



Opening hours:

From 16th March to 1st November, daily from 10:30 a.m. until 05:30 p.m.
From 2nd November to 15th March daily from 10:00 a.m. until 04:30 p.m.

Closing times:

Closed at 25th December and at 1st January of each year

Reservations:

Tel: +39 0588 86099

Price valid until 31st December 2015

Volterra Card (valid 72 hours):

Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, Pinacoteca, Ecomuseo dell'Alabastro, Teatro Romano and Battistero

14,00 € full

20,00 € Family (2 adults and 2 under 18)

12,00 € Students & over 60

10,00 € Adult groups (min 20 pax)

5,00 € Student groups (min 20 pax)

Palazzo dei Priori

Piazza di Priori shares its name with the main building that faces it: the Priori palace, since the 13th century, the site of the Municipality of Volterra.

In 1208, the elders and the people of Volterra decided on the construction of a new palace that would face this plaza and that would be a worthy and imposing site for the Municipality, the Priori palace.

The bulk of the building dominates the entire plaza; it became inhabitable a few years after the 1208 decision, but it was completed only in 1257, with the construction along the via Turezza of a second building called the rear house. Above the main body, consisting of a squat parallelepiped, rises a high tower that makes the palace look more like a fortification than a public building.

On the facade opens a loggia, of which the arches are still seen, two of which were transformed into windows accessed by seven stairways, and from here people entered the palace.

The facade walls are visible hand-squared stone blocks. A string-course in moulded stone indicates the division between the ground floor and the first floor, on which open five large mullioned windows covered with an acute curved arch. The inside of the mullioned windows is decorated with three-lobed arches topped by a colonnade with capitals with acanthus leaves. Another string-course indicates the division between the first and the second floor where three windows open, similar to those of the first floor; the third floor is identical to the second.

The roof sloping over the façade is crowned by battlements with semi-circular merlons; this is a very particular type of merlons not found in any other medieval Tuscan buildings. The main body is topped by a tower decorated on the front with three emblems of the City, the Municipality and the People: the red cross on a white field, a red griffin conquering a green dragon on a white field and the split white and red crest. The tower has a pentagonal floor plan and was built after the original was destroyed by the earthquake of 1846. The medieval tower has a square floor plan ending in four pillars that sustained the beams from which the bells of the Municipality were suspended.

It had a clock since 1393, built for Domenico di Pietro by Castiglione Aretino. The ancient mechanism of the clock on the façade was replaced several times, and it was modernized with the division of the day in twelve hours.

Many inscriptions and emblems appear on the façade. The emblems are those of some of the captains of the People who succeeded each other in Volterra.

In the space between two of the openings of the ground floor was carved an incision that represents the unit of measure used in Medieval times by the Municipality of Volterra. It was called the "Canna Volterrana" and differed from those used in the nearby cities; in Volterra, it measured 2.52 m and was divided in 4 wings of 63 cm, in turn divided into 12 ounces, corresponding to approximately 5.25 cm each.

Entering the palace, we find ourselves in an atrium; on its back wall begins the steep stairway that leads to the upper floors, and on the right, a small door leads to a cloister. The atrium is decorated by the emblems of captains of the People and commissioners, some of whom come from the Pretorian palace from which they were removed in the 1930s. There are six stones celebrating important civil and political moments of modern Volterra. Originally, the ground floor was occupied by two rooms.

The room on the right was called that of the Captain of the Priori Families and access was also possible from the outside by a lateral entry. There was a room where the cases of the Municipality were kept with the books and the manuscript files.

The first floor, on the other hand, was occupied by the room for the rooms of the council, another smaller one for the magistrates, a cappella and by some small rooms. The second was intended for a breakfast room, bedrooms and a small meeting room. The third floor housed the kitchen and some service rooms.

On the landing of the first floor, is visible a fresco of Pier Francesco Florentine (XV century) depicting the Crucifixion.

There is access from here to the room of the Grand Council, which even today, as in medieval times, is used for the rooms of the Community Council. The room is richly decorated with a fresco painted at the end of the 1700s. The elaborate painted architectural decoration depicts what were the emblems of the noble families of Volterra alternating with the emblem of the city, the red cross on a white field. The same emblem of the city, along with those of the Municipality and of the People, is depicted on the back wall, above the door that leads into small room next to it; at the sides of this door are represented the emblems of the Medici family (the coat of arms with six balls) and the Marzocco of the Florentine lady, next to mottos of the community statues.

An entire wall of room is occupied by an old fresco depicting the Annunciation and the saints Giusto, Ottaviano, Cosma and Damiano, painted in 1383 by Iacopo di Cione Orcagna. This work indicates an important moment in the history of art in Volterra; in fact, it is probably the first painting of the Florentine school to be done in a public building of the city; it coincides with a period in which the pressure of Florence was very strong over Volterra. The choice of the representation also lends itself to a political reading; in fact, Cosma and Damiano are traditionally listed among the patron saints of the Florentine people.

Renovation work in 1958 brought to light the traces of a previous fresco probably from the 13th Century and a partly legible inscription: "Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram." Another wall is occupied by the 16th Century painting Wedding at Cana of Donato Mascagni, from the Badia of San Giusto.

The meeting room, next to the main assembly room, was originally called Adiunta and was used for closed meetings among the main collaborators of the priors or as the site of events of minor importance. Unlike the Council room, its plasterwork was not preserved, but the stone of the wall is visible. The sinopie (the preparatory drawings) of Orcagna's fresco were preserved in the Council room.

Visitors may admire the seats along the walls of the room where the magistrates of the Municipality presided.

Above the seats is a detached fresco originally placed on the wall of the access stairway to the palace. Depicting San Girolamo, it is attributed to Luca Signorelli and dated 1491. Also in this room are a painting of Giobbe by Donato Mascagni, a 1741 Nativity of Mary by Gian Domenico Ferretti and Adoration of the Magi by Ignazio Hugford, also from 1741.

Facing the windows that overlook the plaza, it is possible to admire the Pretorian palace on the opposite side, precisely in front of the Priori palace. It was built around 1320 by bringing together various older buildings that the Municipality had bought from the families Malcrazi and Belforti, two of the most wealthy and powerful families of Volterra.