



Floor 0

Not to be missed!

Listed here are the most significant exhibits among those displayed on Floor 0. The corresponding reference number is shown on the display cases or near the exhibits.

Rooms 2-7

1

Two rare examples of Italian assault vehicles from WWII: SLC “Maiale” and MTM “barchino esplosivo”, 1935-1936

The SLC or slow-running torpedo, nicknamed “Maiale” (*Pig*), was designed to transport explosive charges underwater to attack ships in enemy ports. Its effectiveness was such as to inspire similar English achievements. The MTM or modified explosive motorboat, known as the *little explosive boat*, was again designed for individual attack on enemy bases. The pilot would steer the assault craft at full speed towards his target, but before impact and detonation, he would jump from his boat. All these vehicles were very dangerous and required great skill (on the second floor, in Room 27, there is also a fragment of a “Grillo” (*Cricket*), a motorboat equipped with spiked continuous tracks, intended to allow them to climb over harbour booms).

Room 5

2

Bronze hand cannon; Tuscan manufacture (Cosimo Cenni foundry), 1643

This exhibit, which is not Venetian, is the only integral hand cannon (*Colubrina da corsia*), which was most certainly used in a galley. The hand cannons generally had a long range and a barrel length of 32 times that of the ball, as well as considerable ballistic power. This weapon had good shooting accuracy only at close range as it was positioned at the bow end of a galley, and therefore prone to pitching of the hull on the wave. The most beautiful bronze pieces of Venetian artillery that were kept in the Arsenal were all pillaged by Napoleon in 1797.

Rooms 5-6

3

Series of plastic models of fortresses of the Venetian State, coming from the Model Room of the Venetian Arsenal, 17th century

This series of 17th century models is the first set of objects that gave rise to the idea of setting up a Naval Museum in Venice in the early 1800s. This was followed by the technical naval models, the only pieces that are still remaining of a conspicuous collection preserved in the *Sala dei Modelli* (Model Room) of the Venetian Arsenal, and lost during the Napoleonic destructions. These naval models are now displayed in the various exhibition halls of the Museum.

Room 6

4

Example of a “chain-shot”, probably of the 17th century

Used by all Navies, “chain-shots” were a special form of ammunition used to shoot masts, break up the rigging or cut the sails of target ships. Chain-shots were made up of two iron “half cannonballs” joined by a short chain that was coiled up when loaded.

When the chain-shot was fired it extended and destroyed every object that came within its trajectory. Because it looked like spreading wings once it had completely opened out, it was called *anzolo* (angel in Venetian).

Room 8

5

Recent models dedicated to two Roman Nemi Ships, recovered from Lake Bracciano, 1st century AD.

Already known and subject to repeated and failed recovery attempts (1446, 1535, 1827, 1895), the ships were finally pulled out of the lake between 1927 and 1931. This made it possible to study them in depth and, despite being essentially “barges” for pleasure activities and religious ceremonies, they revealed valuable information on Roman shipbuilding. Unfortunately, during World War II the finds were completely destroyed by fire.



Floor 1

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Room 12

6

Parchment of a geographical chart of the Mediterranean by cartographer Diogo Homem, 1557

Diogo Homem (1521-1576), was a Portuguese cartographer like his father, Lopo Homem. Due to a crime, he was forced to exile from his country, first in England and then he settled and worked in Venice. The works of Diogo Homem are of exceptional graphical quality and beauty, and the one kept here, although a portolan chart, is well representative of the whole European continent.

Room 14

7

Reconstructive model of a galley, 1881

In 1881, Admiral Luigi Fincati, director of the Naval Museum and scholar of ancient building methods, proposed a series of technical models that reproduced various types of ancient ships with oars, such as the *frigata*, the *fusta*, and the *galea*. For the first time, the latter showed the historical accuracy of the “*alla sensile*” rowing method, which was considered unlikely at his day and age. The method consisted of one oar per man, with three sharing the same bench, consequently in the 16th century also called “*trireme*” (three oars). In the same room, a life-size oar that was experimentally recreated by Fincati himself is on display.

Room 14

8

Three examples of galley side bands (in more recent times, also known as *cortelà*), 17th – 18th centuries

Since the 15th century, the “command zone” of the galley, that is the stern, was decorated and the side bands or external stern sides were always the most striking elements. When disarmed, they were often disassembled from the vessel and kept by the nobleman who had commissioned them, but sometimes they were also preserved in the Arsenal in memory of famous commanders. Of the three side bands exhibited here, the two red and gilded ones could have belonged to the galley *Capitana* of Lazzaro Mocenigo, or also to that of Francesco Morosini, conqueror of the Peloponnese.

Room 15

9

Galley anchor, probably of the 17th century

Like every ship, even the Venetian galleys had various types of anchors on board, according to necessity. They were all in the shape of a grapnel (in Venetian *rampegón*) and had specific names, such as *marzocco* or *rampegón da sòrzer* (which means “anchoring”) but for simplicity they were all called *irons*. The anchor displayed is characteristic for its four rather short *flukes*, evidently not to take up too much space on deck, but made more efficient by oversized *palms* (“scoops” to grip into the sandy bottom).

Room 16

10

Large model of a first-rank “Cesare” vessel, early 19th century

This model shows every detail of a boat whose construction had started under the Venetian Republic, then completed under napoleonic rule and finally launched on 7 November 1815 in the presence of the Austrian Emperor, Francis I. Thanks to the scale and loyalty to the original it can be considered a “real ship” in miniature; an excellent piece of research of construction and naval equipment of that period. Of particular interest, hanging from the mainsail boom is the “lifebuoy” to rescue men at sea.

Room 17

11

Model of the last *Bucintoro*, 1824

Since 1177, the famous Venetian parade ship accompanied public ceremonies, and was increasingly extravagant with every new construction. The last 18th century *Bucintoro*, was eventually destroyed for contempt during the Napoleonic conquest. In the early 19th century, this stunning model, was made to recall its memory. In the Room, it is surrounded by some original finds, also related to similar vessels from previous eras; other fragments can be found at the Correr Museum.



Floor 2

Not to be missed!

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Room 24

12

Model of a “Roma” battleship, 1985-2005

Donated by the modeller, Giancarlo Barbieri, it is the largest and most complete model dedicated to the famous and unfortunate Italian battleship “Roma”; built exclusively on the basis of original technical documentation, its precision covers every minute detail, like the engines of the service boats and the vehicles for the Admiral’s use parked on the bridge.

Room 25

13

Set of naval sketches by the artist Ippolito Caffi, 1866

Ippolito Caffi from Belluno, one of the most important artistic figures of his time and an epigone of Venetian vedutism, was also a fervent patriot of the Risorgimento. He wanted to witness the clash between the Italian and the Austrian fleet (composed almost entirely of Venetians, so much so that Venetian was spoken on board until 1918...) at all costs and hence boarded the flagship “Re d’Italia”, which sunk during the battle of Lissa, and where unfortunately he too lost his life. These sketches, made just before then, are now valuable evidence.

Room 25

14

Lifeboat of the “Re d’Italia”, 1866

The boat bears evidence to the battle of Lissa, being the boat that saved the life of Admiral Persano, commander of the Italian fleet as the flagship “Re d’Italia” (5963 t, built in New York in 1861) sunk during the battle. It is a classic *skiff* at the service of the Commander.

Room 28

15

Set of pre-unitary Navy uniforms, 1790

Collection of uniforms of various pre-unitary Italian navies, some of which are not well-identified. Among them are particularly interesting Venetian uniforms, dating back to 1790. The dominant blue colour is certainly not surprising (prevalent in all navies) and the presence of red: the official colours of the Venetian State were blue and gold, but the “colour” of the Venetian naval fleets was bright red, and in fact, the flags and decorative drapes on ships were of that colour.

Room 28

16

Sets of large celebratory rings, 19th century

After the annexation of Venice to Italy, to commemorate the tradition of the Marriage of the Sea, large celebratory rings were made at each launch of important ships in the Arsenal. The rings were blessed and then hung with a ribbon to the ship’s stern at the time of launching, and then kept on board.

Room 28

17

Venetian navy flag, probably from the 18th century

Several examples of flags and banners are preserved in Venetian museums as examples of valuable workmanship. This drape is important as it is a common flag of the Venetian Navy, like the thousands that were produced across the centuries and then destroyed. This flag comes from a donation by the Giustinian family, who had their own with the family coat of arms between the lion’s legs instead of the usual open book. It represents the typical national flag of the navy in the 18th century, in simple bright red cotton cloth with a yellow border, a blue strip to symbolize the sea and sewn into the centre is a yellow lion (“shaded”, as it was said in those days) holding a cross, because Venice has always wanted to represent a Christian power.



Floor 3

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Room 33

18

Pleasure boat, Neapolitan manufacture, probably dating back to the 18th century

This boat is called *feluca* but it has never had sails. It is not a Venetian pleasure boat, but it is very interesting for its elegant line and mostly because the stern part of the hull is built exactly like a small galley; this has value above all considering its originally 18th century construction.

Room 33

19

Series of “votive” offerings of various ages, 17th-18th centuries

Votive offerings, in the maritime context, represent the practice of resorting to the divine intervention when the capacity to fight against the hazards of the sea is exhausted. Present in almost all churches of the Mediterranean coastal towns, many votive offerings were removed and destroyed as they were considered of little artistic value. This collection comes from the Campania area, from the churches of the Madonna del Carmine in Torre del Greco and from that of the Madonna dell’Arco in Naples. On the Venetian coast you can see them in the church of San Domenico in Chioggia and in the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Barbana in the lagoon of Grado.

Room 34

20

Models of typical Chioggia fishing boats (*tartàna*, *bragòzzo*, *batelùcio*), 1870

These three models are very important, both as regards the technical quality with which they are made, and because they provide accurate evidence of the particular decorations in use at the time and the rigging such as sails and nets. The *tartàna* model, the largest deep-sea fishing vessel used at the time, is one of only two existing models.

Room 34

21

Example of a large frame saw, known as *spartidóra*, 19th – early 20th centuries

Before the industrial era, wood was cut into planks by hand, for any type of use, employing an effective and practical frame saw used by two people, as is well shown in the illustration. The name derives from the fact that it was used to “divide” the log into various planks.

Room 35

22

Peggy Guggenheim’s personal Gondola, ‘50s/’60s of the 20th century

The gondola has always been the typical means of transport for people of a high social status. Over the centuries noble families owned one or several gondolas with gondoliers at their service (called *de casàda*, or of the family in Venetian) but with the advent of engines gondolas progressively disappeared. When the famous American collector Peggy Guggenheim came to live in Venice, she wanted to revive the ancient Venetian tradition and had a gondola built, employing a gondolier to accompany her on quiet city journeys. In 1979 she donated her boat to the Naval History Museum, and it therefore represents the last Venetian *gondola de casàda*.

Room 35

23

Two examples of typical Venetian boats: the *barchéta* and the *gondola falcàda*, 19th century

Venice has always been populated by boats of many different types, which then disappeared with the advent of motorisation. Nevertheless, these two surviving examples show that even the “poor” boats had very refined technical features, such as the asymmetrical construction, like the renowned gondola. The *barchéte* were mainly used for ferry services (for example, between Venice and Lido) while the *barchéte a cóa de gàmbaro* (also called *gondole falcàde*) were used for normal city services, like the gondolas of the time, and comparable to today’s taxiboats.



Floor 4

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Room 41

24

Room dedicated to the Swedish Navy

In this room, set up in the last quarter of the 20th century with Swedish memorabilia of Italian design, a reference emerges on the latest use of oar-propelled vessels, which dates back more than two thousand years and is documented in the previous rooms. Before the last galleys of the Mediterranean states were totally replaced by naval vessels with sails (in Venice and France in 1814) the Swedes and Russians, in the rivalry to possess Finland, adopted mixed oar and sail-propelled ships, as they were most suited to the characteristics of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia. Therefore, with the modern designs by Frederic Chapman, who also studied the Venetian galleys, two fleets consisting of hundreds of ships were formed and sailed those waters until the mid-19th century. It was the Russian Navy to fight in 1854 for the last time with oar-propelled ships against the British ships, off the coast of Turku.



Room 42

25

Large malacological collection, with shells from all the seas of the world

In scientific terms, shells are “the protective limestone hull produced by invertebrates, mostly belonging to *Molluscs*”. The collection displayed here, which was donated by the Venetian designer Roberta di Camerino, considers five of the eight classes of subdivision, and in this the aesthetic beauty or the rarity of the specimen is essentially enhanced. It includes: the *Poliplacophora* or *chitons*, which have a quid made up of eight backbones, movable between them, the *Gasteropoda*, again very mobile, with a spiraled shell in a single piece, the *Bivalves*, which live mostly buried in the sand and have a shell composed of two distinct valves, the *Scaphopoda* that are in the form of an elephant’s tusk shell open at both ends, and finally the *Cephalopods*, whose only example with an outer shell is the *Nautilus*, while most of them have an internal shell, like the squid. The majority of specimens displayed come from tropical seas, while only very few can be found in the Adriatic or Mediterranean seas where molluscs generally have inconspicuous shells. As a curiosity, in recent years the *Pinna nobilis*, the largest bivalve in the Mediterranean (exhibit n. 15), has been colonising vast areas of the Venetian lagoon.