

**“PORTRAIT OF DANIELE IV DOLFIN,
THE PROSECUTOR AND GENERAL OF THE SEA”**

GIAMBATTISTA TIEPOLO

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FAR REMOVED FROM THE ECONOMIC, political and military power that it had enjoyed during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and which was clearly expressed in one of the most stimulating cultural environments in Europe at that time, the city of Venice nonetheless continued to maintain an enviable splendour throughout the eighteenth century. There continued to be a highly active trade in spices and sumptuary articles, with luxury goods being manufactured and exported in great quantities. The city enjoyed a sizeable commercial influence in the eastern Mediterranean region, while, at the same time, reaping the benefits of its great institutional stability, which resulted in an exceptional form of government. Venice was, in fact, an oligarchic Republic, ruled over by a select group of aristocratic families who regularly succeeded one another through an elective system that permeated all of the State's structures, from the smallest bureaucratic duties to the largest administrative bodies of “La Serenissima” – the Most Serene Republic, as Venice was popularly known.

The city was indebted to all of these families for its artistic development and enlivenment, the renovation and construction of churches, the modernisation of the lagoon's palaces, the intense activity of many different collectors and, generally speaking, an informed group of patrons of the arts, supporting everything from painting to music. It was into this opulent world that Giambattista Tiepolo was born in 1696, becoming the most active painter in Venice throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. Very early on in his career, Tiepolo joined the workshop of Gregorio Lazzarini, a painter who already enjoyed a certain success, and who dedicated himself, above all, to the painting of historical subjects. It was not long before Tiepolo gained the favours of the local aristocracy, who saw in him an artist who could conceive and paint large compositions on historical themes, with an allegorical and triumphal purpose and framed by illusionist classical



Giambattista Tiepolo
(Venice, 1696 – Madrid, 1770)
***Portrait of Daniele IV Dolfin,
the Prosecutor and General of the Sea***
1755-1760
Oil on canvas
235 × 158 cm
Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, inv. 219/259

architecture. Tiepolo had a marked preference for using a palette of bright and vibrant colours, in paintings filled with light that demonstrated his ability to create scenes which, although they displayed little archaeological rigour, nonetheless had an undeniable dramatic impact. His pictures also revealed the use of a most expressive brushwork, already showing signs of the romanticism to come and attracting attention to his work far beyond the Veneto region. He painted with the same energy in Lombardy and Germany as he did for the Swedish Crown and the Russian Czars, before making his way to Madrid – where he was to die in 1770 – having been commissioned by King Carlos III to decorate the Royal Palace.

The Dolfins belonged to one of Venice's most prestigious patrician families, one of the twenty-four that, according to tradition, had contributed to the foundation of the Venetian State. This lineage was to produce a string of important figures who distinguished themselves in the service of the Republic: a doge, some procurators of St. Mark, six cardinals, and various senators, generals and ambassadors. It fell to Daniele III Dolfin to embark on a programme of modernisation works at the family palace at San Pantaleone, which took place between 1725 and 1730 and was marked by the commissioning from Giambattista Tiepolo of a cycle of ten paintings on themes relating to the history of Rome, to be placed in the palace's great hall, which meanwhile had been enriched with a complex programme of *trompe l'oeil* fresco paintings by the artists Niccolò Bambini and Antonio Felice Ferrari.

It is perhaps this ancient link between the Dolfins and Tiepolo that explains the posthumous commission from the Venetian artist of the portrait of Daniele IV (1656-1729), the brother of the reformer of the family palace. Tiepolo produced the work at a time that is not known for certain, but which was most probably during the period from 1750 to 1753. A leading general of the Republic, he was one of the protagonists

of the lengthy armed conflict with the Turkish Empire in the Peloponnese, between 1684 and 1699, which ended with the temporary blockade against the Ottoman expansion in the Aegean Sea. He participated in the taking of Athens in 1687, and was later appointed the procurator and captain-general of the Venetian fleet, and the procurator-general in Dalmatia and Albania. After the peace resulting from the Treaty of Karlowitz, he also occupied other important public and military positions, assisting the king of Denmark and Norway on his tour of the Venetian territories, between 1708 and 1709, and serving as a senator, having been elected in 1711, and later becoming Superintendent-General of the Sea, in 1714. Appointed the Commander of the Republic's Naval Forces in the last war against the Turks (1714-1718), he did not succeed in maintaining control over the Peloponnese, which led to his humiliating dismissal from the post. He was not, however, completely removed from public office, as he was later appointed as the ambassador to Poland, in 1717.

Although this was not a genre that Tiepolo particularly favoured, the portrait of Daniele IV is nonetheless a fine example of his artistic skills and of the facility that he had for creating images of prestige that could respond to the urban patriciate's needs for its representation. The model, which immediately reminds us of the great sixteenth-century tradition of the Venetian portrait, is highlighted against an architectural background that was designed to reinforce Daniele IV's institutional dignity, further underlined by the princely wealth of the damasks and the symbols of his dedication to "La Serenissima": an official cap, the baton of command and the book decorated with lead tassels, this latter item being a reference to the positions that he occupied in the civil government. Even the glove that he is wearing on his left hand, an artifice that was designed to hide the fact that he had lost four fingers in military action, emphasises the intangibility of this hero from the city of Venice.

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