era.



FIRST FLOOR



LEGEND

- 1** Egyptian statues, pre-history collection and Mycenaean vases
- 2** Greek and Greek Colonial ceramics
- 3** Greek and Greek Colonial ceramics
- 4** Etruscan pottery and pre-historic bronze
- 5** Pre-historic bronze
- 6** Greek and Greek Colonial ceramics
- 7** Terracotta votives
- 8** Roman ceramics
- 9** Roman bronze
- 10** Roman bronze

- Orange** Roman sculptures
- Green** Grave monuments
- Blue** Greek and Roman sculptures
- Yellow** Frescos
- Purple** Gems

## EGYPTIAN, PREHISTORIC AND MYCENEAN POTTERY COLLECTIONS



The first display cabinet contains the oldest material: a collection of **Egyptian statues** in bronze and ceramic (coming from bequests), that show various divinity, as Osiridis, god of Afterlife.

The **pre-history collection**, consisting of stone artifacts, deer antlers with traces of carving and bronze weapons, found during excavations in Venice, in the Lagoon area and near Treviso.



In the same cabinet there are ceramic vases from the area of Greece and Cyprus, the most noteworthy of which are four **Micean vases** which are evidence of the existence of Micean trade with the Upper Adriatic at the end of the second Millennium BC.

## GREEK AND ITALIOT POTTERY

The collection of Greek and Greek Colonial ceramics continues in the second and third cabinets and it presents various decorative styles and production techniques:

- **Corinthian and Italo-Corinthian vases** from the 7th to the 4th Cent BC, the most noteworthy of which is the crater mid-Corinthian “a colonnette” decorated with animals and a battle scene;

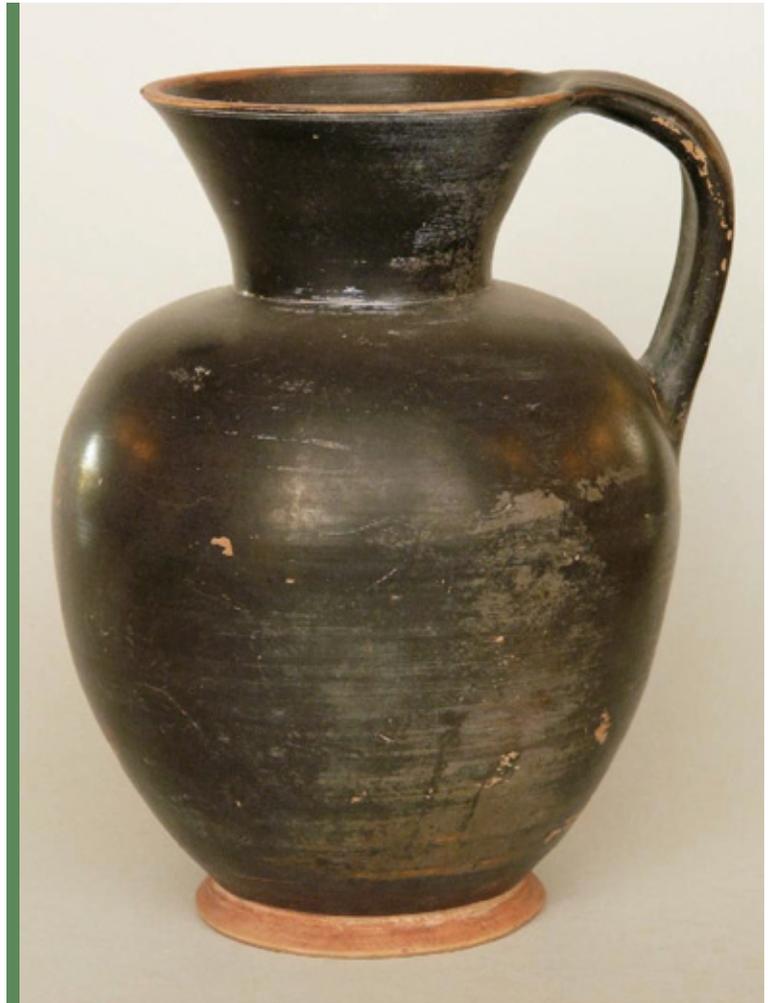




- Attic vases decorated with black figures (6th and 5th Cent BC), probably coming from a necropolis in the Venetian hinterland (Adria?);



- Attic vases, some decorated with black varnish others with figures in red, datable to the late 5th and 4th Cent BC and representing the last phases of Greek figurative ceramics. Of particular interest is the small *Hydra* decorated with three young girls in classical costume.

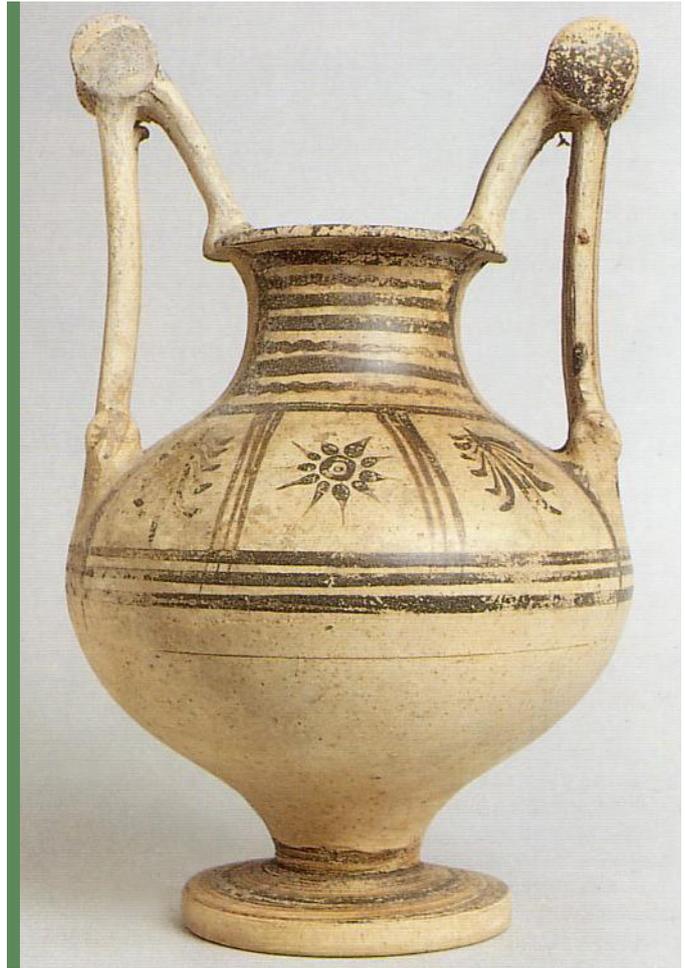


The sixth display case completes the presentation of **Greek and Greek Colonial ceramics** with vases from Campania and Puglia with designs in red, Italiota (Colonial) pieces with applied decoration and Italic vases finished in black varnish.



## ETRUSCAN POTTERY AND PROTOHISTORIC BRONZES

The fourth cabinet houses **Etruscan pottery: Bucchero Vases** work from the 6th Cent BC; vases with applied decoration produced in Southern Italy; **vases in geometric styles from Apulia** (Puglia), with the characteristic decoration on a two-tone effect; pottery produced in the area of the Upper Adriatic.





This cabinet and the fifth contain **pre-historic bronze** objects.

These present a significant range of small votive statues of human and animal figures of Etruscan, Italic and Paleoveneto manufacture; used as votive objects, they have been discovered in places of worship, mainly in the area around Altino. They are displayed together with tableware made to serve as grave goods (like *Thymaterion* bowl), votive pieces associated with libation and wine and objects such as brooches and mirrors for personal and ornamental use, some of which are of certain local manufacture.



## HELLENISTIC TERRACOTTAS AND ROMAN FINDS

Finds from the Greek and Roman eras are to be found in the remaining display cabinets. The seventh contains **terracotta votives**: statuettes, busts, heads of divinities and the worshippers, animals, decorated tablets, antifixes from Greek temples in Central and Southern Italy (note the two veiled heads, male and female).



The **Roman ceramics** (eighth cabinet) comprise a small but important collection of differing types and manufacture. There are kitchen-table ware for funerary use and glasses and



goblets from the Upper Adriatic; of particular is the **goblet with the signature “Clemens”**, found on Torcello and datable from the end of the 1st Cent BC and the beginning of the 1st Cent AD.

Various types of terracotta oil lamps are represented: circular, matrix, decorated with religious designs, private motifs, circular patterns, animals and plants.

Also on display are five cruets associated with San Menas, datable to between the 4th and 6th Cent AD of African manufacture which are evidence of the diffusion





in the Upper Adriatic of the cult of the saint introduced, probably, by the Byzantines.



In the ninth and the tenth cabinets there are **Roman bronzes** with religious motifs from temples and domestic shrines, tableware, keys, weights from the typical Roman scale, the stadera and items of personal jewellery which complete the display of Roman material.



### SCULPTURES

The collection of Greek **sculpture ranged** along the walls, the fruits of Venetian acquisitions, offers works of various types; among the most noteworthy in terms of artistic quality are the head of a lady, which comes from a grave monument, and the head of a veiled male figure, probably a representation of the god *Kronos*.



There are also **copies** and **Roman** re-workings of Greek originals, **grave monuments** and figurative grave stones of Roman manufacture, from the area of Altino, and a small collection of fragments of frescoes.

The arcade at ground level contains urns, altars, memorial stones and grave monuments.



## GEMS



The small collection of gemstones comprises 69 pieces, including intaglios and cameos. Half of these were certainly Roman, the earliest dating to the 2nd century. In all probability, they were found in the lagoon area and in Altino. The remainder are 19th century imitations.



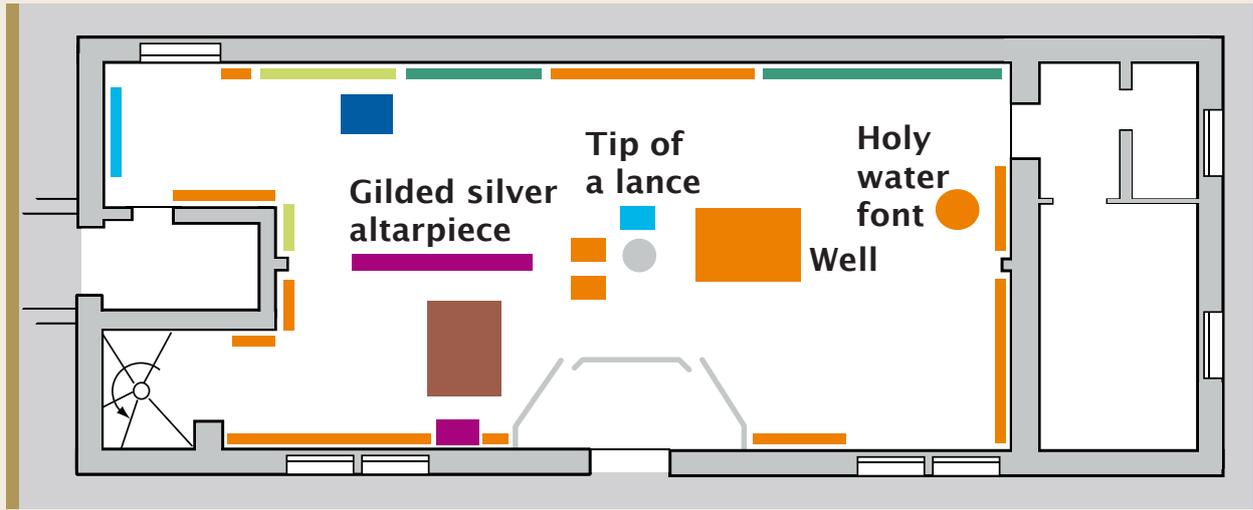
The subjects depicted are divinities and personifications (Fortuna, Mercury, Minerva...), themes connected to war and hunting, animals, and offering scenes. Worthy of mention among these is the **dark red jasper with sacrificial scene.**



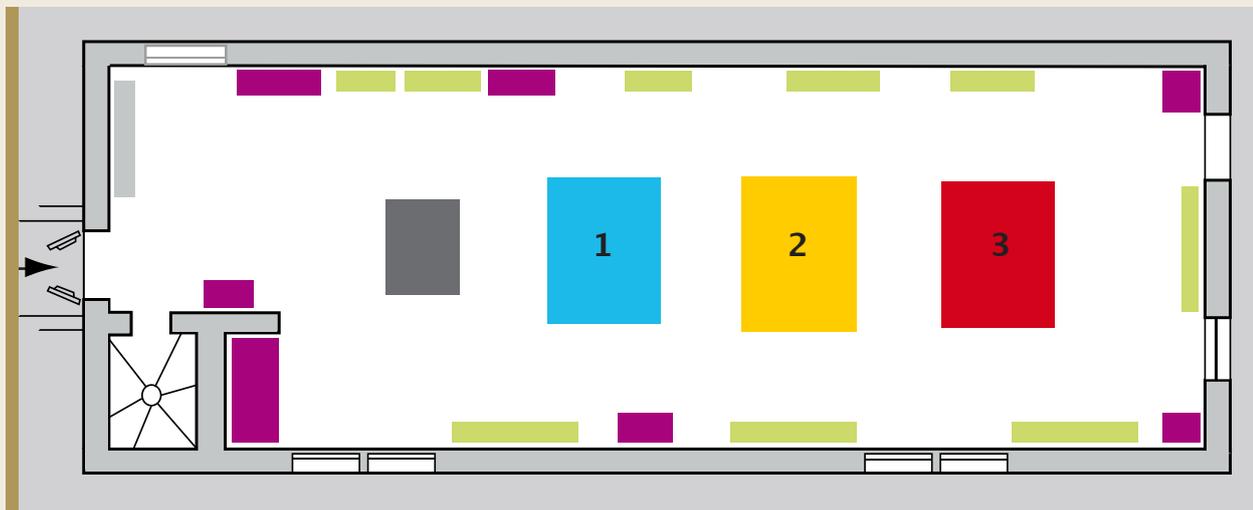
The Medieval and Modern Section, which is housed in the Palazzo del Consiglio, contains objects and documents from the first centuries of the Christian era until the 19th Cent, presenting the story of the island of Torcello and its relations with the area of Altino, with Byzantine culture and with the city of Venice.



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



LEGEND

Ground floor

- Architectural fragments
- Mosaics
- Metals
- Paintings
- Sculptures
- Local handcrafts
- Multimedia point
- Information point

First floor

- Metals
- Paintings
- Sculptures
- Local handcrafts
- Temporary exhibitions
- Ceramics
- Multitouch workstation

## STONE ARTEFACTS

The ground floor gallery contains stonework and architectural fragments going back to the centuries of the high Middle Ages, when Torcello had its affirmation like city centre. Along



the walls the **marble fragments** of 6th Cent, in which the symbol of the **cross** predominates, they have all the style Byzantine arrived from Ravenna.

Pertaining to the centuries succeeded there are some stonework with decoration in western style mixed with Byzantine designs

like braids, waves frames and geometric interlaces with flowers. They are decorations that between the 9th and 10th Cent evolve in a more refined execution, including varies animals, often fantastic, flowers and leaves.





One of Byzantine items is a splendid **holy water font**, in Pentelic marble used for the blessing of holy water on the feast of the Epiphany presumably coming from the destroyed church of Saints Marco and Andrea in Murano.

At the centre of the room is a **well** from a Roman monument dating from the first century BC which was restored in the 10th Cent.



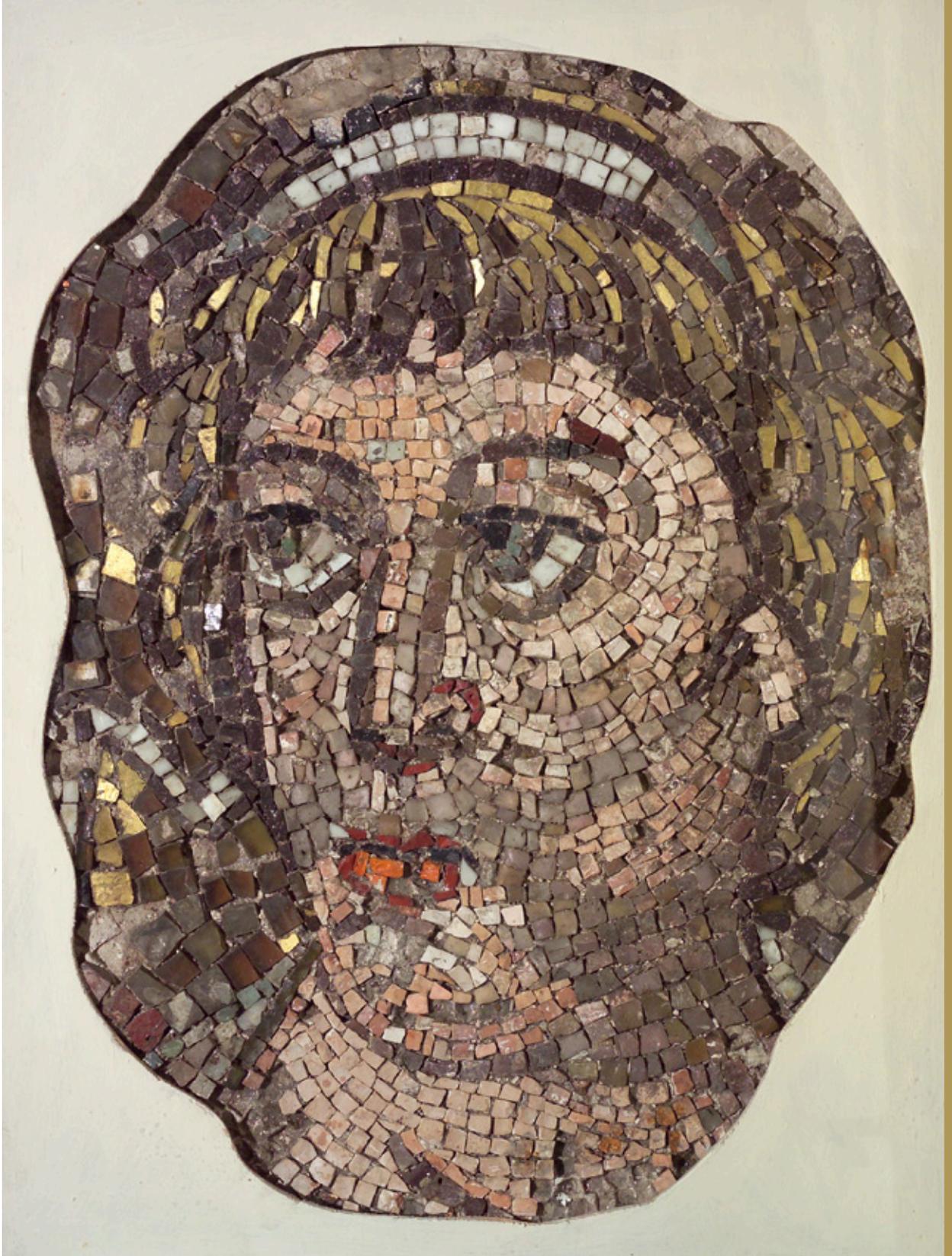
To its flank there is a **tip of a lance** in bronze with astrological symbols and an inscription in runic letters that, in the high Middle Ages, were used from the Nordic people in order to record words of augury or of good auspice.



## MOSAICS

Three groups of **mosaics** occupy the walls. The first, which comes from the ruined church of San Michele in Africisco of Ravenna, dates from the 6th Cent and consists of two fragments portraying the **head of an angel**; the other two groups, dating from the 12th Cent, originally came from the Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello.





One fragment shows the **head of Christ and the Prophets** of Universal Judgement, while the other, once decorating the tympanum over the triumphal arch of the Basilica, portrays the heads of **angels and a beardless Christ**.

The front of the **gilded silver altarpiece** dating from the first half of the thirteenth century, also from the Basilica, was originally

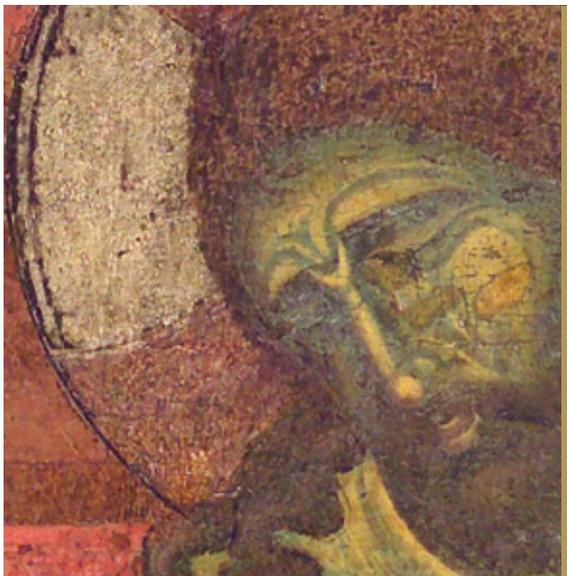


composed of forty two panels, thirteen of which survive today, and which depict the Virgin Mary enthroned with the Infant Jesus, the Archangels Gabriel and Raphael, the Prophets Isiah and Jeremiah, the Saints Theodore, Theonisto, Nicholas, Liberal and Maura and the symbols of the Evangelists Mathew and Luke (14th Cent).



Also worthy of interest is the collection of **Byzantine bronzes** (6th to 12th Cent) with oil lamps, enkolpion crosses, bosses, medallions, rings and brooches.

Remarkable the painting on board representing **suffering Christ** between the Virgin, Saint Giovanni and two angels, of 1300 approximately, an example of the Venetian production, with the typical dramatic expression.



## SCULPTURES



The wooden sculpture of 14th Cent in the ground floor gallery representing **Saint Anna** enthroned with the Virgin (She held a Jesus Child, now lost).

To introduce us more closely to the religious and historical vicissitudes of the island are the Confraternity sign of the Scuola Grande di S. Giovanni Evangelista of Torcello of 15th Cent and two Lion's mouth for the Inquisitors, both of 15th Cent and found on Torcello, used to the secret denunciations: one for the salt contraband, the other for blasphemers of the Church.

The exhibition continues on the second floor, once the meeting place of the council which was made up of islanders who had come of age and were members of the Albo d'Oro, or "Golden Charter".



In the small display cabinet, the exhibits include the ivory curl of a crosier, once belonging to the Bishop of Torcello, Bono Balbi, of 13th Cent and two Ikons of Bizantine production.





The great wooden polychrome sculpture of **Saint Fosca** constituted the lid of a sarcophagus in which her body in namesake church of Torcello was guarded. The work of a Veneto artist of the first half of 15th Cent, represents the lying saint.

PAINTINGS

The two paintings on board of 16th Cent that represent **Saint Catherine** and **Saint Veneranda** decorated the destroyed Church





of San Giovanni Evangelista of Torcello and frame a **tabernacle** with Madonna and Child of Verona workshop of 15th Cent.

The **Saint Cristoforo**, painted in oil on board in Mid-15th Cent, is represented in the customary iconography with the Child on the shoulders while he crosses a water course.



The ten wooden boards attributed to Bonifacio Bembo (news from 1444 to the 1477) representing **history of Giacobbe** were probably parts of a ceiling decoration.



The **Pietà**, a painted and gilded high relief by Paolo Capso (1497/1539), represents the seated Virgin with the extended body of Christ, on the left Saint Giovanni Evangelista and Maria Magdalene, on the right Saint Giuseppe d'Arimatea with the characteristic turban.

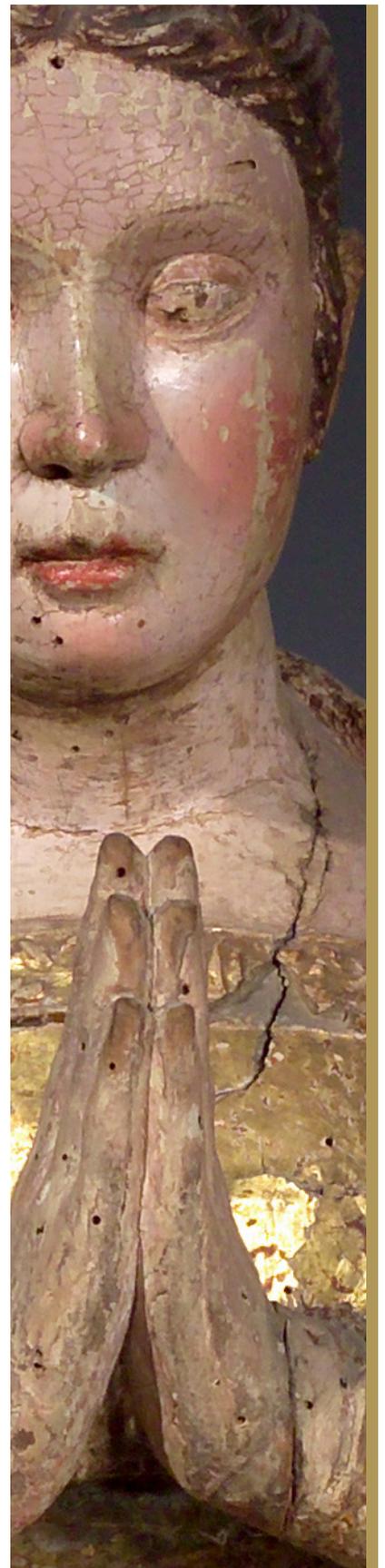


on the left Saint Giovanni Evangelista and Maria Magdalene, on the right Saint Giuseppe d'Arimatea with the characteristic turban.



Worth of interest are the **paintings** coming from the destroyed church of Sant'Antonio of Torcello and attributed to **workshop of Paolo Caliari**, known as **Veronese**: the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi (were the internal and external doors of the organ), five monochromes (decorated the parapet of the organ) and the four paintings that represent some episodes of the history of Saint Cristina.

In the gallery and in the great display cabinet are placed some sculptures of 15th Cent, like the **Virgin at prayer** seated in existence to adore the Child (now lost), a holy bishop giving his



benediction, Saint John the Baptist and the **Triptych** (gilded and polychrome wood) with the Virgin seated on a throne and Saint Rocco and other Saint.



METAL ARTEFACTS



The first cabinet in the centre of the gallery contains items of the history of Torcello and the lagoon. From the period of the founding of the settlement there is a **lead seal with Greek inscription** dated to the middle of the 7th Cent, one of the oldest documents of the history of Venice.



Found in a tomb at Erechia, it is probably the seal of a Byzantine official, a representative of the Exarch of Ravenna.

The **Byzantine coins** (6th – 11th Cent) recall the trade with the oriental Mediterranean. **Papal and Doges' lead seals**, Friezes and weights are exposed too.





Among them there are the **seals** of Giacomo Vianello, bishop of Torcello, and the one of the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta.

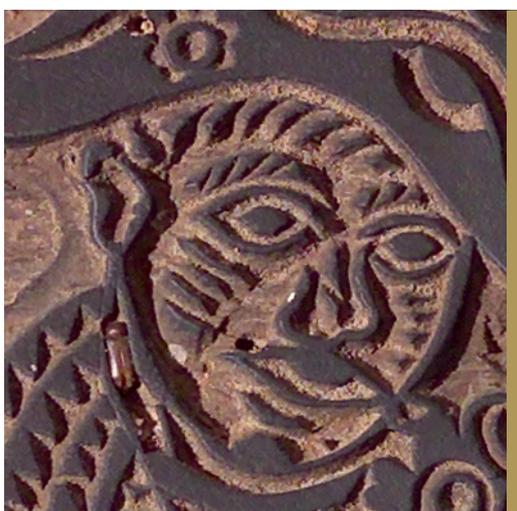


## TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

The central display cabinet periodically exhibits different works conserved in the museum deposit.



Currently it accommodates four great **wafer irons** with decoration of flowers, eucharistic symbols and coats of arms for the production of host and four **matrices** for the press of woven, paper and the impression of the leather.



## POTTERY AND LOCAL MATERIALS



The third cabinet houses **pottery fragments** found on Torcello and in the northern Venetian lagoon, evidence of the intense social and commercial life of this area including items from islands which have since submerged.



There are also the figured Renaissance ware and a group of **tableware** with the name of the content one were destined (SOPE in order to indicate soup, and PUINE to cheese).



The **conventual ware** of Torcello presents the typical yellow background and the bernardinian trigram: one cross encircled from three arrows facing upwards.







TORCELLO MUSEUM  
Piazza Torcello  
30142 Torcello - Venice  
Tel. 041/730761

Opening time  
Winter time: 1/11-28/02 10:00 – 17:00  
Summer time: 1/03-31/10 10:30 – 17:30  
Closed: on Monday and national festivities, 21st  
November (opened 15th August)

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