

Getting to know the *Town Hall*



Ajuntament de Palma



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# Plaza de Cort



*History tells that King James I conquered Mallorca in 1229, where he created an institution called the Great and General Council that ruled the entire island. In 1718, with the Decree of the New Order handed down by Philip V, the power previously held by the City University and the Kingdom of Mallorca was transferred to the Town Hall, and its authority over the entire island was cut back to solely the city of Palma.*

The Plaza de Cort remains the heart of city life. The square is named after the fact that many of the former **courts** and feudal **curias** were located there. The square is regarded as **kilometre zero**, where all the main roads of Mallorca begin.





# Let's look at the façade



The **Baroque façade** is the perennial image of the building. It has been subject to several different reforms and was declared a historical and artistic monument on 3rd June 1931.

The **current** Town Hall building, popularly known as La Sala, was built over the former **Sant Andreu hospital** and the former Casa de la Universidad. No evidence of the design of the former building remains.

The building echoes the scheme of **traditional Mallorcan patrician houses**, with three descending floors topped by an impressive overhang.



On 28th February 1894, a huge fire left major flaws in the building and practically gutted the entire inside. This spurred a new reform of the Town Hall following the plans drawn up by town architect Manuel Chápulli.

The **overhang**, designed by Gabriel Torres and crafted in red pine, juts out approximately three metres. It is held up by eleven beams on which six male **Atlas figures** alternate with five female **caryatids**. Thus, a female figure coincides with the sixth section and marks the centre of symmetrical façade.



## *The bench on the façade.*

*Tradition has it that people who were out of work would sit here, and when they were asked, "So why aren't you working?" the response would invariably be, "If it weren't for my arthritis, my arm, etc., I'd be working, but...". For this reason, it is popularly called the lazy man's bench or the bench of the "sinofós", which is Catalan means, "If it weren't for...".*



*The clock is popularly known as En Figuera, in memory of Pere Joan Figuera, the smelter of the first bell in the 14th century. For centuries it was situated in a tower on Calle de la Victoria street that was demolished last century.*

*It has been on façade of the Town Hall since 1849, and the current clock was manufactured fourteen years later.*



A snail and a dragon are the signatures of master stonemason Jaume Caracol (whose surname means snail) and master sculptor Francesc Dragó (whose surname means dragon), who sculpted the symbols of their nicknames on the façade.

# Inside the Town Hall



The **Municipal Public Library** has been located in the vestibule of the Town Hall since 1927, in the area previously occupied by the fire station



Today only a Gothic portal with the city's coat-of-arms and blazoned wooden doors remain from the **Sant Andreu hospital**, where the Great and General Council used to meet. It is located inside the Cort building where the coat-of-arms of Mallorca can be seen engraved in stone.

## GIANTS

The current giants owned by the Palma Town Hall date from 1961 and were christened Tófol and Francinaina upon popular initiative. They are made of wood and card, measure 4.2 metres tall and are dressed in typical Mallorcan garments.



*Next to them are two more giants, copies of ones dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which were lost during the Spanish Civil War. They are made of aluminium and resin, measure 3.8 metres tall and weigh 30 kg. They are also named Tófol and Francinaina.*

On the staircase are two more giants, a group of musicians: one with a tambourine and flageolet, and the other with the xeremeia, a local wind instrument.





### STAIRCASE OF HONOUR

Going up the Staircase of Honour. The Staircase of Honour was designed by architect Gaspar Bennázar. It is a sumptuous French-style staircase whose front features the figures of mace-bearers sculpted by Joan Monserrat. It also displays the winged dragon that crowned the helmet of King James I, and two coats-of-arms: one with the royal arms of Aragon and the other with those of Mallorca.



In the walls at the back near the beginning of the staircase, there are two small reliefs, one on each side, depicting a turtle and a frog. These figures date from 1926, when the new Staircase of Honour was built.



*Popular tradition has it that the staircase was built very slowly and in a slapdash, haphazard fashion. That is, that construction went simultaneously at a turtle's pace and a frog's leap.*

# The Main Floor



## THE ARK OF THE SACKS

The **Ark of the Sacks** dates from the 17th century. It housed the four sacks that contained the names of the different people who might serve on the city's jury. Once a year, the ark was opened and a child under the age of seven was in charge of taking out the balls with the names of the new jurymen. This procedure was called "**sack and luck**", "sack" because the names were inside the sack and "luck" because you had to be very lucky for your name to be chosen.



## COPIES OF THE STANDARD AND THE STAFF OF COMMAND

Displayed in the glass case are copies of King James I's **standard** and the helmet of Martin I the Humane, with which James I has traditionally been depicted, and of the maces that the **mace-bearers** carried when they accompanied the jurymen around the city.

Also displayed is the **mayor's staff of command**, the symbol of the authority of the visible head of the Town Hall.



There are also a series of noteworthy paintings:



## MARTYRDOM OF CABRIT AND BASSA

Depicts the martyrdom of Cabrit and Bassa, executed because of their loyalty to King James II





### SAINT SEBASTIAN

A painting attributed to Van Dyck depicting the patron saint of the city, Saint Sebastian. Legend has it that in 1523 a plague epidemic that was devastating the city of Mallorca suddenly ended in the month of August with the arrival of a relic of the saint. Since then, Saint Sebastian has been worshipped in gratitude for his protection and healing, and in 1634 he was officially declared patron saint of the city.



### BURIAL OF RAYMOND LULLY

The burial entourage of Raymond Lully as it passes through what is now Juan Carlos I square.



### THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

The former mayor's office contains interesting antique furnishings as well as striking paintings: the portrait of Raymond Lully by Ricard Anckermann, the painting of the jurymen venerating the Virgin, and the painting depicting the dormition of the Virgin Mary.

The mayor's office is also outstanding for the entrance lobby that leads to the main balcony on the façade.

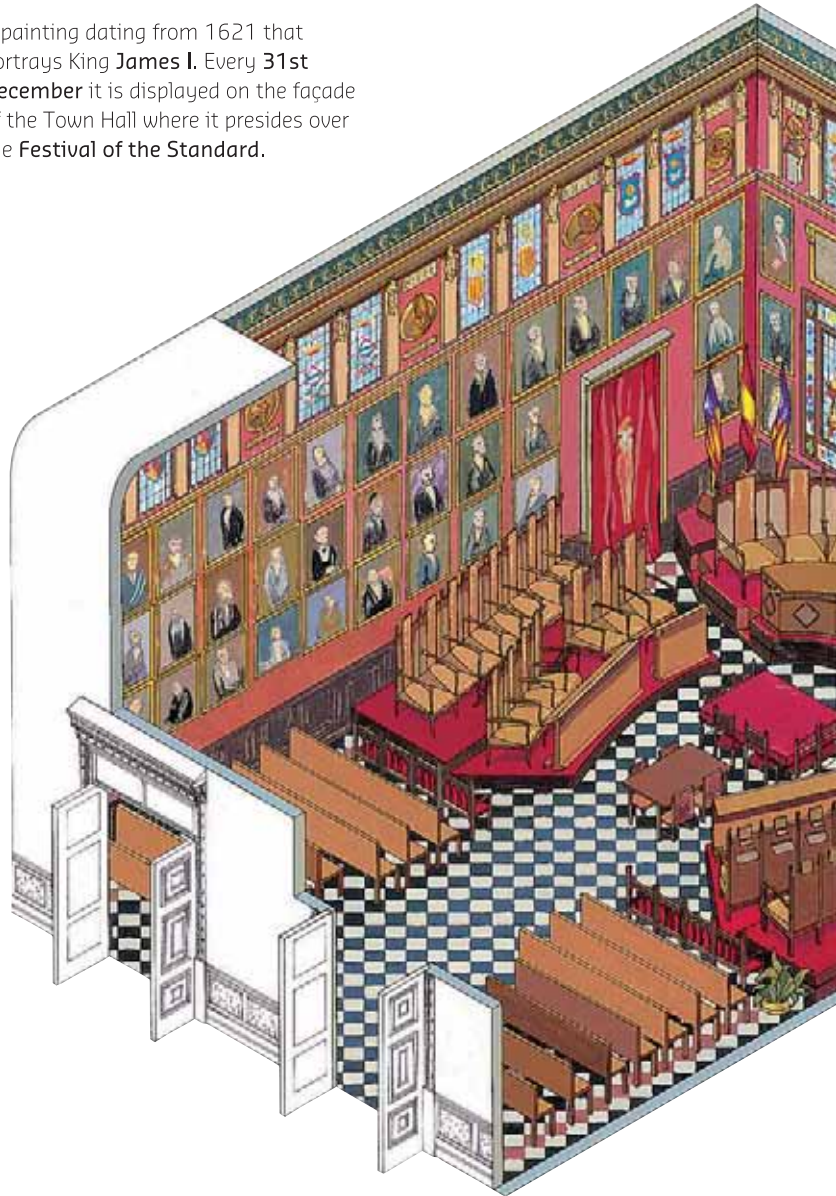




*One popular tradition on the last day of the year is to take children on a walk to the Town Hall in an attempt to see the "Man of the Noses", a character who has as many noses as there remain days in the year... This figure is the portrait of the King James, who in fact has just one nose, precisely the number of days left in the year!*

## Henry Hall

A painting dating from 1621 that portrays King James I. Every **31st December** it is displayed on the façade of the Town Hall where it presides over the **Festival of the Standard**.







In both windows we can recognise the figures of the **mace-bearers**, symbols representing the **jurymen of the city**, surrounded by the coats-of-arms of the towns of Mallorca.

*And covering the walls are the Gallery of Illustrious Children of Mallorca. This tradition, instituted by the Great and General Council, of proclaiming illustrious sons and daughters and placing their portraits in the Plenary Hall, has been continued by the Palma Town Hall until today.*







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