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Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. An Image of Patronage

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Over the past years the research for this book has developed like the maturing of a fruit tree, with each period of growth followed by necessary pruning to yield first harvests. At the roots of my exploration was a historiographic paper on the reception of Sassetta, to which I was introduced by Ilja Veldman and Paul van den Akker. This paper inspired the outline for a monograph on the artist, presently a work in progress, and I am delighted that Henk van Os was willing to be what one might call the expert gardener on this project. The first fruits borne by my research concerned the genesis of Sassetta's first and last works, the *Arte della Lana* altarpiece and the fresco on the *Porta Romana* in Siena. Since the documents I discovered appeared to have a broader significance, not only regarding our knowledge of the painter, but also regarding the function of altarpieces, the history of artistic tradition in Siena and the use of cartoons, the material was published in *The Burlington Magazine* in 1998 and 2001. This introduced me to its editor at that time, Caroline Elam, whose professionalism and critique have since been great stimuli.

Trimming scissors were needed to cut the project down to fit the requirements of a doctoral dissertation for the University of Amsterdam and, in a search to establish the impact of patronage and function on Sassetta's work and career, I therefore singled out the artist's most central and innovative work. The fairly complete picture that emerged of the steering committee behind the commission then gave a twist to the argument. Through a study of Cardinal Antonio Casini, the mastermind behind the iconography of Sassetta's altarpiece, it emerged that two other altarpieces had participated in the tale: the *Santa Maria Maggiore* altarpiece by Masaccio and Masolino, and Sassetta's own *Madonna delle Ciliegie* in Grosseto. Moreover, the *Madonna della Neve* constituted a fortuitous case: the archives yielded surprising documents, not only to me but also to Monika Butzek who is preparing a volume on the *Sieneſe Duomo* for the *Kirchen von Siena* project of the *Kunsthistorisches Institut* in Florence. I thank her for the characteristic generosity and friendship in which she shared with me her thoughts, her documents and her immense knowledge of Sieneſe artistic history. At the time, the altarpiece was being restored by Nicola McGregor and Roberto Buda, under the supervision of Alessandro Cecchi, all of whom allowed me to visit the restoration atelier and all of whom openhandedly showed me their findings. Andrea Lensini's colour photographs accompany this volume and present the work for the first time after its restoration.

It was privilege to have Henk van Os' seminal study on the topic of 1968 ('*Schnee in Siena*') at my disposition and to find his predilection for the artist scattered throughout his writings. I feel honoured to have been able to benefit from his insights, his thought-provoking discussions and his ability to look towards the broader framework. I am indebted to Ludwin Paardekooper who, with enthusiasm, pragmatism and erudition opened my eyes to the wondrous, labyrinthine world of Italian archives, while the support and scientific mind of Christa Gardner von Teuffel made her my guardian angel. Sible de

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