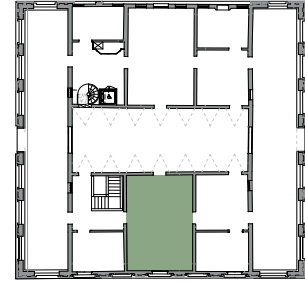


# ANCIENT FIGURES ROOM



Ancient Figures Room when under the ownership of the Olcese family

Ancient Figures Room as it appears today

This space, at one time the largest on the *piano nobile*, was originally a public room, as indicated by the themes on the walls; moreover, it is the room with the most intact wall decoration. It amounts to an architectural “score” of pilaster strips and faux marble-framed aedicules inhabited by figures in ancient costumes and oratorial poses, perhaps emperors and empresses. These figures are imposingly elegant, uniting Roman-inspired *gravitas* with Mannerist formal research, focused on the complicated rhythm of movements and drapery. Alternating with the aedicules are niches with monochrome faux statues, probably representing ancient divinities. The high frieze, for its part, alternates spaces featuring monochrome herms, trophies of vases, armatures, shields and ensigns, with landscape apertures, some of which refer to gods and goddesses such as Bacchus and Diana, whereas others are based on myths, such as the *Rape of Proserpina* or *Ariadne on Naxos*.



## DID YOU KNOW

Two adjacent panels of the frieze are linked by the narration of different aspects of the same mythological episode. The myths in question are: to the right of the door, the *Rape of Proserpina* at the hands of Pluto, King of the Underworld, who drags his victim into the kingdom of the dead on a chariot pulled by two horses; and further left, *Ceres* in search of her daughter, where the goddess of the earth is shown searching for Proserpina, driving a chariot pulled by snakes, with a lit torch in her hand.



Sustris, Vase, Ancient Figures Room



Polidoro da Caravaggio, *Decorated vase*, engraving, 16<sup>th</sup> century

In the finely decorated trophies with vases and helmets, we can discern precise references to Polidoro da Caravaggio (circa 1500-1543), one of Raphael's finest students, while in the idea of "supporting" the illusionistic architectural frame with faux statues and caryatids we can detect an evocation of the style of Giulio Romano, a student of Raphael who was active above all in Mantua. In that period, similar solutions were also deployed in the decoration of the country houses of the Este family in Ferrara.

Thanks to a number of Michelangelesque references, particularly in the faux statues up high, we can identify in Sustris's frescoes his familiarity with the sets designed by Giorgio Vasari and used for the 1542 staging in Venice of Pietro Aretino's comedy *La Talanta*. Sustris's originality lies precisely in his capacity to fuse influences from central Italy with those from Venice. For their part, the figures of the lower register also appear caught half-way between the influence of Raphael (alongside references to ancient statuary) and that of Titian, as embodied by the textured brushstrokes.



Sustris, *Male Figure*, Ancient Figures Room



Sustris, *Female Figure*, Ancient Figures Room



Sustris, *Ariadne abandoned in Naxos*, Ancient Figures Room



D. Campagnola (circle), *Landscape*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 16<sup>th</sup> century

In the scenes of the frieze, in which most of the subjects are associated with the ancient world, Sustris was the first artist to merge the typical Roman ruin-strewn landscape with a Titianesque rural feel. A love for naturalistic appearances and a taste for *trompe l'oeil* backdrops were essential elements of ancient painting. Indeed, idealised painted landscapes were, for the Romans, a source of delight, and were favoured companions during their hours of *otium* (the free time in which they were not at work and could spend studying), while also fulfilling their desire to escape the evils of city life.