

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

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The Ca' Dolfin Tiepolos

KEITH CHRISTIANSEN

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



Director's Note

Acquisitions are the heartbeat of a museum. They can reshape or refocus its collections in accordance with shifts in knowledge and taste, and truly significant acquisitions can have the effect of opening new horizons to its public. What visitor to the Museum in the decade following its opening in 1872 could have predicted that the Metropolitan would one day be among the greatest collections in the world? Each step of the way has been marked by purchases and gifts reflecting the acumen of its curators and the generosity of collectors.

This *Bulletin* chronicles the acquisition in 1965 of three monumental canvases painted for the Ca' Dolfin in Venice by the great Venetian painter Giambattista Tiepolo. I have a vivid memory of the event, for at the time I was an assistant curator, and the task of compiling the documentation of the paintings and writing a memo regarding their desirability was assigned to me by Associate Curator Claus Virch. I was present when the canvases, still rolled around an enormous drum from the years they had been in storage, arrived in the Museum, and I watched with a rising sense of excitement as they were laid out on the gallery floor. Their purchase was widely covered in the press, for works of this size and quality were generally thought to be, quite simply, unavailable at any price. Overnight the Museum's collection of paintings by Tiepolo became unique, and with a number of important gifts of this artist's incomparable oil sketches, it is now without equal outside Venice. It was for this reason that we were so anxious to undertake the major Tiepolo retrospective held last year in celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of his birth.

In September 1995 the paintings were reinstalled in the newly renovated Dr. Mortimer D. Sackler and Theresa Sackler Gallery at the top of the Grand Staircase. Through the generosity of a gift from Drue Heinz, the gallery was redesigned and its ceiling raised in order to properly house these stupendous canvases, which have been given new stretchers that restore them to their original shapes. How these pictures came to New York and to the Museum is a story I happily leave to the author of this publication and curator of last year's Tiepolo exhibition, Keith Christiansen, Jayne Wrightsman Curator of European Paintings.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

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Front cover: Detail of *The Triumph of Marius* (see page 39). Inside front cover: Detail of *The Capture of Carthage* (see page 40). Inside back cover: Detail of *The Capture of Carthage* (see page 40)

opposite
Detail of fig. 44, *The Triumph of Marius*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Along the left edge Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) painted himself as a bystander.



The Ca' Dolfin Tiepolos

In her novel *The Glimpses of the Moon*, first published in 1922, Edith Wharton chose as the setting for one of those deceptively casual meetings on which personal relations so often turn the sumptuous Baroque interior of the church of Santa Maria degli Scalzi (see fig. 2), a stone's throw from the railway station in Venice. Wharton relied largely on her acute visual memory of the impressive interior, for the magnificent vault—frescoed in 1743–44 by Giambattista Tiepolo (1696–1770) and his lifelong collaborator, Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna (1688–1766), a specialist in that magical art of illusionistic architecture known as *quadratura*—was destroyed by an Austrian incendiary bomb in 1915. Beneath Tiepolo's conjured vision of the Virgin sailing across a cloud-streaked sky above the pitched roof of her humble Nazarene house, effortlessly carried aloft by alluringly leggy angels, the serious-minded Coral Hicks and the still-married man on whom she has set her sights await her fellow travelers.

"Oh, there's Eldorada and Mr. Beck!" [Coral] broke off with a jerk, signaling with her field-glass to the pair who had just appeared at the farther end of the nave. "I told them that if they'd meet me here to-day I'd try to make them understand Tiepolo. Because, you see, at home we never really have understood Tiepolo; and Mr. Beck and Eldorada are the only ones to realize it. Mr. Buttles simply won't."

It may seem incredible that Tiepolo should require defense or that his work could be "misunderstood." He is, after all, the most approachable of Old Masters. The *terribilità* of Michelangelo is as foreign to his art as is Poussin's intellectual hauteur or Caravaggio's dark realism. He is the master of sunny visions: Christian saints and ancient deities inhabiting a luminous imperium, aristocratic women richly arrayed and playing their part on illusionistic stages of the noblest architectural backdrops, nude goddesses of ravishing beauty and aloof mien, vigorously masculine heroes resurrected from the pages of classical mythology, dignified Old Testament prophets and Roman priests, and an enviable menagerie of well-groomed horses and thoroughbred dogs. Yet the wealth of invention, the apparent ease with which complex compositions pour forth from his brush in dazzling color, even the very accessibility of his work—a feature that recommended it to so many of his contemporaries—have proven stumbling blocks for sterner critics, who stubbornly insist that seriousness of purpose and high-minded moral tenor are incompatible with facility and beauty.

opposite

1. Detail of fig. 44, *The Triumph of Marius*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A high-flying standard proclaims the Romans' victory over the Africans in 104 B.C.

2. *Giambattista Tiepolo* (Italian, 1696–1770) and *Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna* (Italian, 1688–1766). *The Miraculous Transport of the House of Loreto*. Fresco. Ceiling of the church of *Santa Maria degli Scalzi, Venice* (ca. 1743–44; destroyed by an Austrian bomb in 1915)



Even in his own lifetime there were those who disapproved: critics brought up on the idealist theories of Leon Battista Alberti, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, and that young, fervent prophet of Neoclassicism from the other side of the Alps Johann J. Winckelmann, who preferred the more obviously studied art of Tiepolo's contemporary Anton Raphael Mengs. (As fate would have it, Tiepolo spent his last years at the Spanish court at Madrid, where Mengs was the official painter.) Certainly, Tiepolo's work found no apologist in nineteenth-century England, though the salon painters of France were busy studying his frescoes in Venice. By the early twentieth century the consensus of opinion was on the side of those Mr. Buttleses who "simply won't." In his voluminous and influential writings John Ruskin mentions Tiepolo just once, and although his comments, when isolated, may sound like praise, they are far from expressing approbation. Upon examining the artist's three great canvases depicting the Passion of Christ in the church of Sant'Alvise, Venice (see fig. 3), Ruskin wrote, "[Tiepolo] is virtually the beginner of Modernism . . . exactly like what a first-rate Parisian Academy student would do, setting himself to conceive the sentiment of Christ's flagellation,

3. *The Road to Calvary*. Oil on canvas, 177 × 204 in. (449.6 × 518.2 cm). Church of Sant'Alvise, Venice



after having read unlimited quantities of George Sand and Dumas.” Ruskin was a champion of an earlier, supposedly purer age—that of Giotto and Fra Angelico—and he saw Tiepolo’s kind of painting as “the rags and ruins of Venetian skill, honour, and worship, exploded all together sky-high.” Nor was it in England alone that such views prevailed. Manet is reported to have declared that Tiepolo irritated him: “These Italians bore one after a time, with their allegories and their *Gerusalemme Liberata* and *Orlando Furioso* [a reference to the two great Renaissance poems that continued to inspire painters and musicians through the eighteenth century] and all that noisy rubbish.”

Critical censure generates ignorance, and in 1891 the young Roger Fry, who was later to write so eloquently on Bellini and Mantegna and to become the champion of Postimpressionism, wrote home from Venice, “Tiepolo is a great revelation to me; I had never heard of him before.” At almost the same time as Fry, Bernard Berenson, the most influential American writer on art of his generation, offered the novel opinion that Tiepolo “seems not so much the last of the old masters as the first of the new.” Perhaps understandably Berenson felt it necessary to add, “[Tiepolo’s] vision of the world was at fault . . . because the world itself was at fault.” Such ideas do not die easily, and there are still a lot of naysayers today, their eyes firmly shut against the charms of Tiepolo’s works.

When *The Glimpses of the Moon* appeared, the Metropolitan Museum owned just one painting by Tiepolo: a work that had fallen into its lap as part of the original group of 174 pictures acquired for it in Europe by a member of the Museum’s executive committee (see fig. 5). The present superb collection of works by the artist—





opposite
 4. Detail of fig. 46, *The Battle of Vercellae*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

5. *The Investiture of Bishop Harold as Duke of Franconia*. Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (71.8 × 51.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, 1871 (71.121). This is the first work by Tiepolo to enter the Museum's collections.

which includes an incomparable series of oil sketches (or *modelli*) for altarpieces and ceiling decorations, detached frescoes from a palace in Vicenza, a ceiling from a palace in Venice, and a series of three enormous canvases with scenes from Roman history—lay in the future. This *Bulletin* is concerned with the Metropolitan's three magnificent scenes from Roman history and their seven companions: four in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, and three in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna—landmarks of Tiepolo's early career and among the most spectacular paintings by the artist in any museum. Installed in a specially constructed gallery at the top of the stairs leading from the Metropolitan's Great Hall, the canvases offer visitors an experience that might make Eldoradas and Mr. Becks out of the most unyielding Mr. Buttleses (figs. 6, 7). The miracle is that pictures of this size and importance should have become available at the time and in the fashion they did.

The story begins with a letter written by the executors of Stefan Mendl's estate on June 17, 1965, to the director of the Metropolitan, James J. Rorimer:

Dear Mr. Rorimer,

Your sister . . . is a friend of mine and she was kind enough to mention to you that you might hear from me concerning some paintings owned by an estate of which I am an Executor.

The estate owns three paintings by Giambattista Tiepolo . . . from the Palazzo Castiglioni in Vienna. One painting is entitled 'Triumph of Marius' and two are entitled 'Battle Scene.' . . . Unfortunately, I do not have any adequate pictures . . . but



6, 7. Entrance to the galleries of European paintings after the 1995 renovations. The gallery is shown at the time of the Tiepolo exhibition of 1997, when seven of the ten Ca' Dolfin canvases—three from the Metropolitan and four from the Hermitage—were shown together. The battle scenes are placed as they were in Ca' Dolfin: on either side of a large door.

I enclose herewith a photocopy of an article from L'Illustrazione Italiana published in Milan on March 29, 1925. The article describes the pictures in some detail. . . .

The Tiepolos . . . are stored in the Lincoln Mountain Vaults at Saranac Lake, New York. . . . I do not believe [they] . . . have been examined since 1951.

The estate is interested in disposing of the pictures and if your Museum has any interest in them, I would be very happy to meet with you or your curator of paintings to discuss the matter further.

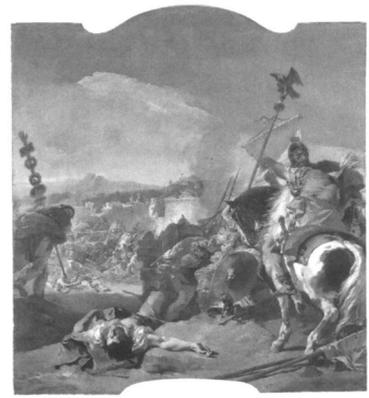
The letter was sent by the director to Claus Virch in the paintings department. The effect produced may be judged by the alacrity with which a response was drafted and sent off, the day following Virch's receipt of the correspondence: "Mr. Rorimer referred your letter to the Paintings Department for the answer, and I am writing to tell you that we would be very much interested in the paintings which are offered for sale through you. It would, of course, be important for us to be able to inspect the paintings, and I would like to know whether you are planning to have them shipped to New York in the near future." It is easy to appreciate the excitement the letter generated, since the three pictures were acknowledged masterpieces of which all trace had been lost for more than thirty years.

Part of a series of ten canvases depicting Roman battle scenes and triumphs, the pictures had been painted between 1726 and 1729 to decorate the main room (or *salone*) of the Ca' Dolfin in Venice (fig. 8). Tiepolo was just thirty at the time but



was already the most promising artist in a city rich in talent. As early as 1732 the Venetian biographer and critic Vincenzo da Canal singled out the cycle, noting that the “ten very large pictures of various heights, in which are shown the battles and triumphs of Coriolanus and other Roman histories, [are] among [Tiepolo’s] most singular works.” The spectacular decorations Tiepolo carried out for palaces and villas in Venice and the Veneto in the ensuing years seem not to have dimmed the fame of these monumental canvases: three decades later, during a prodigiously productive sketching tour of Italy, Jean-Honoré Fragonard and his traveling companion, the amateur-printmaker Abbé de Saint-Non, arranged a visit to view them. Fortunately for posterity, Saint-Non recorded his impressions in his diary: “Among the most beautiful things [Tiepolo] has done in Venice are the large frescoes [*sic*] in a room of the Dolfin palace at S. Pantaleone, works of the most beautiful colors and of a seductive effect and composition.” Saint-Non’s slip in referring to the pictures as frescoes is understandable, for they were set into recesses in the walls of the *salone* and had frescoed surrounds.

The visit of the two travelers was hardly casual or hurried. Fragonard seems to have set himself before each of the canvases in succession, paper and red chalk in hand, sketchbook balanced on his knee, for five drawings recording the overall compositions of some of the canvases and arresting details from others have come down to us (see figs. 9, 10). It is worth noting that by this date—May or June 1761—



The Capture of Carthage. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (see fig. 45)



Cincinnatus Offered the Dictatorship. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (see fig. 38)



The Triumph of Marius. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (see fig. 44)



Fabius Maximus before the Senate at Carthage. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (see fig. 42)

Hannibal Contemplating the Head of Hasdrubal. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (see fig. 43)



8. Disposition of the *salone* of Ca' Dolfin, showing an arrangement of the ten canvases. The arrangement is somewhat tentative since there is no way of knowing for certain the relative positions of same-sized pictures. The premise adopted here is that in the works on the side walls Tiepolo took into account the actual source of light in the room. It is obvious, too, that in *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna* the architecture has been foreshortened to be viewed from the right. Paintings are shown to scale. See pages 44–45 for a description of the sequence of canvases.

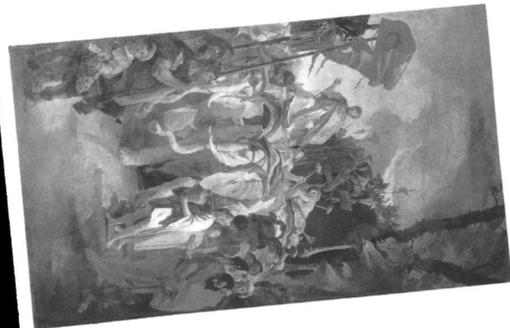


The Battle of Vercellae. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (see fig. 46)

Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (see fig. 34)



A Roman Triumph (possibly The Tarantine Triumph). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (see fig. 40)



Veturia Pleading with Coriolanus. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (see fig. 33)



Brutus and Arruns. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (see fig. 37)





9. Jean-Honoré Fragonard (French, 1732–1806). Drawing with details after *The Triumph of Marius and The Capture of Carthage*. Red chalk on paper, 17¼ × 13 in. (45.1 × 33 cm). The Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena

10. Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Drawing after *The Capture of Carthage*. Red chalk on paper, 17¼ × 13 in. (45.1 × 33 cm). The Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena

Tiepolo was no longer the newly sighted comet hurtling across the Venetian sky, but a fixed star in a prominent constellation: an artist who attracted commissions from as far afield as Lombardy, Sweden, Germany, and Russia and had, most recently, received an invitation from the king of Spain to move to Madrid. He was then employed on a vast ceiling fresco for the Pisani family’s villa at Strà, near Padua, which, not surprisingly, Fragonard and Saint-Non set out to see after leaving Venice on June 23. They made the trip by boat—as is still possible today—with horses pulling them along the Brenta Canal as far as Padua. “A very amusing and most agreeable trip,” wrote Saint-Non,

because of the infinite numbers of charming houses belonging to the Venetians that are situated on the two banks [of the canal] and of which the famous Palladio built a large number. One of those that most merits attention and that must absolutely be seen belongs to the Pisani and is built at the entrance of a large town called Strà. . . . The apartments are throughout of an elegance and at the same time a simplicity and a charming freshness; Tiepolo is currently painting a gallery that will unquestionably be a lovely and agreeable thing, as are all of the works of this ingenious and accomplished painter; but since the [frescoes] were not yet finished I was unable to see them.

Alas, not only were Saint-Non and Fragonard unable to gain access to the gallery, they missed a unique opportunity of meeting Tiepolo—a particularly unfortunate occurrence, since Fragonard was the only artist in Europe gifted with a like facility and imaginative verve and would doubtless have had some revealing comment for his companion to record.

In 1761 Tiepolo's fame was at its height. However, the tide of taste was changing, and when he died in Madrid nine years later, the assumptions on which his art was based—the exaltation of the artist's imagination over historical accuracy or truth to nature and a love of pageant over moral statement—were clearly out of step with the norms being established by Neoclassicism. In 1796 the Venetian state quietly capitulated to Napoleon's advancing army, marking the demise of the aristocratic culture that had promoted Tiepolo's art. This is not to say that his paintings went completely unappreciated. Antonio Canova, the greatest Neoclassical sculptor, actively pursued the purchase of Tiepolo's drawings and easel works—among much else, he owned the Metropolitan's oil sketch for Tiepolo's ceiling in the Residenz at Würzburg (fig. 11)—and even Mengs, Tiepolo's rival at Madrid



11. *Allegory of the Planets and Continents*. Oil on canvas, 73 × 54⁷/₈ in. (185.4 × 139.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1977 (1977.1.3). This oil sketch, or modello, for the vast ceiling in the Residenz, Würzburg, is the largest and most spectacular of all Tiepolo's oil sketches. It was acquired by the great Neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova from Tiepolo's son Domenico. All trace of it was then lost until 1954, when a diner at the Hendon Hall Hotel, outside London, noticed it installed in the ceiling of a corridor.

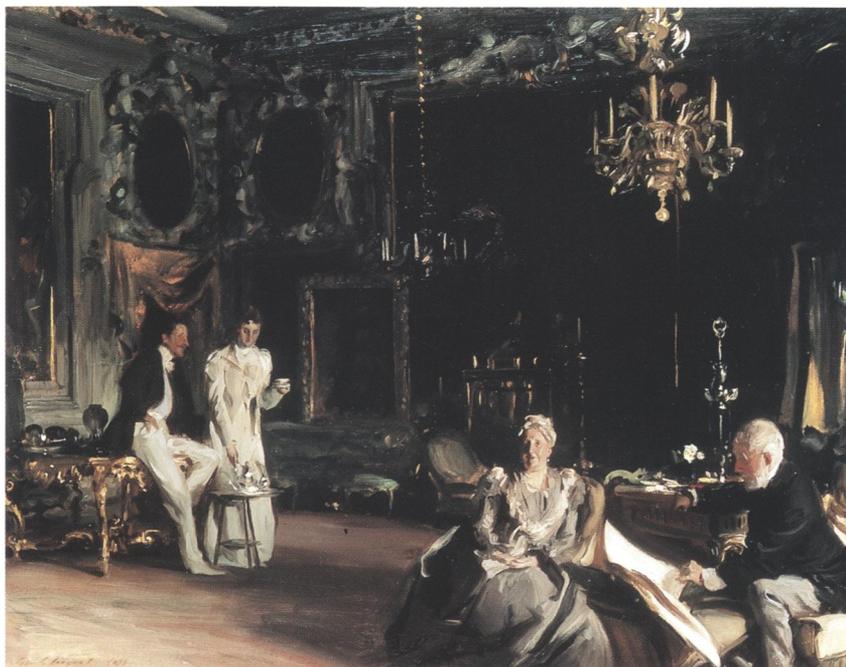
12. *Facade of Ca' Barbaro, Venice, for which Tiepolo painted the ceiling (fig. 14), now in the Metropolitan Museum. The oldest part of the palace is the section on the left, and it was for a room in this wing that the Metropolitan's canvas was painted.*

13. *John Singer Sargent (American, 1856–1925). A Venetian Interior. Oil on canvas, 25 × 31 in. (63.5 × 78.7 cm). Royal Academy of Arts, London. Painted in 1899, the picture shows the Curtis family in the large salone of Ca' Barbaro, where Sargent, Henry James, and Isabella Stewart Gardner were guests. Monet painted there, and Cole Porter lived there briefly as well. The Curtises acquired the palace in 1885, by which time Tiepolo's oval canvases in this room and his ceiling in another had been removed and sold.*

and the prophet of Neoclassical painting, was said to admire Tiepolo's brilliance as a draftsman (as well he might, since Tiepolo was unquestionably one of the greatest draftsmen Europe has produced). Yet there was no way around the fact that Tiepolo's ceilings and frescoes were increasingly viewed as relics of the ancien régime.

This critical revision of Tiepolo's work was accompanied in Venice by an economic slump that lasted over half a century. Old families died out, and many of those who were left found it expedient to cash in on their inheritance. Palaces were emptied of their contents and sold, frequently at bargain prices, to foreign residents—at first mainly a colony of expatriate artists, writers, eccentrics, and, by the late nineteenth century, the idle rich. (This cultural moment is captured beautifully in Henry James's *Aspern Papers*.) In 1888 the son of Robert Browning bought the once-grand Ca' Rezzonico, with its two splendid frescoed ceilings painted by Tiepolo for Ludovico Rezzonico in 1758. The palace had greatly deteriorated (Austrian troops had been quartered there and built a bread oven in it), and following its purchase for 250,000 lire, Pen Browning set about the arduous task of putting the cavernous interiors into order. Robert Browning died in the palace the following year.

The long-term effect of the political and economic plight of Venice was that Tiepolo's canvases were removed from the palaces for which they had been painted and were put on the open market. Even his frescoes occasionally fell victim to changed circumstance and financial expedience: what had been commissioned by the Venetian oligarchy was appropriated as decorative accoutrements of the newly rich in Paris and New York. Such, for example, was the fate of the venerable Barbaro palace on the Grand Canal (fig. 12). In the 1850s the last two direct male Barbaro descendants, Marc'Antonio and Giovanni, had been constrained





to rent out the main floor of their ancestral home, with its two ceilings and four overdoors by Tiepolo. Following their deaths the palace passed in 1860 to their sisters, Veneranda and Elisa Bassi. Six years later, after first removing the furniture, books, silk hangings, and Tiepolo's two ceilings and four ovals, Elisa sold the palace to a syndicate of investors. The palace subsequently changed hands twice, being acquired in 1885 by Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Curtis, who made it the site of an expatriate salon frequented by Robert Browning, John Singer Sargent—who painted a view of the interior (fig. 13)—Henry James, and Isabella Stewart Gardner. The ceiling passed through the hands of several French collectors before being purchased by the architect Stanford White, who installed it in the Fifth Avenue home of the Civil War veteran Colonel Oliver H. Payne; it was given to the Metropolitan following Payne's death by Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer (see fig. 14).

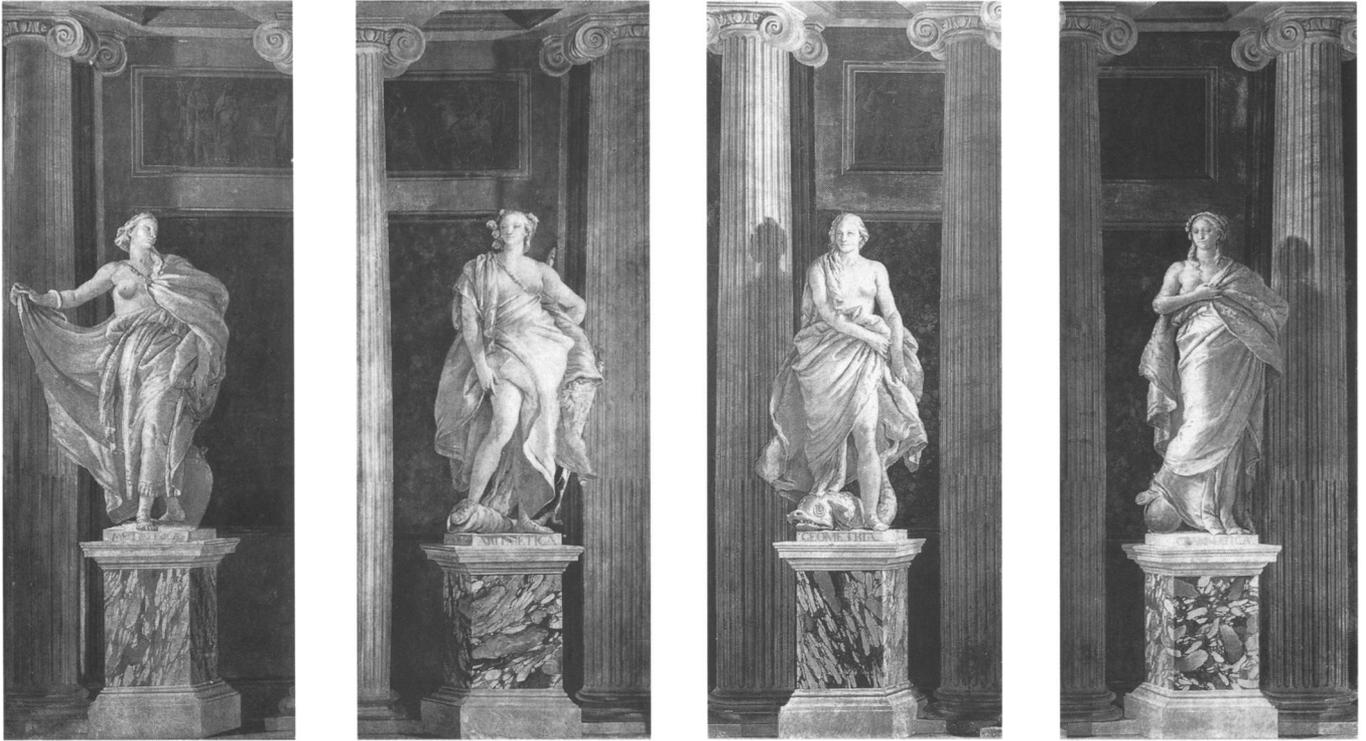
More remarkable still is the history of an extensive group of frescoes by Tiepolo now in the Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, which celebrates a visit made in 1574 by Henry III of France to the Contarini palace in Mira, on the Brenta Canal. The frescoes were greatly admired by Tiepolo's friend Francesco Algarotti, the critic-courtier, who owned an oil sketch related to them. Shortly before 1896 the Parisian collector Édouard André visited the palace, then under new ownership, and was

14. *The Glorification of the Barbaro Family*. Oil on canvas, 96 × 183¼ in. (243.8 × 466.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Anonymous Gift, in memory of Oliver H. Payne, 1923 (23.128). This ceiling, painted for a room in the Ca' Barbaro, was sold in 1866 by the last heir of the Barbaro family. It was acquired in Paris in the early years of this century by the architect Stanford White, who kept a stock of paintings, objects, and sculpture for his clients, and it was installed in the Fifth Avenue house of Colonel Oliver H. Payne.

15. *View of the interior of the gallery of the Palazzo Valle-Marchesini-Sala, Vicenza, showing the remains of the fresco decoration to which the Museum's allegorical figures and ceiling belonged. The medallion-like ceiling piece is in the center; the allegorical figures were arranged in pairs on the ends of the long walls.*



16, 17. *Details showing the decorations of the Palazzo Valle-Marchesini-Sala, Vicenza. Traces of the Metropolitan Museum frescoes were left on the walls when the thin surface layer of fresco was removed at the turn of the century. In these photographs the contours of the figures of Metaphysics and Geometry can be seen with their painted architectural surrounds, foreshortened to be viewed from the center of the room. Tiepolo initially designed Geometry with a raised left hand holding a compass. He changed this in the course of painting; the original idea is visible in the trace of the fresco in the palace and more faintly in the finished work.*



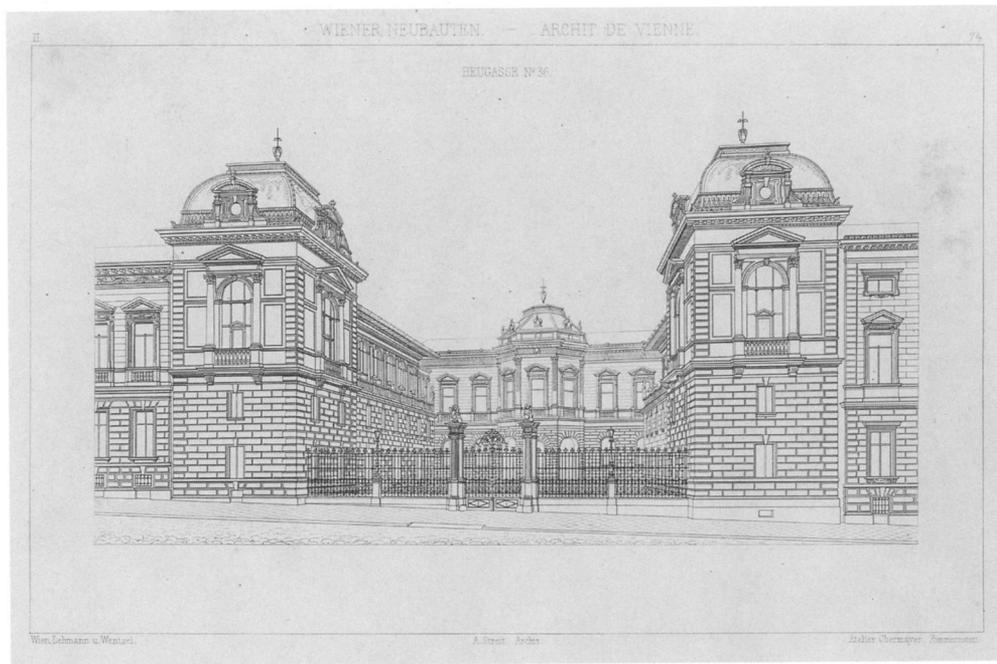
18–22. Allegorical figures of *Metaphysics*, *Arithmetic*, *Geometry*, and *Grammar*, and ceiling medallion showing *Virtue and Abundance*. Fresco transferred to canvas, each $146 \times 57\frac{7}{8}$ in. (370.8×147 cm); medallion diameter 114 in. (289.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Grace Rainey Rogers, 1943 (43.85.12–16). These detached frescoes, painted by Tiepolo in collaboration with the specialist in perspective Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna, were removed at the turn of the last century from Palazzo Valle-Marchesini-Sala, Vicenza (see fig. 15). The circular fresco was intended to read as a sculpted medallion set into the ceiling.

offered its stupendous frescoes. They were purchased, detached from the wall, and, despite laws designed to restrict the export of significant works of art, sent on to Paris to be installed in the stairwell of André's residence. Perhaps about the same time a set of monochromatic frescoes with architectural backgrounds by the professional scenographer Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna and feigned statues by Tiepolo was removed from the Palazzo Valle-Marchesini-Sala, Vicenza (figs. 15–22). The set was bequeathed to the Metropolitan by Grace Rainey Rogers in 1943.

The history of the Museum's Ca' Dolfin canvases is, if anything, even more fascinating (figs. 44–46). The last male member of the Dolfin family, Daniele (called Andrea), died in 1798—two years after the fall of Venice to Napoleon—and the palace and its contents passed to a collateral branch. The process was



23. Engraving of the neo-Baroque facade of the Aichholz Palace, Vienna, opposite the Upper Belvedere (the palace was destroyed during World War II). Designed in the 1870s by A. Streit. The Tiepolo Ca' Dolfin canvases were installed there in 1886. (From C. von Lützow and L. Tischler, *Architecture moderne de Vienne, Vienna, 1880*, pl. 74)

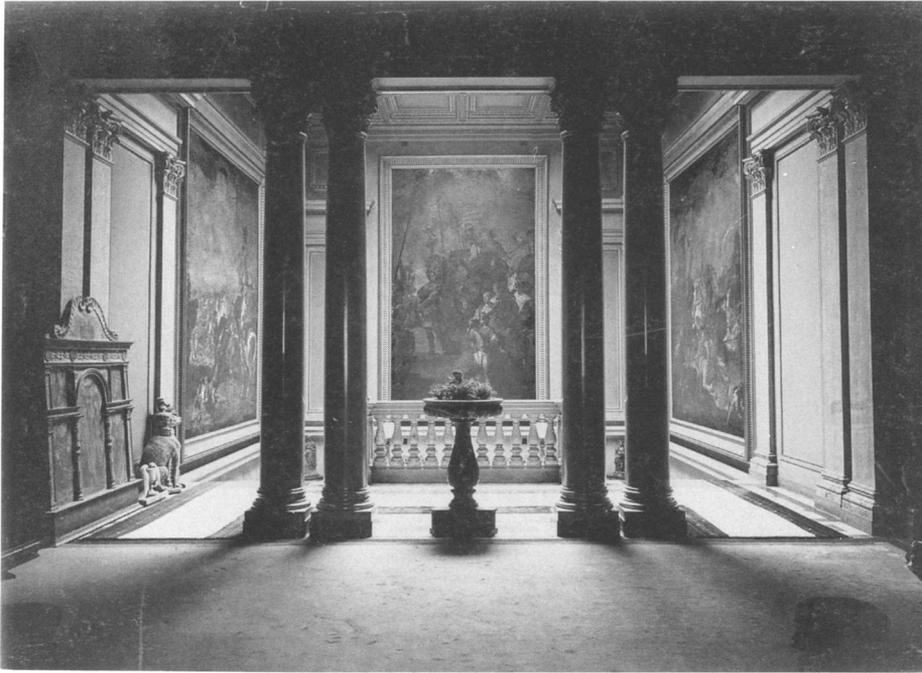


repeated in 1854, when Count Giovanni Querini Stampalia inherited the palace, of which he apparently had no need. Portable objects were moved out—including Tiepolo’s splendid full-length portrait of one of his Dolfin patrons—and the palace and Tiepolo’s ten pictures were left in a state of shocking abandon. Just how far matters had been allowed to decline is abundantly apparent in the following notice, taken from Ernest de Liphart’s review of an exhibition of paintings held in St. Petersburg in 1909. It records a visit he made to the Ca’ Dolfin in 1870—just over a century after that of Saint-Non and Fragonard.

The palace was a desolate spectacle: the red marble staircase had been sold step by step so that only a few remained. It was necessary to climb a chicken ladder to get to the main floor. There, one entered a vast room entirely decorated with paintings by Tiepolo, of which two immense canvases to either side of a demolished fireplace, facing the windows, showed battles from Roman history. . . . The ceiling, pierced by an Austrian bomb in 1848, offered a furtive view of the sky; the broken panes of the windows gave free entrance to intemperate weather. Access to the palace from the ground was through an immense garden, reduced to the status of a vegetable plot.

Small wonder that two years later all ten paintings were removed and sold in payment of taxes. (The palace itself was acquired by a Milanese architect, G. B. Brusa, who in 1876 undertook necessarily extensive repairs; the palace, today part of the University of Venice, was the object of a restoration campaign in the 1970s.)

The purchaser of the paintings was Baron Miller von Aichholz of Vienna, who bought them through the Venetian art dealer and frame maker Michel Angelo Guggenheim. Baron von Aichholz was in Venice to buy additions to his collection, and he managed to attract the attention of the great connoisseur Giovanni Morelli,



24. *Photograph taken about 1913, showing the Metropolitan Museum's three canvases installed in the stairwell of the Aichholz Palace, Vienna*

who anticipated selling him some fifteenth- or sixteenth-century works, perhaps a Bellini, Carpaccio, or Tintoretto. He was somewhat taken aback by Baron von Aichholz's purchase of the Tiepolos—paintings Morelli considered “done with much spirit and brio but in the end . . . little more than decoration” (see Appendix B). It is not clear what the baron intended to do with these enormous canvases, for in 1876 he did not possess a residence sufficiently grand to house them. Was it merely a whim or speculative venture? In the event, he put up all ten for sale in Paris. Five were bought by a Russian collector, Polovzeff; these were presented to the Stieglitz Central School of Technical Drawing in St. Petersburg in 1886, and in 1934 became part of the collections of the Hermitage. The remaining five failed to sell. They were hauled back to Vienna, where between 1877 and 1888 Baron von Aichholz built a splendid new residence at Prinz Eugenstrasse 28, just opposite the Upper Belvedere (fig. 23). The three largest pictures, now in the Metropolitan, were installed at the top of the main staircase (fig. 24) while the two smaller ones, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, were dealt with in a less definitive fashion. In 1900 the latter two again were offered at auction, together with a large part of the baron's collection. Once more they failed to fetch their reserve, and he brought them back to Vienna.

Baron von Aichholz died without heirs in 1919, and his Vienna house, with the Tiepolos, was purchased by an enterprising Italian, Camillo Castiglioni, who made his fortune following the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I. The son of a Trieste rabbi, Castiglioni had risen from the ranks as a minor bank clerk to become one of Austria's richest industrialists and a prominent figure in the nouveau riche society of postwar Vienna. He was married to an actress and provided a theater for Max Reinhardt, the stage director and founder of the Salzburg Festival. He was, however, by no means universally loved: the writer and satirist

25. *The Triumph of Marius*
as it appeared when it
arrived at the Metropolitan
Museum in 1965



Karl Kraus was among his detractors. Within a surprisingly short period of time Castiglioni amassed a significant collection of paintings and sculptures to decorate his new residence. Among the more amusing innovations was the installation of electrically operated curtains in front of the Tiepolos so that they could be ostentatiously “unveiled” before guests. Alas, the party did not last long: by 1924 Castiglioni was in bankruptcy court.

Joseph Duveen, head of the well-known art firm, was asked to evaluate Castiglioni’s collection with a view to its sale, and the following year some of the works were put on the auction block, including a splendid painting by Correggio that is now in The Detroit Institute of Arts. Castiglioni sold the two smaller Tiepolos to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 1930 at a favorable price to procure an export license for the three larger canvases. These he used as collateral on a loan from

Stefan Mendl. The three canvases were rolled around a drum and sent to Zurich for storage; ownership was officially transferred to Mendl in 1935. (By this date Castiglioni had wisely quit Vienna and returned to his native Italy; he died in Rome in 1957.)

As a final twist to an already complicated story, Mendl emigrated to New York, taking the pictures with him. Too large for his apartment on Central Park West, they were put in storage at Saranac Lake, and there they sat for almost thirty years. That the pictures had crossed the Atlantic was known among specialists, but in the standard monograph on Tiepolo's work published in 1962, the owner is listed as "unknown." Evidently, during this period the pictures were unrolled on only two occasions: in 1942 and again in 1951, when two conservators were engaged to evaluate their condition, which proved to be excellent, despite their checkered history. Thus to all intents and purposes the pictures disappeared until, through the letter already quoted, the estate of Stefan Mendl contacted the director of the Metropolitan with a view to selling them.

Rorimer received the letter in mid-June, and it was just four months later, on October 15, that the three rolled-up canvases were trucked to the Metropolitan from Saranac Lake. By that time they had been fully researched, and it is hardly surprising that as soon as they could be properly examined the Museum acted to secure an option on their purchase, which was finalized the following month. Attention then turned to their display, which proved a more protracted and difficult matter than could have been anticipated.

The first problem had to do with the lack of a gallery proportioned to house pictures of this size. Although the European paintings galleries are located in the original Metropolitan building, dedicated in 1880, the ceilings had been lowered in 1952 to accommodate climate-control systems. The tallest picture measures just under eighteen feet—about the same as the gallery walls from the floor to the ceiling cove. Thus there was no way of showing the paintings at their proper height (in Ca' Dolfin they were displayed almost four feet off the floor). This situation was finally rectified in 1995 when the ceiling of the gallery at the top of Richard Morris Hunt's Grand Staircase was raised ten feet, providing the pictures with a room about the same length and height but twelve feet narrower than the *salone* in Ca' Dolfin. The doorframes and cornice of this gallery were copied from features in the Great Hall, so that the room would read as the climax to Hunt's splendid architectural ensemble. (Although Hunt designed the arch leading into the gallery, he had never provided plans for the gallery itself, which had retained its undistinguished Victorian detailing until the 1952 remodeling.)

The second problem had to do with the fact that originally the pictures were painted on canvases with irregularly shaped tops and bottoms, enabling them to be set into recesses in the walls of the *salone*. When removed from Ca' Dolfin in 1872, pieces of canvas were added and then painted to expand the compositions into a more conventional rectangular format. The paintings were then provided with generic Rococo frames, which is how they appeared in Baron von Aichholz's Vienna palace (figs. 26, 27). Unfortunately, this treatment significantly altered Tiepolo's compositions, which had been carefully conceived so that the poses of

26. *The Capture of Carthage* as it appeared when it arrived at the Metropolitan Museum in 1965. The frames on all three of the Metropolitan's canvases were those made for Baron Aichholz.



figures and placement of objects responded to the ebb and flow of the outer profile. To properly redress this predicament it would have been necessary to undertake the time-consuming and complicated task of removing the canvas additions, constructing new irregularly shaped stretchers, and remounting the pictures in specially made frames. Given the expense and delicate labor involved, over the years two compromise solutions were attempted. Following their purchase, the three paintings were slipped into lidlike frames that covered the nineteenth-century additions and had cutout openings surrounded by moldings to suggest the original shape of the picture field. The frames were inelegant, and the paintings looked more boxed than framed. Then, when the pictures were cleaned in 1979, it was decided to paint out the additions with a brownish color, similar to the one Tiepolo frequently used as a ground color, and to commission new rectangular gilt frames. The effect was at once to affirm and to deny the irregular shape of the picture fields.

In 1995 funding at last permitted the construction of shaped stretchers, as well as frames based on an eighteenth-century Venetian molding in the Museum's collection

27. *The Battle of Vercellae as it appeared when it arrived at the Metropolitan in 1965.*



(see Appendix A). After almost a century and a quarter the pictures have more or less reassumed the shape Tiepolo intended them to have (see figs. 44–46). It has proven impossible to establish precisely some of the more elaborate curves on the bottom edges, since the recesses in Ca' Dolfin have been simplified by a subsequent owner. There is, of course, a limit to how closely the paintings can, in a museum context, approximate the way they appeared in Ca' Dolfin. Tiepolo conceived the pictures not as oversize paintings to hang in a gallery but as substitute frescoes: they were intended as a series that, in turn, was part of a larger decorative ensemble.

Ca' Dolfin is located just off the Grand Canal on Rio di Ca' Foscari (fig. 28). Originally the residence of the Secco family, it was purchased by Giovanni Cardinal Dolfin in 1621. In all probability, it was Giovanni's nephew who was responsible for initiating the extensive restoration that transformed the exterior of the palace, giving it its austere aspect, described by contemporaries as "alla romana." The architect responsible for these transformations is not known, but work seems to have

28. *Facade of Ca' Dolfin, Venice, located on the Rio di Ca' Foscari, just off the Grand Canal. The main *salone* extends the full width of the building and is lit by the five arched windows.*



moved along slowly, and it is just possible that Domenico Rossi (1657–1737) was involved in the last stages of construction. One of the reformers of Venetian architecture at the turn of the century, Rossi designed a number of buildings for which Tiepolo painted decorations. Linked to this remodeling was the creation of a large light-filled room, or *salone* (fig. 29), behind the five arched windows of the main floor, or *piano nobile*. Nicolò Bambini (1651–1739) was hired to fresco the ceiling with an apotheosis of the Dolfin family (fig. 30), while the Ferrarese Antonio Felice Ferrari (1667–1720), a specialist in illusionistic architecture, created feigned balconies in the vault (fig. 31) and trompe l'oeil frames around ten recesses in the walls, conceivably for the festivities the Dolfin family sponsored in February 1709 in honor of the visit of King Frederick IV of Denmark. That such extensive work could be carried out on short notice might seem to us impossible. Nonetheless, sometime before 1720, an English visitor was shown the *salone* by Bambini, and he was told by the artist that the task had taken just fifteen days. Small wonder that Bambini was widely employed in Venice and was hired by one of the Dolfin brothers, Dionisio, patriarch of Aquileia, to fresco the library in his official residence in Udine, north of Venice. Domenico Rossi had worked on that palace, too, and Tiepolo was to paint in it a brilliant cycle of frescoes.

Ceilings decorated with allegorical subjects were popular in Venice and the Veneto, though at this date they were more likely to be on canvas and set into a recess. Still, some years earlier the French-born Louis Dorigny (1654–1742) had frescoed a room for the Zenobio—reputedly the wealthiest family in Venice—with an illusionistic ceiling and trompe l’oeil architecture, employing real rather than feigned stuccowork to frame the irregularly shaped mirrors that are set into the walls. Tiepolo later made a specialty of this sort of decoration, normally collaborating with experts in scenography, but he was perhaps only thirteen when the *salone* of the Ca’ Dolfin was frescoed and can hardly have even begun his apprenticeship with his teacher Gregorio Lazzarini.

Thanks to a recently discovered document, we now know that Tiepolo’s paintings were not commissioned before the summer of 1726, and we are thus faced with the curious fact that for a number of years the Dolfin seem to have been content with their frescoed interior completed by blank canvases set into the recesses. This fact emerges quite clearly from the will of Daniele Dolfin III (known by his middle name, Giovanni, to distinguish him from his brothers, also named

29. The salone of Ca’ Dolfin with frescoes by Nicolò Bambini (Italian, 1651–1739) and Antonio Felice Ferrari (Italian, 1667–1720). Tiepolo’s canvases were originally set into recesses now filled with mirrors. Above these recesses are allegorical figures painted in grisaille. The frames are trompe l’oeil. Now part of the University of Venice, the room is used for conferences and lectures.





30. Ceiling of the salone of Ca' Dolfin, showing a glorification of Venice and the Dolfin family. At the apex of the composition, trumpeted by Fame, sits Venice (crowned, holding a scepter) with marine supplicants in front of her. Behind her sit a pair of figures possibly intended to allude to War (with a sword) and Peace (with an olive branch). Viewed counterclockwise, the other figures can be identified as Prudence, with a mirror and snake; Neptune holding his trident; a sea nymph; Amphitrite and a dolphin—an obvious allusion to the Dolfin family; the three Graces; the Arts—Astronomy, Music, Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting; Saturn with a scythe; Mercury; and Hercules. At the lower left, as though flying into the room itself, is Abundance or Peace, holding a cornucopia in one hand and a sheaf of wheat in the other, emblematically offering the viewer the fruits secured by the Dolfin victories against the Turks.



31. Detail of Antonio Felice Ferrari's illusionistic architecture in the salone of Ca' Dolfin and Nicolò Bambini's figure of Abundance or Peace

Daniele), drawn up on April 30, 1726, following his appointment as the Venetian representative to the Ottoman court in Constantinople. In the testament he states, "God willing, I will have the canvases in the room [of the palace] painted by famous painters. If, however, I am called to heaven before this is done, I exhort my heirs to put their hands to the task with all possible solicitude, so that this worthy task may be brought to completion in a fashion that will increase the dignity and embellishment of the house." Giovanni Dolfin left for Constantinople on June 27 and three years later died in the Turkish capital. It must have been his younger brother, Daniele IV (Gerolamo), who actually engaged Tiepolo and saw the canvases brought to completion in 1729, the date that appears on one of the canvases and, incidentally, the year both brothers died.

There is an interesting parallel for the starts and stops at Ca' Dolfin in the virtually contemporary work undertaken at Udine by Dionisio Dolfin. There, too, Nicolò Bambini had been employed about 1710, while Tiepolo was hired only about 1726. At Udine, Tiepolo worked exclusively in fresco, creating illusionistic ceilings, feigned sculpture in wall niches, and large narrative scenes with elaborate trompe



32. *A partial view of the gallery of the Patriarchal Palace at Udine, where Tiepolo worked with Mengozzi Colonna. These frescoes were carried out for another member of the Dolfin family contemporaneously with the Ca' Dolfin canvases. The main fresco shows Rachel hiding the idols from her father.*

l'oeil frames. His collaborator in this complex venture was the spectacularly imaginative Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna, who had been Ferrari's pupil (fig. 32).

The mixture at Ca' Dolfin of oil paintings, with their rich, sonorous colors, and fresco, with its paler, drier look, may strike us as a strange aesthetic choice, but there were practical advantages to combining the two media. Foremost among these was the possibility of decorating a room in stages over an extended period of time. Fresco, of course, was a seasonal activity, requiring warm weather. By contrast, oil paintings could be undertaken anytime. By combining the two, work could be staggered to speed completion, or, in the case of Ca' Dolfin, the project could be divided into phases, with the frescoes painted at one point and the canvases at another. Interestingly, in a nearly contemporary commission to decorate a room in the Sandi family palace in Venice, fresco was again combined with oil painting. Tiepolo frescoed the ceiling, while Bambini painted an enframing frieze in oil on canvas, and, as at Ca' Dolfin, the walls of the room were decorated with canvas paintings, three by Tiepolo and two by Bambini. As the Sandi commission suggests, the 1720s was an extremely busy decade for Tiepolo. Inevitably, he had to juggle his work on the ten Ca' Dolfin canvases with other commissions. Not only was there the fresco cycle in the Patriarchal Palace at Udine but also a chapel for the cathedral of the same city. It is hardly surprising that a large and important religious composition undertaken in 1721 for a Carmelite foundation in Venice was delivered only in 1727.

What of the subjects in the Ca' Dolfin cycle? In 1732 our most trustworthy biographical source for the young Tiepolo, Vincenzo da Canal, described the cycle as showing the battles and triumphs of the Roman patrician general Coriolanus and other events from Roman history. He seems to have been mistaken. With the exception of the two battle scenes in the Metropolitan Museum, all of the canvases bear—or once bore—damaged banderoles with identifying inscriptions from Lucius Annaeus Florus's *Epitome of Roman History*, an encapsulation of Roman history written in the second century A.D. and based in large part on Livy's celebrated historical narrative. From these it is clear that only one canvas certainly illustrates an episode from the life of Coriolanus. In it Coriolanus appears not as a hero but as a turncoat and an ally of the Romans' enemy, the Volsci, being dissuaded from attacking his native Rome by the entreaties of his mother and wife: his mother, Veturia, rather than Coriolanus is the protagonist (fig. 33). The passage from which the inscription has been excerpted makes this situation perfectly clear: "And [Coriolanus] would have avenged his wrongs by force of arms with even greater severity if his mother, Veturia, had not disarmed him by her tears when he was already advancing" (*Nec minus ille ferociter iniuriam armis vindicasset, nisi quod iam inferentem signa filium mater Veturia lacrimis suis exarmavit: I.xvii.3-4*).

Taken as a whole the ten pictures in the cycle offer a synoptic account of the expansion and defense of Rome, from its foundation to its domination of the Italian peninsula. Pride of place naturally fell to well-known triumphs and examples of patriotic fervor, such as would have been appropriate to honor a patrician Venetian family—especially one like the Dolfin, who had famously fought on behalf of the Venetian republic. In 1686–87 Daniele IV (Girolamo) participated in the last great victories against the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean, led by Doge Francesco Morosini. Daniele IV won several key victories for his countrymen. (Sadly, the cost of one of these was the destruction of the Parthenon in Athens, which the Ottomans had used as a powder magazine and which exploded when it was hit by a Venetian mortar on September 26, 1687.)

The earliest event in the cycle (actually a legend) is the subject of one of the St. Petersburg canvases and concerns Rome's struggles with neighboring tribes. It shows Mucius Scaevola defiantly plunging his hand into a blazing flame as a



33. *Veturia Pleading with Coriolanus*. Oil on canvas, 152 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 88 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (387 × 224.2 cm). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The demure woman behind the stern-faced Veturia is Coriolanus's wife.



34. *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna*. Oil on canvas, 152³/₈ × 89¹/₈ in. (387 × 226.4 cm). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

opposite

36. Detail of fig. 34, *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The details of the tripod altar were inspired by Tiepolo's study of Roman antiquities for Scipione Maffei's *Verona Illustrata* (1731–32).



35. *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna*. Oil on canvas, 19 × 10⁵/₈ in. (48.3 × 27 cm). Musée Magnin, Dijon. This is the only certain autograph modello, or oil sketch, for any of the large *Ca' Dolfin* canvases. In it Tiepolo established the irregular picture field and the relation of the two principal figures. Virtually everything else underwent revision—even a detail such as the tripod brazier, which in the final picture became a beautifully realized marble altar with a classical relief.

demonstration of the resolve of the Romans in resisting the Etruscan king Porsenna, a supporter of the Tarquins (figs. 34–36). “Behold,’ [Mucius] said, ‘and know from what sort of a man you have escaped” (En, ut scias, inquit, quem virum effugeris: I.iv.6). Next in sequence is one of the two canvases in Vienna, depicting the Roman Brutus and the Tarquin Arruns simultaneously killed by each other’s spears (an event that occurred in 509 b.c.; fig. 37). The passage from Florus serves as a sort of supertitle to the action portrayed: “Brutus with his own hand killed Arruns, the king’s son, and fell dead on his body from a wound dealt him by his foe, as though he would pursue the adulterer even to the





37. *Brutus and Arruns*. Oil on canvas, 150³/₄ × 71⁵/₈ in. (382.9 × 181.9 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



38. *Cincinnatus Offered the Dictatorship*. Oil on canvas, 152¹/₈ × 88¹/₄ in. (386.4 × 224.2 cm). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

opposite

39. *Detail of fig. 38, Cincinnatus Offered the Dictatorship*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. This still-life detail makes one regret there are no still lifes by Tiepolo.

infernal regions” (Donex Arruntem filium regis manu sua Brutus occidit superque ipsum mutuo vulnere expiravit, plane quasi adulterum ad inferos usque sequeretur: I.iv.8). In the scene of Coriolanus referred to above, Veturia, accompanied by her daughter-in-law and two grandsons, halts the advance of the Volscian army on Rome by her entreaties (487 B.C.). Next is the depiction of the upright noble Roman Cincinnatus (fig. 38), who had retired from public life to his country estate and was found tilling his fields when summoned to assume the dictatorship of Rome and lead the army to victory over the Latin Aequi and Volsci (458 B.C.): “It happened





40. *A Roman Triumph* (possibly *The Tarantine Triumph*). Oil on canvas, 214³/₈ × 126³/₄ in. (544.5 × 321.9 cm). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. This was perhaps the first of the ten canvases in the cycle to be painted and is filled with narrative detail.

to be the middle of the season of sowing, when the lictor found the patrician actually at work bending over his plow” (Medium erat tempus forte sementis, cum patricium virum innixum aratro suo lictor in ipso opere deprehendit: I.v.13).

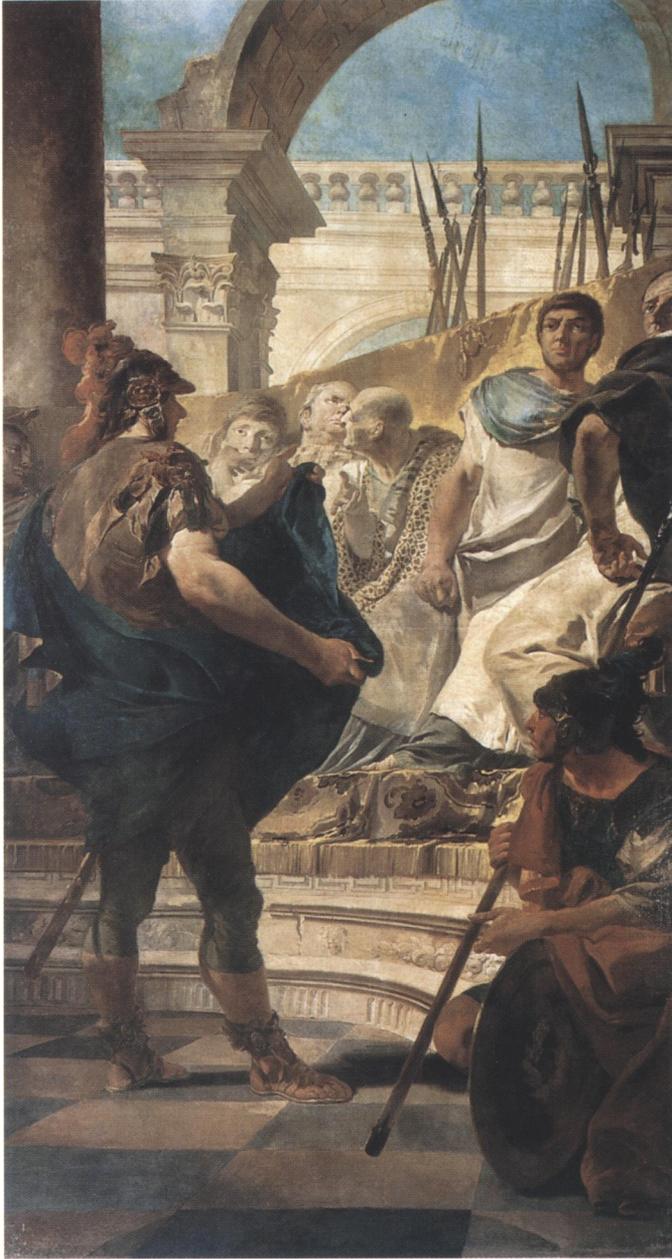
The subsequent event, which took place almost two centuries later, is portrayed in the large canvas in the Hermitage. This is a triumphal procession—apparently celebrating Rome’s victory over the Tarantines (279 B.C.), who dominated the south of Italy and were supported by Carthage and King Pyrrhus (figs. 40, 41). The identification is not absolutely clear, but the much-damaged and fragmentary inscription—evidently not from Florus or Livy—mentions Pyrrhus and elephants. Elephants are prominently depicted, but the presence of a bound prisoner is an



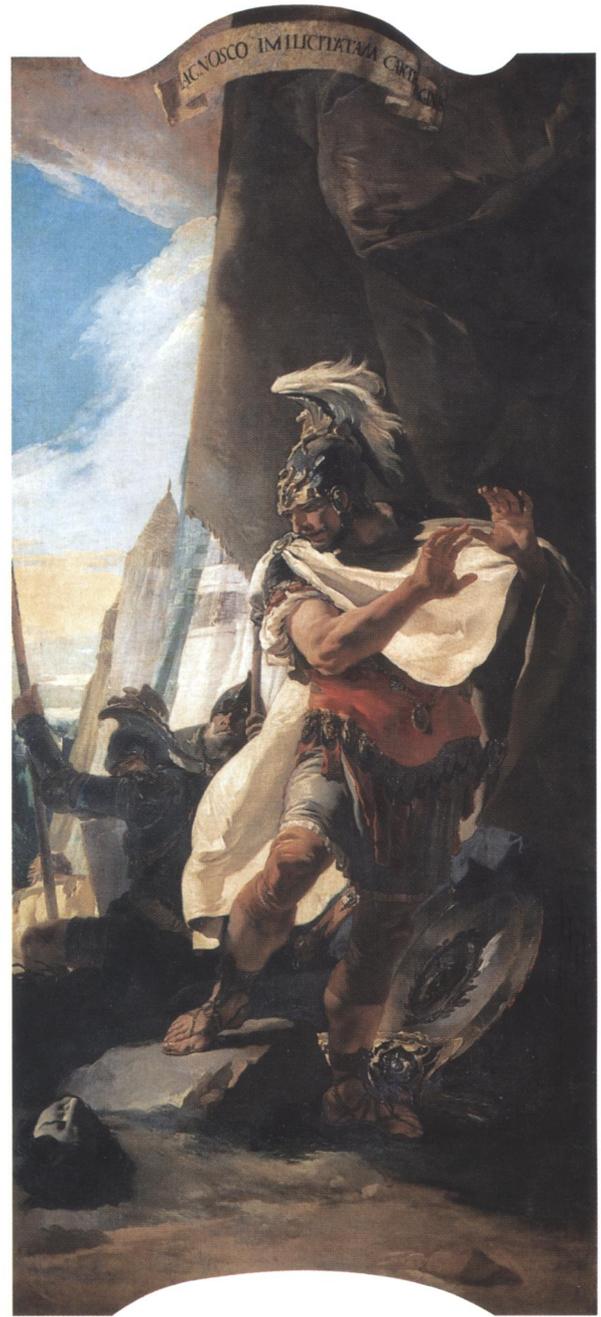
anomaly. Might the picture show, instead, the triumph of Scipio or Aurelian, as some scholars have suggested?

These canvases were followed by a number of episodes chronicling Rome's long struggle against its arch rival, Carthage, in the Punic Wars. In the first, Quintus Fabius Maximus is shown before the senate at Carthage threatening war if the brilliant African commander Hannibal is not surrendered (217 B.C.; fig. 42). "He spread out his toga with a gesture which did not fail to produce the alarm which might have been expected had he really carried war in its folds" (Et excusso in media curia togae gremio non sine horrore, quasi plane sinu bellum ferret, effudit: I.xxii.7). In the second, Hannibal is depicted coming upon his brother's severed

41. Detail of fig. 40, *A Roman Triumph*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Behind the captive is what appears to be a Gypsy family.



42. *Fabius Maximus before the Senate at Carthage*. Oil on canvas, 152 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 88 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (387 × 224.2 cm). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



43. *Hannibal Contemplating the Head of Hasdrubal*. Oil on canvas, 150 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 71 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (382.9 × 181.9 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

opposite

44. *The Triumph of Marius*. Oil on canvas, 220 × 128 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (558.8 × 326.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.183.1)

head, which had been thrown into his camp (fig. 43); Hannibal took this as an omen of his own impending defeat by Scipio. For once, the passage from Florus is an address to the viewer by the protagonist: “I recognize the ill-luck of the Carthaginians” (*Agnosco inquit infelicitatem Carthaginis*: I.xxii.45). The large canvas at the Metropolitan is next in sequence. It shows the triumph of Marius (fig. 44), with the victorious general Gaius Marius leading the African Jugurtha through Rome in chains (104 B.C.). “The Roman people saw Jugurtha led in triumph loaded with chains,” declares the inscription (*Opertum catenis Iugurtham in triumpho populus Romanus aspexit*: I.xxxvi.17).





45. *The Capture of Carthage*.
Oil on canvas, 162 × 148³/₈ in.
(411.5 × 376.9 cm). *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*,
New York. Rogers Fund,
1965 (65.183.2)

In the Metropolitan there remain the two brilliantly conceived but somewhat ambiguous paintings of battles that have no inscriptions. They are usually identified as showing the bloody capture of Carthage by Publius Cornelius Scipio (146 B.C.; fig. 45) and Marius's victory over the invading Cimbrian Gauls at Vercellae, in Lombardy (101 B.C.; fig. 46). Florus recounts that the Gallic tribes were weakened by their stay in the Veneto—"the very mildness of the country and of the air sapped



their vigour” (I.xxxviii.11–18)—and this sort of topical detail could well have recommended this subject to the Dolfin. Alternatively it has been proposed that Coriolanus is shown before his change of allegiance, leading the Romans to victory over the Volsci in capturing their capital, Corioli. There is no means of resolving the dilemma satisfactorily, for the pictures contain no details that might distinguish these battles. It may, nonetheless, be noted that the city in the so-called *Capture of*

46. *The Battle of Vercellae*.
Oil on canvas, 162 × 148³/₈ in.
(411.5 × 376.9 cm). *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*,
New York. Rogers Fund,
1965 (65.183.3)

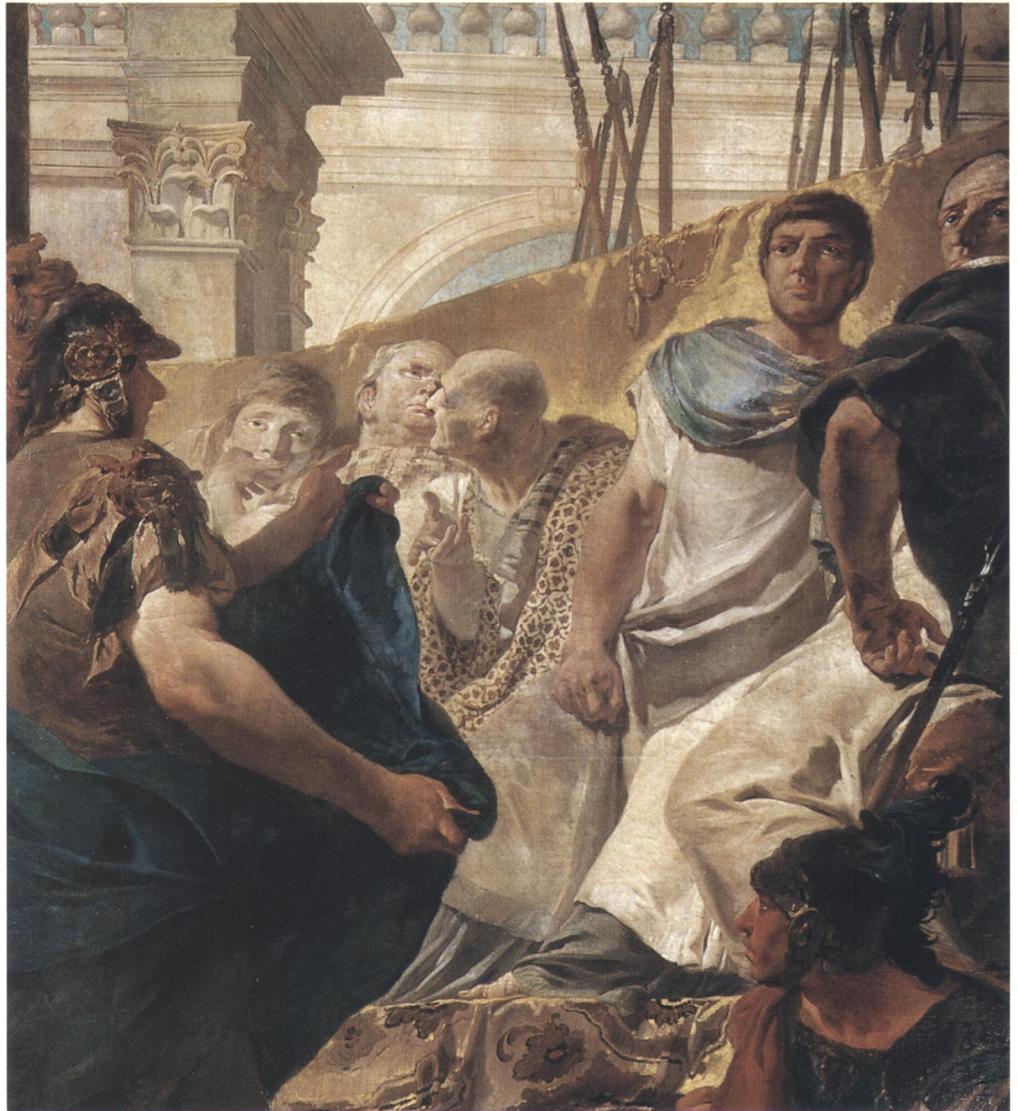


47, 48. Details of fig. 45, *The Capture of Carthage*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tiepolo's virtuosity with the brush is especially evident in his evocation in monochromatic tones of an ancient city and his use of the bristles to create surface texture.

Carthage is a great metropolis, with a citadel, temples, and statues, such as would be appropriate for the great city of Dido described by Virgil (fig. 47). The carnage depicted in the background accords with descriptions of the battle. Moreover, the defeat of Carthage was one of the pivotal events in Roman history and is unlikely to have been omitted in a series such as this. It might be thought that the two battle scenes bore some direct relationship to the two triumphs. This seems to be the case with *The Triumph of Marius* and *The Battle of Vercellae*, both of which involved Gaius Marius. If it could be demonstrated that the Hermitage canvas shows not the Tarantine triumph but the triumph of Scipio, then there would be good reason for identifying the second battle scene as the capture of Carthage.

In this alternation of battles, triumphs, and valorous acts, it is difficult to discern any didactic program except in the most general sense. In his 1986 monograph on Tiepolo, Michael Levey writes, "The state and its demands on the individual form the theme. Rome conquers—especially its traditional enemy Carthage (for which





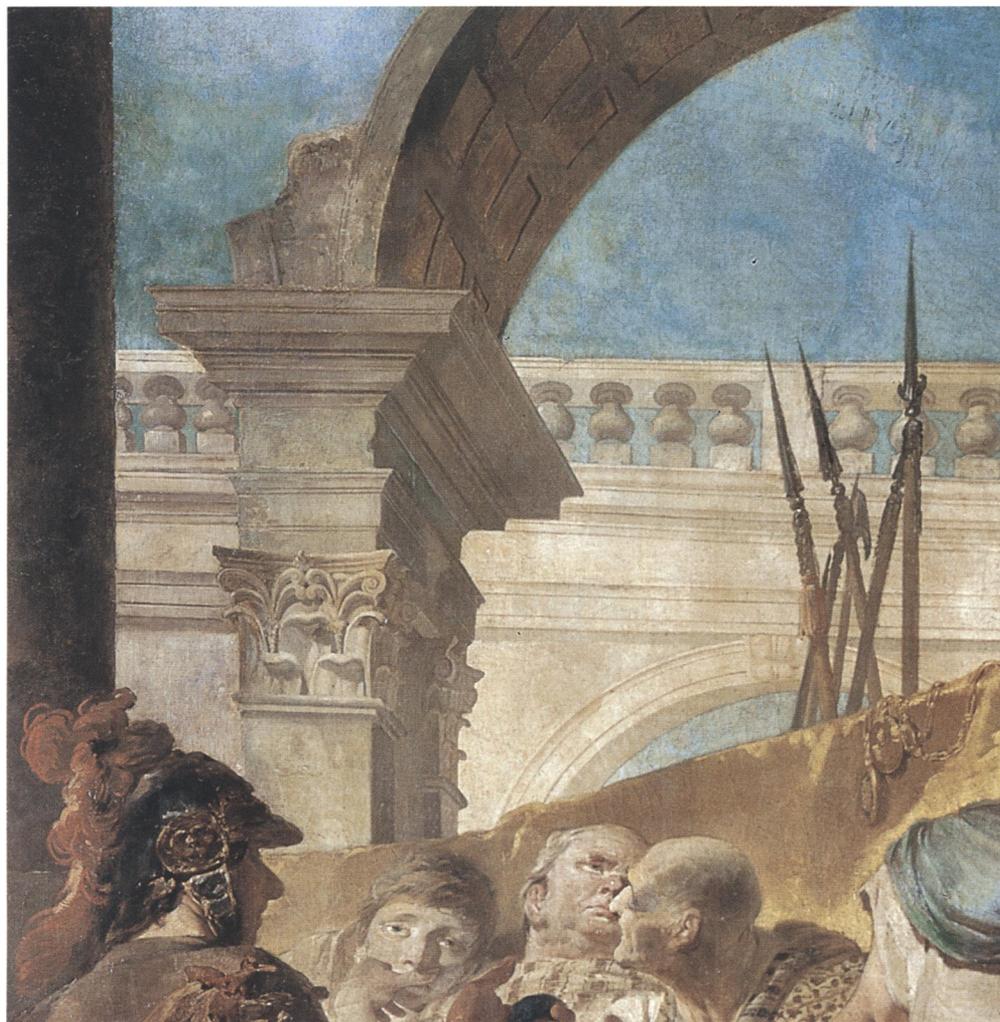
49. Detail of fig. 42, *Fabius Maximus before the Senate at Carthage*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The sequence of three heads reacting to Fabius Maximus's words is brilliantly conceived to add an air of seriousness to this picture.

might be read Venice versus the Ottoman Empire).” It may have been that the Dolfin viewed the pictures in this allusive fashion, for it is not difficult to imagine them finding in the military conquests and territorial expansion of republican Rome a flattering analogy with the history of Venice, and in some of the heroes, a reflection of their own patriotic commitment to the Venetian state. Daniele IV may not have literally put his hand in a fire for Venice, but he did lose four fingers of his left hand in battle against the Turks in 1690.

The *salone* in Ca’ Dolfin has a large arched entrance on one long wall and, on the opposite side, five windows overlooking the canal; these provide the only source of light for the room, and Tiepolo took this fact into consideration in his pictures. The end walls had three canvases each, forming a sort of triptych with one of the immense vertical pictures of a Roman triumphal procession at the center. On the west end wall (lit from the left) *The Triumph of Marius* was installed, flanked by *Fabius Maximus before the Senate at Carthage* (the architecture is viewed from the right) and *Cincinnatus Offered the Dictatorship*; opposite (lit from the right) was a

scene perhaps intended to show the Tarantine triumph flanked by *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna* and *Veturia Pleading with Coriolanus*. On the long wall, to either side of the main doorway, were the two squarish battle scenes, while opposite, in restricted spaces to either side of the center window, were the narrow canvases of *Brutus and Arruns* and *Hannibal Contemplating the Head of Hasdrubal*. The compressed energy of the ensemble must have been almost overpowering.

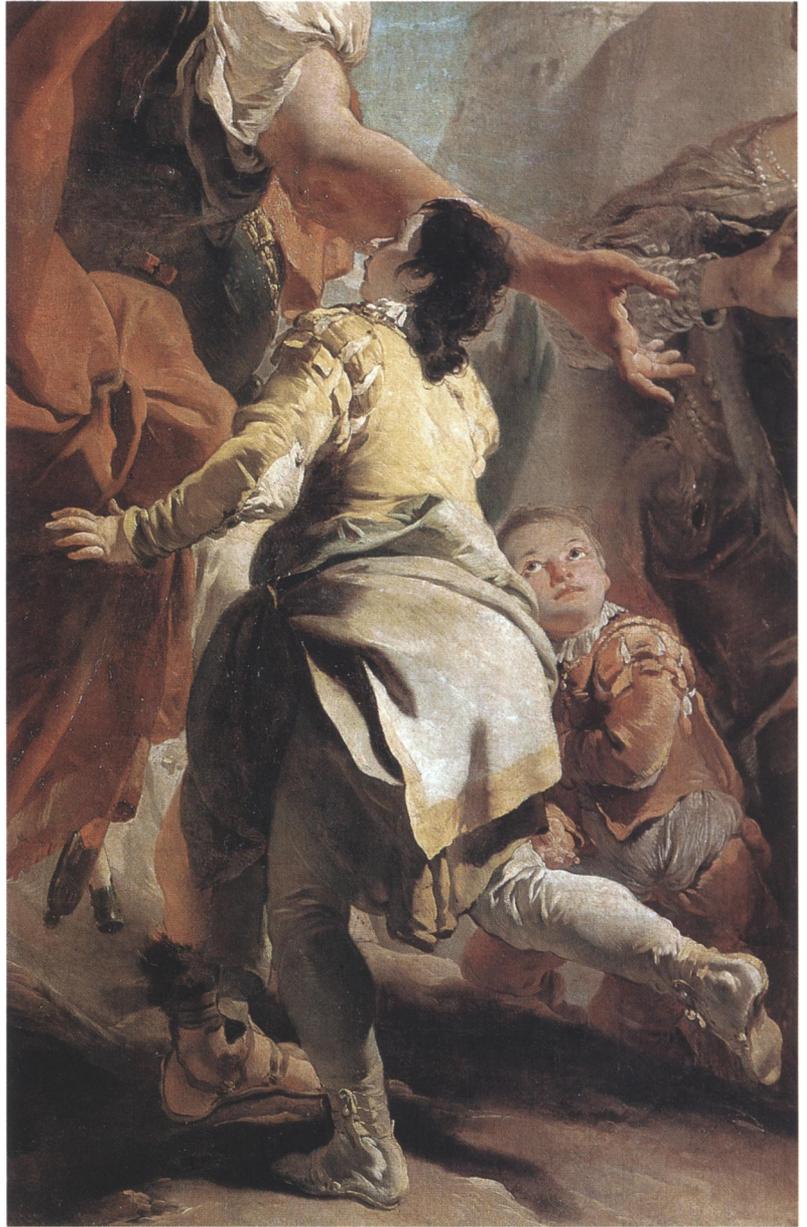
One notable feature of the pictures is their treatment of Roman history in romantically evocative terms rather than as archaeological reconstruction. This was a typically Venetian approach. Only in *Fabius Maximus* is there a real attempt to evoke the world of antiquity. The figures huddled in discussion fully convey the character of ancient statesmen (fig. 49). Nonetheless, if we look closely at the building that shelters them, we find that it is composed of a picturesque ruin. So, far from imitating the architecture of Rome, the pier with applied columns is taken from Palladio's sixteenth-century church of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice: the building presents a Palladian vision of antiquity (see fig. 50). In 1724 Tiepolo was called upon to make drawings after Roman statues and portrait busts to illustrate a book on the antiquities of Verona compiled by Scipione Maffei. The relief sculpture decorating the



50. Detail of fig. 42, *Fabius Maximus before the Senate at Carthage*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The classical pier has been taken over from Palladio's Renaissance church of San Giorgio Maggiore. Tiepolo seems to have looked at the ancient world through the lens of sixteenth-century Venetian art.



left
51. Detail of fig. 40, *A Roman Triumph*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



right
52. Detail of fig. 33, *Veturia Pleading with Coriolanus*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

brazier into whose flames Mucius Scaevola thrusts his hand unquestionably reflects this antiquarian employment, but it manages nonetheless to avoid the effects of a piece of antiquarianism (fig. 36). Similarly, the vases, war booty, and standards in *The Triumph of Marius* show none of the archaeological obsessions of Mantegna or Rubens (figs. 54, 57). In *Marius* the arch through which the procession passes has the appearance of a Gothic bridge, and the fortifications shown in the remaining paintings are, again, more Gothic than Roman in appearance. (Is there a veiled allusion in this to the medieval fortifications in the Veneto?)

The mind of the scrupulous recorder of historical events was at the opposite pole from Tiepolo's imagination. In the Ca' Dolfin canvases he treats history as pageant and grand theater. In *Coriolanus*, for example, the general of the Volsci is unexpectedly greeted by his eager sons, who, dressed in sixteenth-century finery,



53. Detail of fig. 38, *Cincinnatus Offered the Dictatorship*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

dart out from behind their stern grandmother (fig. 52). Their action introduces an element of human sentiment into an otherwise somber story, making a scene of immense appeal and genial believability. In no less picturesque a fashion the procession in *A Roman Triumph* is headed by a court dwarf on the left (fig. 51) and two Gypsies on the right. The page dressed in yellow satin staring out of *Cincinnatus* adds a calculated note of urbane refinement that Tiepolo contrasts with the stunningly painted still life of a peasant meal prominently positioned in the foreground (figs. 39, 53). This is the sort of local color that Tiepolo was to bring to all of his subsequent history paintings. He even found a place for himself among the colorful bystanders along the left edge of *The Triumph of Marius*, turning his head to stare out at us, as though to solicit our approval for his achievement (see p. 2).

The greatest challenge in the Ca' Dolfin canvases was adapting visually complex



54. Detail of fig. 44, *The Triumph of Marius*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

stories to restrictive vertical picture fields: horizontal rather than vertical canvases had been the normal vehicle in Venice for narrative paintings of this sort. The problem was especially acute in the two triumphs. Previously, depictions of Roman triumphs had always been shown as processions across the picture field. Tiepolo managed to turn this limitation to advantage, rotating the procession ninety degrees, so that it moves from the background into the foreground, threatening to spill out of the picture plane into the room of the palace. He must have derived inspiration for this approach from Veronese's splendid *Triumph of Mordecai* (1556) on the ceiling of the church of San Sebastiano—but that work could serve only as a point of departure, not a model.



In Tiepolo's two triumphs, we have the first intimation of the brilliant scheme he was to invent a decade and a half later for his frescoes in the ballroom of Palazzo Labia, where Cleopatra proceeds from the barge toward fictive stairs leading into the actual hall. In *The Triumph of Marius* the viewer is made to participate in the scene (it is, indeed, the viewer that Jugurtha fixes with his proud gaze; fig. 54). Tiepolo's increasing mastery of spatial problems is fully demonstrated by a comparison of *A Roman Triumph* with *The Triumph of Marius*. In the former the space is ambivalent and the arrangement of the figures casual. The placement of the victorious general atop his curious cart is awkward (fig. 55), and the billowing banner

55. Detail of fig. 40, *A Roman Triumph*. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The identity of the Roman general is not certain. Pyrrhus, Scipio, and Aurelian have been suggested.



56. Domenico Tiepolo. *Fallen Warrior*. Red and white chalk on paper, 6½ × 11¾ in. (16.5 × 29.8 cm). The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann (1997-57). Sometimes thought of as a study for Giambattista Tiepolo's *Capture of Carthage*, the drawing is more likely a copy after the picture by his son Domenico, perhaps dating from about 1754–55, when Domenico was at work on a fresco cycle in the church of San Faustino Maggiore, Brescia.

opposite

57. Detail of fig. 44, *The Triumph of Marius*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

on the left and descending diagonal of spectators on the right confuse rather than articulate the composition. Its brilliant effect derives less from its overall arrangement than from individual details and the intense sky.

By contrast, in *The Triumph of Marius* Tiepolo organized the composition around a simple arc, accented by the measured placement of the figures of the boy with a tambourine in the foreground; Jugurtha in the middle ground; and Marius at the

crest of a hill, his torso set off by the receding wall of the distant arch. The spears and ensigns create a vertical grid, while the yellow standard, crisply fluttering above Marius, falls on the vertical axis, anchoring the scheme. No less notable is the powerful construction and ponderous, forward-moving gait of the figures, so different from the tentative physiognomy in *A Roman Triumph*. The shift from the sharply lit, brilliant colors of the latter to the more subtle modulations in *The Triumph of Marius* is equally remarkable.

The Triumph of Marius is unquestionably the latest and most mature picture in the cycle (this is, quite obviously, why it is dated and why Tiepolo inserted his portrait in it), and *A Roman Triumph* must be the earliest. Having begun the Ca' Dolfin cycle with *A Roman Triumph*, Tiepolo seems to have turned—perhaps after a hiatus—to its two companions (ca. 1726–27) and then to the remaining compositions, including the battle scenes.

Since 1975 George Knox has maintained that the battles were painted in the mid-1750s, after Tiepolo's return from Würzburg. The primary evidence for this is three chalk drawings related to the pictures (see fig. 56). He considers them preliminary sketches by Tiepolo; I believe them to be by Tiepolo's son Domenico (who frequently copied his father's works) and extraneous to any dating of the paintings. Quite apart from these drawings, however, is the simple fact that da Canal clearly states that the room contained ten pictures, and the style of the battle scenes is in no way different from that of the other paintings. Each stage of Tiepolo's progress on the cycle was accompanied by greater mastery of his pictorial means. In the battle scenes and in *The Triumph of Marius* the brush is manipulated to suggest a range of textures: the weave of cloth, the coat of a horse (fig. 48), the rough skin of a soldier. Highlights are scumbled with consummate control, almost as though Tiepolo were drawing with colored light. The background skirmish in *The Capture of Carthage* and the impressive Moorish captive, his head and upper torso visible between Jugurtha and the spectators to the left in *The Triumph of Marius* (fig. 57), are carried out in near monochrome—tones of gray, blue, and buff—with loose, broken brushwork that looks ahead to Goya and Delacroix: never again did Tiepolo achieve such a tactile effect in his work. Although it is frequently stated that fresco



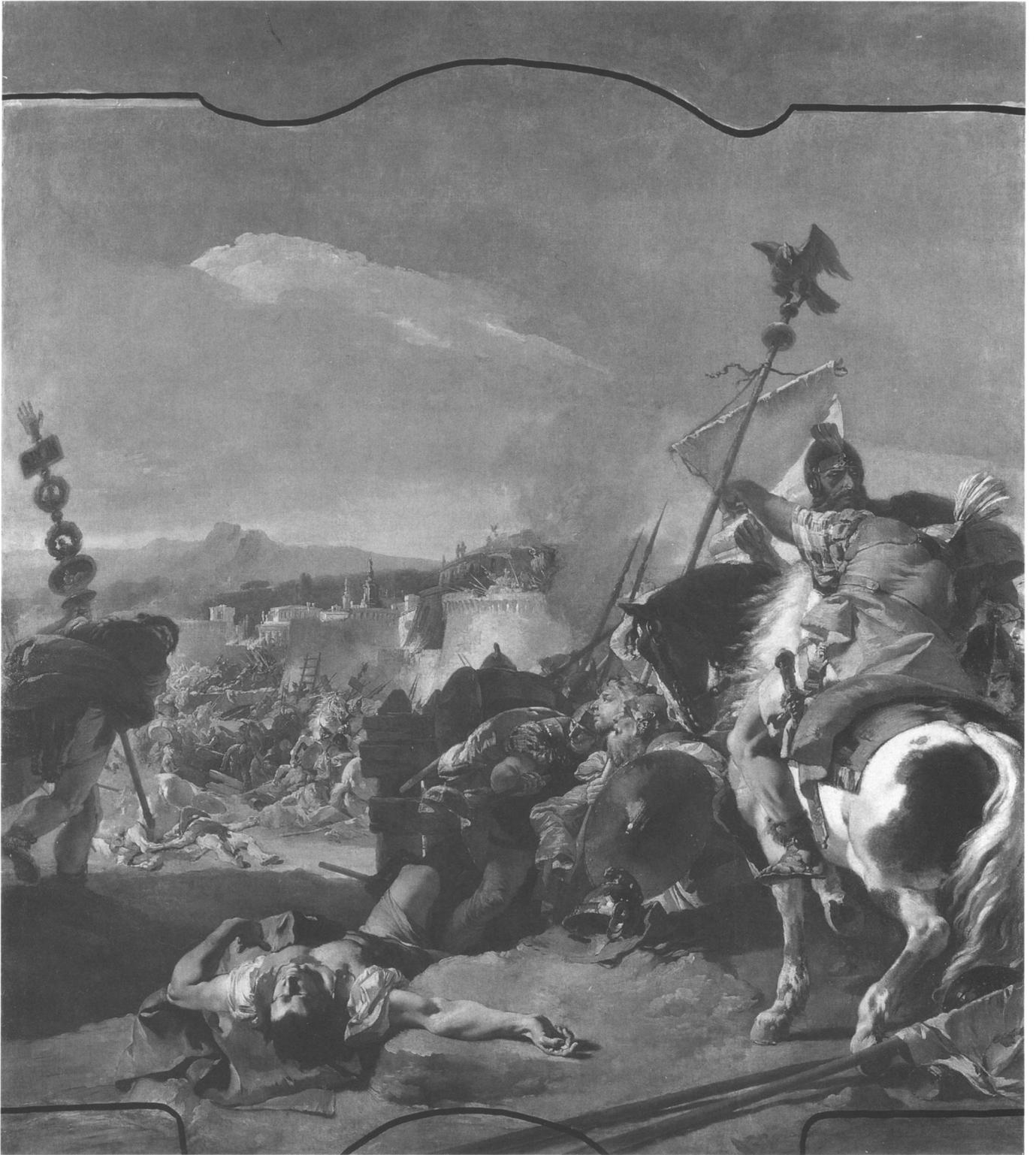


was Tiepolo's natural medium, the Ca' Dolfin paintings reveal him as an unsurpassed master of oil. One might almost reverse the judgment and say that what makes his frescoes so remarkable is the degree to which he managed to simulate the textural effects of the Ca' Dolfin pictures in a medium that was, by nature, transparent and smooth. In the Ca' Dolfin canvases Tiepolo definitively rejected the dark world of his older contemporary Piazzetta. Staking his claim to color as his vehicle of expression, he realized the potential of light as an animating as well as dramatic force, and he harnessed overt emotionalism to the dictates of narrative drama.

Over the next decade and a half, Tiepolo's art was to undergo profound changes. Yet behind his finest achievements—from the cinematic richness of his two gigantic canvases with Old Testament stories painted for the parish church of Verolanuova, near Brescia, to the resonant pathos of his great religious masterpiece, *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), and the elevated realism found in the genre-like details of the ceiling over the staircase of the Residenz in Würzburg—there is the echo of the extraordinary pictures for Ca' Dolfin that were carried out at the threshold of his maturity. That these canvases should now adorn the Museum's most prominent European paintings gallery seems fully justified, for in many respects they summarize the goals of humanist painting from the time of the Renaissance, and they attest in no uncertain terms to the genius of the artist who can claim to be the last Old Master, Giambattista Tiepolo.

opposite

58. Detail of fig. 46, *The Battle of Vercellae*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Appendix A

Reshaping the Ca' Dolfin Canvases

Following their removal from Ca' Dolfin in 1872, Tiepolo's irregularly shaped canvases were transformed into rectangles by a combined process of reduction and addition. Some of the projections were cut off, while new pieces were added to fill indentations; some of these additions are visible in early photographs (see, for example, fig. 59). Each of the two squarish paintings had a large strip of canvas at the top, which increased the height by six inches, and they also had canvas fills in the bottom corners and at the bottom center; these had been added about 1872. The top and bottom corners of *The Triumph of Marius* were additions, and, as with the two battle scenes, the original curved indentation at the bottom center was filled in. In 1930 the additions at the tops of the two Vienna paintings were removed and the bottoms were reshaped to match the curved indentation of their frescoed surrounds in the palace. A similar project was undertaken in 1994 on the three works in the Metropolitan Museum. The enormous size of the pictures made this a particularly complicated operation.

The initial idea was to reconstruct the original complex profiles of the paintings: to reintroduce not only the shaped tops and the indentations of the bottom edges but also the curved extensions that had been lopped off. Two kinds of evidence were enlisted: technical examination of the canvases and measurements and tracings of the frescoed surrounds in Ca' Dolfin. It was anticipated that the evidence from the one would corroborate or supplement that derived from the other, but such was not the case. A technical examination established that while the three Metropolitan canvases retained their original vertical edges, the bottoms especially had suffered greatly and had been much altered. Weave distortion (the scalloped pattern that results along the edges of a canvas where it has been pulled taut for tacking onto the stretcher) in each of the pictures indicates that originally the bottom corners were notched and included a curved indentation. Surprisingly, when tracings were made of the bottom edges of the frescoed surrounds, they did not align with the profile suggested by the technical evidence: either the indentations of the canvases aligned with those of the surrounds and the notched corners did not, or the corners aligned and the curves did not. The only explanation for the disparities is that the lower portions of the frescoed surrounds have themselves been altered. This is likely to have occurred during the restorations undertaken by the Milanese architect G. B. Brusa after 1876 to accommodate mirrors and sconces where the canvases had been. It must be remembered that by that time the palace had been abandoned for more than a century and that broken windows and a hole in the ceiling made the room particularly vulnerable to inclement weather.

Under these circumstances, it was decided not to attempt an archaeological reconstruction of the elaborate profile of the bottom edges but only to introduce the curved indentation in the center, following the evidence of the technical examination. The addition at the bottom center of each canvas was removed, but those in the bottom corners were

opposite

59. Photograph of *The Capture of Carthage* before treatment, with lines indicating additions made to the canvas after its removal from Ca' Dolfin in 1872. The additions in the lower left and right were not removed in the 1995 restoration, since there was no means of reconstructing the original bottom contour precisely.

60. *New stretchers under construction at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*



left, together with their nineteenth-century repainting. The additions at the top of each picture were also removed; the present curved profiles accord with the technical evidence and conform pretty much to the frescoed surrounds in the room. However, since a few inches at the apex of *The Triumph of Marius* had been cropped, it was necessary to add pieces of canvas to make up the highest points of the uppermost curve.

The complex job of constructing new stretchers was undertaken by George Bisacca of the Department of Paintings Conservation, working with Daniel Olsen of the carpenters' shop (figs. 60–62). New frames also had to be produced, since at the Metropolitan the paintings would hang as large canvases rather than as substitute frescoes, which is the effect they had in their original setting. The cross section as well as surface color of the new frames were based on an eighteenth-century Venetian frame in the Museum's collection. While the final effect is necessarily different from that in Ca' Dolfin, it is now possible to better appreciate the way Tiepolo consciously adapted his composition to the shape of the picture field.

61, 62. *Preparing the pictures for transfer to their new stretchers and attaching them*





Appendix B

In February 1872 the great connoisseur Giovanni Morelli wrote to his cousin Giovanni (Giannino) Melli about Baron Miller von Aichholz. The letters draw a fine portrait of Baron von Aichholz's ambitions as a collector and elucidate Morelli's own prejudices in matters of painting. Thanks to the generosity of Jaynie Anderson, one of the unpublished letters is printed here in English.

Venice, 21.2.[18]72

Dearest Giannino,

Unfortunately I have had to convince myself that my baron Miller, whom I recommended to you as a connoisseur of the fine arts, was not that knowledgeable man who he first appeared to me to be. I have mistaken a firefly for a lantern. Imagine, he has told me that he does not like Correggio's paintings in Parma, that he does not know what to do with Moretto da Brescia or with Moroni, that he found nothing of quality among Poldi's paintings, and that his armory was two-thirds full of forged objects. Here in the galleries of the academy in Venice, where he begged me to accompany him, I saw that he walked by the best pictures by Titian without even observing them—and that in a word he understood truly nothing about Italian art. Then he did not know what to make of Dutch works of art! Nevertheless, one cannot deny that for a certain period of our art and for certain artists of that period, which is the second half of the fifteenth century, he has a very acute sensibility, and he enjoys very much, for example, the works of Mantegna, Carpaccio, Cima da Conegliano, and so on and so forth, but his sensibility does not go any further than this circle. And yet from that period he jumps in one bound to the decorative painters at the end of the seventeenth century, who, for example, would be Canaletto, Tiepolo, and their contemporaries. Yesterday he bought ten large Tiepolo canvases from a dealer here for the price of 46,000 francs: imagine, forty-six thousand! He even asked me if I thought one day you would perhaps sell him your little paintings by Borgognone, your Foppa portrait, and the Man Smoking by Molenaer. I told him that I would write you, but that I really doubted whether you would want to deprive yourself of one or the other of these pictures. Here in Venice he must have spent more than 60,000 francs on works of art. He was extremely kind to me and extended a warm invitation for me to stay in his house at Vienna when I go there, and said he would take it badly if I did not, all the more so since he is all alone in his palace. This morning he left to return to Vienna. . . .

Yesterday morning, before he left, I asked Miller if he would buy anything at the sale of the Gsell Gallery, and he replied: "There is nothing among those paintings that anyone would want to have, with the exception of a Tiepolo." This confirmed for me your judgment of him. He is an eccentric man, or if you like, an imperfect and capricious amateur. . . .

Nane M.

[Giovanni Morelli]

On March 5, 1872, Morelli confided his real feelings about the Tiepolo canvases to Sir Austen Henry Layard, many of whose Italian Renaissance paintings are now in the National Gallery, London: "The paintings [by Tiepolo] are truly done with much spirit and brio but in the end are little more than decoration. *De gustibus non est disputandum*—there is no accounting for taste." It is in this letter that we learn the dealer was Michel Angelo Guggenheim.

opposite
63. Detail of fig. 45. *The Capture of Carthage*. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following: Jaynie Anderson, for the information about Giovanni Morelli and Michel Angelo Guggenheim and the quotation from Ernest de Liphart; Wolfgang Prohaska, for information on Baron Miller von Aichholz and Camillo Castiglioni; Irene Artemieva, for information on and photographs of the Hermitage canvases; and Filippo Pedrocco, who furnished measurements and various information about the *salone* of Ca' Dolfin and made available to me the dissertation of Giuliana Pradella on the cycle of paintings. I am particularly indebted to Hubert von Sonnenburg and George Bisacca in the Department of Paintings Conservation. Jack Soutanian first brought to my attention the reference to Tiepolo in *The Glimpses of the Moon* by Edith Wharton. A fascinating article by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi on the response of Henry James and Edith Wharton to the work of Tiepolo appears in the 1998 *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 33. KC

Notes

Unpublished letters are on file in the Archives Department at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Latin translations are from Lucius Annaeus Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, Loeb Classical Library (1929).

P. 7: “quantities of George Sand and Dumas”: John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903–12), vol. 24, p. 358.

P. 7: “exploded all together sky-high”: *Ibid.*, p. 357.

P. 7: “and all that noisy rubbish”: Ambroise Vollard, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer*, trans. Violet MacDonald (London, 1936), pp. 152–53.

P. 7: “never heard of him before”: Roger Fry, *Letters of Roger Fry*, ed. Denys Sutton (New York, 1972), pp. 131–35.

P. 7: “first of the new”: Bernard Berenson, *Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York, 1894), p. 76.

P. 7: “world itself was at fault”: *Ibid.*

P. 11: “most singular works”: Vincenzo da Canal, *Vita di Gregorio Lazzarini*, ed. Giovanni Antonio Moschini (Venice, 1809), p. 34.

P. 11: “of a seductive effect and composition”: Abbé de Saint-Non, *Panopticon Italiano: Un diario di viaggio ritrovato, 1759–1761*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg and Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée (Rome, 1986), pp. 202, 206.

P. 14: “I was unable to see them”: *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15.

P. 44: “Venice versus the Ottoman Empire”: Michael Levey, *Giambattista Tiepolo: His Life and Art* (New Haven, 1986), p. 52.



