



INGLÉS

THRONE ROOM

The Throne Room, also referred to as the *the Hand-kissing room of the King's Apartment, the Kingdom Room or the Ambassadors' Room*, preserves the totality of its decorations as planned and carried out during the reign of Charles III, and was completed in 1772. Recent restoration has returned all the splendour to this magnificent room following the work on the fresco and the replacement of the original velvet with new cloth, onto which the embroidery was transferred.

Here the Sovereign received all of his ceremonial audiences, even his very last one as it was in this room that his dead body was exhibited before being moved to the pantheon of San Lorenzo el Real, an event for which the tables and ornaments were removed and the drapes changed.

Though Sacchetti thought of covering all the walls of this great gallery with marble that framed mirrors and bas-reliefs no work took place prior to the arrival of Charles III. The King preferred to have the decoration of this room left to his confidant in matters of good taste, the Count Gazzola, who commissioned the architect Giovanni Battista Natali with the designs for the furniture. It seems that the choice of the painter and sculptor to work on the vault can also be attributed to Gazzola.

The visitor's itinerary, as it had been initially envisioned, is fundamental in the understanding of these paintings. Starting at the area over the original entrance door (far eastern end) *Virtue and Merit* and over the door going to the Anteroom of Charles III *Abundance*. In fact, when Tiepolo painted the fresco the access to this room was through the king's Anteroom, which at that point was the entrance to the King's Apartments, where the Venetian also painted a similar theme. Therefore, it is from the eastern access point that *The Allegory of the Spanish Monarchy* should be interpreted. This fresco depicts a vast number of allegoric figures that play out against the open sky. Advancing from that point to the middle of the room the central group of the Spanish Monarchy can be seen. The throne, placed on a large globe, features the statues of Apollo and Minerva to its sides and is surrounded by adulating figures. Behind, next to the entrance of the Kings Apartments, there is a pyramid or monument in honour of Charles III with figures of Magnanimity, Glory, Cordiality and Council. Nearby are the three Christian virtues as well as Prudence, Strength and Victory. Finally, the Fine Arts that are 'represented in one of the corners of the vaults, manifest with their attributes that the glories of the great prince who has been their restorer will be long lived' (Fabre, 1829).

This glorifying of the Monarchy and the King is the main part of the allegory. The other half of the sky that the vault fresco depicts, which is further from us, is populated by the gods of Olympus. Notable amongst these are: Mercury, who, as ambassador of the gods to the Monarchy, seems to announce peace on behalf of Jupiter. Apollo, god of the sun and protector of the arts, is located at the same height of the King's throne whilst to his left is Mars, who is expelling Crime and Fury. In front of the throne in a dominant position is Neptune.

In the lower part of the fresco, above the cornice, there is a number of characters who are possibly the most appreciated element of this piece. They represent the kingdoms of the peninsula and the countries that then belonged to the Spanish Crown. On the side where we have entered are Andalusia, Catalonia, Aragón, Castile and Granada. Opposite are the East

Indies as well as the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias and Murcia. On the long sector over the balconies, starting at the far end, America with Christopher Columbus and several figures alluding to his discovery and then León, Galicia, Valencia and Extremadura. Identifying them is not easy as Tiepolo applied vast artistic licence, caring more for fantastic exoticism and little for rigour. He drew upon picturesque grace and colour in the set of details, such as the servant just above the canopy of the throne who tries to catch a macaw precisely in front of the group that alludes to America.

The perfect union between painting, sculpture and decorative design reaches its maximum expression in the corners of the vault and over the doors. The Apartment Sculptor Robert Michel, author of the decorative stuccoes above the doors and over the cornice, demonstrated a brilliance and capacity for novel invention comparable to the last masterpiece that the great Tiepolo carried out on the vault, which has been praised since its creation and even today.

The rest of the decoration formed by the side tables, mirrors, canopy, the armchair, and the tapestry must be understood as a whole conceived by Gazzola and his team of Italian artists who did not hesitate in returning to their lands of origin to commission all of these decorative elements, in response to Charles III's preferences for Neapolitan aesthetic mores.

In this regard, the velvet tapestry, due to its exceptional quality, was woven in Genoa and then sent to Naples to be completed with gilded silver string by Andrea Cotardi or Gottard, embroider to that court. The designs are by the painter from Piacenza Giovanni Battista Natali (Gazzola was also from Piacenza), selected for his designs which had been prized in Madrid, Paris and Naples. He also authored the design sketches of the side table and mirrors, made by the carver Gennaro di Fiore. Between the summer of 1765 and November of the following year the decorative elements of the Throne Room were completed, but they were not put into place until 1772.

The decorative set conceived by Natali is a key piece of Italian fantasy rococo. Concurring to perfection with the magnificent exoticism of Tiepolo, vaguely alluding to the vast extension of the Spanish Monarchy, are the ornamental characteristics of the late baroque that Natali set in *rocaille* ornament found on the twelve matching mirrors and tables: the four parts of the world, the four seasons of the year (or the four stages of life) and four virtues that in a planned manner play out a kind rhetoric praise of power in its most representative location.

The passivated bronze sculptures that decorate the room were placed here in the same period, though these are older. The *Four Cardinal Virtues* that line the wall behind the throne are often attributed to René Frémin as being made for the altarpiece at the Colegiata de La Granja Cathedral, but these have also been attributed to Foggini. Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, together with the other three that are in the Hall of Columns, make up the series of *Seven Planets* by Jonghelinck. The other two, a Satyr and Germanicus, are casts from classic statues that Velázquez was commissioned to reproduce in Rome. Also Roman are the four lions in golden bronze that guard the throne's steps, made by Matteo Bonicelli in 1651 on commission from the famous painter (with a further eight table supports that are conserved in the Museo del Prado) to decorate the Mirror Room in the Alcázar in Madrid.

The two chandeliers in rock crystal and silver were acquired in 1780 from the Venetian ambassador, Francesco Pesaro, following enthusiastic recommendation by Sabatini. It seems paradoxical that these furnishings would be the finishing touch to the rococo set as they were already considered old-fashioned at the time of their creation. Only ten years later Sabatini started to plan under order of Charles IV a new design for this room, one that was radically architectural and classical, employing marble and bronze with Corinthian pilasters, but this was a project that was never carried out.

The purchase of three of the four magnificent clocks is attributable to Charles IV. These boast complex timing and musical machinery. To the right of the throne a great grandfather clock with ebony box and bronzes in the style of Louis XVI by the woodworker B. Lietaud and machinery by the Parisian Ferdinand Berthoud was made circa 1780. The two side tables opposite each have monumental table clocks, also from the same period and style, in white marble and golden bronze. One has the figures of Music and

Astronomy by Furet and Godon and the other features allegories representing music, by F. L. Godon, clock maker to His Majesty. To the left of the throne the other grandfather clock with ebony box and bronzes with *rocaille* in the English Georgian style dating to the 18TH CENTURY, by John Ellicot, which was a gift from the Court of Portugal on the occasion of the engagement of Barbara of Portugal to Ferdinand VI.

Ferdinand VII respected his grandfather's period decorations, adding the great carpet woven at the Royal Tapestry Works in Madrid that covers the coloured marble geometric inlay on the floor. The empire-style candelabras over the side tables are from both his reign and that of his father.

Finally, we come to the piece that gives its name to the room: the throne. The original thrones (the ones here are exact copies of the original) are stored in the Palace collections and feature a portrait of Charles III in a medallion in relief that crowns the back. Alfonso XII had the throne reproduced, with his own silhouette in the oval, as did Alfonso XIII adding another throne with the portrait of Queen Victoria Eugenia for a matched set. The current thrones feature a royal crown as a symbol.