Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. An Image of Patronage

Israëls, M.

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The next bulk of documents dates to the 1430s and pertains to Ludovica’s commissioning of Sassetta’s altarpiece and to her own testament. In this chapter we shall follow donna Ludovica through these notarial acts to see how she formulated and realised her desires regarding the chapel.

The documents concerning the commission of the Madonna della Neve form part of the archive of the Sienese church of San Francesco (plate xi). The reason that the papers regarding the commission were originally kept in this convent must have been that Ludovica took the vows of the Franciscan Third Order in her widowhood, although she apparently became a secular member as she retained control of her possessions. In her testament, Ludovica appointed the guardian of the Franciscan conventuals and the guardian of the Franciscan tertiaries as her testamentary executors and fiduciaries (Appendix I, doc. A.VII). The provenance of the documentation for Sassetta’s Madonna della Neve therefore does not mean that the friars of San Francesco were involved in its commission.

Ludovica’s Franciscan background indicates one of the ways in which Sassetta may have caught her attention as a candidate to decorate the cathedral chapel. The lives of both Sassetta, and of Ludovica as a tertiary, centred around the church of San Francesco, which contained works by the painter. We know that on 20th June 1427 Sassetta had been paid by its Opera a sum of little more than 11 florins for ‘la tavola di Santo Lodovico’, possibly an instalment for an altarpiece. Also in the church of San Francesco, Sassetta

55 Giovanni Antonio Pecci in 1731 saw these Sassetta documents in the convent of San Francesco, survivors of the devastating fire that raged in the church in 1655; PECCI 1731, fol. 152 v. 66, 32v. 276; his notes published by G. Lisini in BORGHESE & BANCHI 1898, pp. 144-45 note to nr. 82. They are now kept in the ASV, which preserves a lot of archival material from this Sienese convent; LAURENT 1935, pp. 257-258.

56 The tertiaries were actually organised that way. In 1428 the abbess of the tertiaries, Petra of late Angelo di Meo di Vanno Zondadari, created Margarita di Pietro of Condorgiali governor of the tertiaries: ‘rectricem et gubernatricem bonorum omnium dictarum mantellatarum’ and entrusted her with the ‘curam, diligentiam et administrationem bonorum omni ipsorum mantellatarum’; ASV, Fondo Veneto 1, 16100 (dated 2nd July, notary Cristoforo di Domenico Salvi of Abbadia Isola).


58 ‘... al presente di 20 di giugno 1427 da Batista di Bartolomeo di Buonsignore banchiere et camarlingo de l’Uopera... Item Stefano dipintore avuto in prestanza per la tavola di Santo Lodovico L. 46, sol. 12; BONUCCI 2001, pp. 26-27, who suggests a relation between donna Ludovica and the image, because of the presence of her male name-saint. Considering that Ludovica was still alive and would easily have been able to pay herself, the work must have been ordered by the friars themselves in honour of a saint that was of general interest to their order. At the most, the remuneration may have been the friar’s handling of a private bequest. It was probably an intermediate payment. The work itself may have been a single panel, but more likely an altarpiece. An altar dedicated to Saint
had painted an altarpiece for the Petroni family, which will be discussed in more detail below. The initial contacts with the Franciscan convent in Borgo Sansepolcro for their double-sided altarpiece, painted by Sassetta in the years 1437-1444, may also have been mediated by the Siennese house. As we have seen, Franciscan sympathies were shared by many of Ludovica’s friends, amongst them two consecutive bishops of Siena. The first, Antonio Casini, counsellor of Ludovica as well as patron of Sassetta, left money for a perpetual office to be said in the memory of two of his sisters in the church, as we shall see later. We have seen that the second, Carlo Bartoli, also came from a Franciscan background and was well known to the protagonist of the Franciscan Observance, Saint Bernardino. The saint would in turn become a patron of Sassetta, whom he commissioned to paint an Assumption of the Virgin for the high altar of his convent church. In addition to this, Sassetta had a personal affiliation with the Franciscans, as it is probable that his sister Caterina Maria professed to the order. Furthermore, at the time of the commission, both Ludovica and Sassetta lived in the vicinity of San Francesco, in the neighbourhood of San Pietro a Ovile. Ludovica lived on the Piazza del Sale (see Appendix 1, doc. A.7), while Sassetta was registered as gonfaloniere of the Compagnia di San Pietro a Ovile di Sotto in 1431.

When Ludovica commissions the altarpiece to Sassetta on the first day of the Siene new year, 25th March 1430, she is in fact referred to not only as the daughter of Francesco Bertini and the widow of Turino but also, for the first time, as ‘clamidata ordinis Sancti Francisci de Scnis’. She entrusts Sassetta with the task of painting an altarpiece to go over the altar of San Bonifazio near the Porta del Perdono, ‘Stefano Iohannis Consoli de Senis, pictori ad pingendum unam tabulam’. She commissions the painter directly, without intervention of the operaio that was in office, as had previously been usual practice as, for instance, in the case of the Pietà ordered by Caterino di Corsino for the chapel of Galgano di Cerbone (fig. 35). This attests to an unprecedented degree of direct influence in the formation of the chapel of Louis, with an ‘old’ altarpiece with the Virgin and saints, its patronage just passed from the Palmieri to the Rossi, did exist in the time of rossio 1575, fol. 672v (p. 988): ‘Visitavit cappellam Sancti Ludovici [...] Icona vero erat parum antiqua cum figura beatas Marie Virginis et aliorum sanctorum. Cappella est testudinata et videtur minarini ruinam ut appareat et est, ut dixerunt, illorum de Rubeis sed modo de Palmeris.’ It does not appear in chigi (bacci) 1625-1626, pp. 318-319. The identification with Sassetta seems warranted as there was only one painter by the name of Stefano inscribed in the Siene guild of painters.

Some parchments were originally kept in the convent’s archives, see pecci 1731, fols. 347r nr. 204, 377r nr. 320. The contract is now in the asv (Fondo Veneto 1, 16202); see banker 1991, p. 51, suggesting the Vatican contract was the painter’s copy; davies 1961, pp. 568-570 (transcription).

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60 See Appendix 1, doc. e.43. Referred to as ‘Cardinale di S. Marcello’; lusini 1894, p. 106; de angelis 1827, p. 48.

61 bernardino 1427, p. 1205 (sermon xxi-19), praised the newly elect bishop in a sermon on the Campo.


63 israel 2003.


65 ass., Fondo Toscano 1, 16192; published by laurent 1935, pp. 260-261. The contract is written by notary Luca di Nanni of Siena and is made up in Ludovica’s house in the presence of (her?) two bankers, Agabio d’Ambrogio di Antonio and Pietro di Angelo di Pietro.

66 sani 1987, p. 491-492; see p. 77 below. Similarly, the Opera acted as intermediary for the decoration of the chapels of Francesco di Biagio and Giorgio di Andrea di Pietro Tolomei too; see pp. 82, 85.
Santa Maria della Neve. In any case, Ludovica’s choice of Sassetti would also have pleased the Opera del Duomo as, in the years following Turino’s death, Sassetti had been employed by the cathedral works particularly for his skills as draughtsman. He probably made the design for the pavement panel with Joshua’s Defeat of the Amorite Kings in 1426.\(^67\) He also made a grand-scale drawing on a wall of the baptistery of San Giovanni, beneath the cathedral, in preparation for the work by some of the most advanced artists of his day. It was probably a working plan, designed in consultation with Jacopo della Quercia, of the baptismal font for the baptistery in 1427, for which Jacopo della Quercia, Ghiberti, Donatello and Turino di Sano and his son Giovanni di Turino would make the sculptures and reliefs.\(^68\) The Opera del Duomo would continue to use the services of Sassetti later in the painter’s life.\(^69\) It is for these reasons that the Opera would have welcomed donna Ludovica’s choice.

In the contract it states that the altarpiece is to come: ‘ad altare cappelle Sancti Bonifatii, que cappella est prope portam ecclesie maioris prefate, que vocatur et dicitur la porta del Perdono’. It is clear that the chapel of San Bonifazio near the Porta del Perdono is the same chapel discussed in the documentation surrounding Turino’s testament, where it is referred to as the chapel near the entrance, or alternatively as the chapel of Santa Maria delle Grazie. In chapter 111 we shall discuss why this very same chapel could also be referred to as the chapel of San Bonifazio.

In the commission, Ludovica is quite specific in her wishes about what the altarpiece should represent. Five saints are to be shown: the Virgin and Child, the seraphic Saint Francis, Saints Peter and Paul and John the Baptist, with an additional figure of the Salvator above Mary ‘quinque figuris integris scribuntur: Virginis Marie cum Christo Yhesu filio suo in brachis suis, Sancti Francisci seraphici, Sancti Petri, Sancti Pauli et Sancti Iohannis Baptiste cum Salvatore a capite Virginis Marie’. It is remarkable that Saint Francis is the

\(^{67}\) ARONOW 1985, pp. 98-100, 420 doc. 71; POPE HENNESSY 1939, p. 20; BACCI 1929, p. 165. The payment is to ‘Stefano di Giovanni d’Asciano dipintore’. This document has to be treated with some caution and I wonder whether it does not actually refer to another Stefano di Giovanni. Sassetti was not a native of Asciano, since his family lived in Cortona at the time he must have been born; see ISRAELS 2003. The graffito of the panel has completely worn away and its style is difficult to assess, but the rearing horse with its head high up and its hatted rider seems to echo the central horse and horseman in the Melbourne predella panel of the Arte della Lana altarpiece. Pope Hennessy compared the soldier with raised sword and his prostrate victim with the Temptation of Saint Anthony of the same complex.


first to be mentioned immediately following the Virgin and that he is the only one honoured in the contract with a laudatory adjective. Once again, Ludovica and Turino's Franciscan interests come to mind. The Salvator requested in the contract is absent from the altarpiece as we know it. Furthermore, a real discrepancy between the contract and the finished altarpiece is evident in the amount of predella-scenes. In the contract, Ludovica requests five predella-scenes representing the miracle of the snow 'predellam cum quinque storiis Sancte Marie de Nive', whereas the predella now contains seven. The required stories of the miracle of the snow are the first indication of the title that the altar would acquire, whereas in the documents regarding Turino's testament, the chapel was only referred to by its old names.

In the contract, Ludovica goes on to stipulate good materials (gold and pigments), worthy of the work, to be supplied by the painter: 'cum illia quantitate auri et illis coloribus decentibus dictam tabulam, predellam et figuras' who should paint with skill, 'bene et ornate'. The price of the finished painting is to be assessed by two experts, one to be chosen by the patron, the other by the painter. Sassetta promises to finish it in a year. As usual, this obligatory term was stretched somewhat, but about two and a half years later, on 23rd October 1432, Sassetta completed his altarpiece for Ludovica. As stipulated in the contract, each chose a foreign, non-Sienese expert to settle the price of the work and materials that had gone into the altarpiece 'dictum huismodi salarium et mercedem dicte huiusmodi tabule'.

Gualtiero di Giovanni of Pisa, a painter who was active in Siena, represented Ludovica, while Sassetta chose the young Cecchino di Francesco of Verona (circa 1406-ante 1480), a painter and draughtsman who worked in a late International Gothic style, close to that of Pisanello. Within a week, on 29th October, Gualtiero and Cecchino declare, having seen the work that went into the panel, with its figures and stories, and into the surrounding chapel ornament 'visa dicta tabula, figuris, storiis et laborerio in eis dato et ornamento facto pro dicta tabula', Ludovica should pay 'de dicta tabula picta et ornamento dicte cappelle' 180 florins or 738 lire to Sassetta 'pro suo labore, magisterio, auro et coloribus'. It is interesting that Sassetta appears to be paid not only for the work, skill and materials that went into the altarpiece but also for the design of the chapel 'ornamento dicte cappelle'. Ludovica and Sassetta promise to observe the settlement.

70 ASV, Fondo Toscano 1, 16192, as published by LAURENT 1935, pp. 262-263. Notary is Luca di Nanni of Siena.
71 GOEBEL 2002, for Cecchino's Sienese sojourn: pp. 91-92, 113-115, 205-207. Cecchino could have travelled down to Siena with the court of Sigismund, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, who stayed in Siena from July 1432 to April 1433, on his way to the imperial coronation in Rome. Sassetta's Adoration of the Magi, with its fashionably dressed figures and opulent animal-detail, recalls Gentile da Fabriano and, in terms of scale and function, also recalls his lesser known Veronese colleagues. Its unusual shape, size and devotional purpose resemble Stefano da Verona's version of the subject, now in the Pinacoteca di Brera at Milan; SYSON & GORDON 2001, pp. 10, 14-15, fig. 1, 16. On the original shape of the Sassetta see K. CHRISTIANSSEN, in CHRISTIANSSEN, KANTER & STREHLK 1988, entries 2a & b, esp. p. 80. SCAGLIA 1988, proposed to identify Sassetta's eldest king as a portrait of Sigismund.
72 ASV, Fondo Toscano 1, 16192, as published by LAURENT 1935, pp. 263-264. Notary is Luca di Nanni of Siena. The exchange-rate for the florin was somewhat higher than usual: 4 lire and 2 soldi.
The surviving records about Turino’s testament have already painted a picture of Ludovica as a capable and sharp businesswoman and the complications surrounding the payment to Sassetta certainly confirm this view. Ludovica did not agree with the first lodo and she took the case to court.\textsuperscript{73} Whereas the previous lodo had been drawn up in the headquarters of the guild of the Giudici e Notai, the second one was written in volgare before the tribunal of the Giudice dei Pupilli, on 30th December 1432.\textsuperscript{74} Another committee was formed to re-appraise Sassetta’s efforts: the painter Martino di Bartolomeo was arbiter for Ludovica, Sano di Pietro for his colleague Sassetta, with Jacomo di Meio di Nanni to add a third, impartial view. The three experts subscribe the previous taxation of 180 florins, ‘computata ne la detta stima la dipictura de la cappela e de le pareti’. Donna Ludovica is obliged to satisfy her debts to Sassetta, whereupon Sassetta is to consign the altarpiece to her. Ludovica is expected to be present at its installation, as is the custom. One of the witnesses of this final act regarding the payment is a painter from Sassetta’s compagnia, Lodovico di Luca.\textsuperscript{75} So once again it becomes clear that Sassetta not only painted the altarpiece, which was apparently still in his workshop at this time, but also frescoed the walls surrounding the Madonna della Neve altarpiece. This was common practice in other chapels in the cathedral as well and would have been taken into account in the estimate.\textsuperscript{76} The double taxation brought the attention of five arbiter-painters, and undoubtedly many other painters in their trail, to Sassetta’s altarpiece. Indeed, the work must have been a much-studied and hotly-debated item in Siena, not only due to the commissioner’s discontent about its worth but also, undoubtedly, to Sassetta’s manifold innovativeness. He signed the altarpiece on the frame below the Virgin ‘\textsc{stephanvs.de senis [me] .pinxit.’.\textsuperscript{77}

On 30th December 1432, Ludovica was already terminally ill and she died on one of the first days of January 1433.\textsuperscript{77} She had made her testament \textit{corpo re languens} on 11th November 1432 (Appendix I, doc. A.VII), asking to be buried...

\textsuperscript{73} The Curia del Placito, whose members were also known as Consoli del Placito or Savi dei Pupilli had civil jurisdiction and took care of minors and women. Unfortunately, no relevant records have been preserved for the period under consideration; GUIDA INVENTARIO 1957, vol. II, pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{74} ASV, Fondo Toscano 1, 16197, as published by LAURENT 1935, pp. 265-266. Notary is Giovanni di Nicola di Guidone di Siena.

\textsuperscript{75} It has been suggested that the Maestro dell’Osservanza should be (partly) identified with Lodovico or Vico di Luca; GRAZIANI 1948, p. 88 (postscript by R. Longhi); POPE HENNESSY 1956, p. 370; A. Angeline in BELLOSI & ANGELINI 1986, p. 46; CHRISTIANSEN, KANTER & STREIHLKE 1988, p. 100. However, from the documents, which range from 1416 to 1449, a picture of Vico di Luca emerges as a painter of a lesser stature. He polychromed sculptures, a lamp and boxes, frescoed vaults (probably blue with golden stars) and painted banners for a funeral as well as a curtain that was drawn over an altarpiece; BORGHESI & BANCHI 1896, p. 166; MILANESI 1894, vol. 1, p. 48. On 30th October 1443 he was paid by the Concistoro for what seems to have been only the gilding and polychroming of the relief over the door of the Palazzo Pubblico, even though the sum due was considerable (32 florins); ASS, Concistoro 466, fol. 62r, 64r; referred to by ROMAGNOLI 1835, vol. IV, p. 335; U. Morandi, ‘Documenti’, in BRANDI 1983, pp. 265-266. Notary is Giovanni di Nicola di Guidone di Siena.

\textsuperscript{77} The unity formed by an altarpiece and the chapel-frescoes surrounding it was first recognised by GARDNER VON TUEFFEL 1982.

\textsuperscript{77} On 7th January a quantity of cloth for Ludovica’s burial was bought: ‘La redita di madona Lodovica dona fu di misser Turino di Mateio die dare a di vii di gienda 1432 [=1432 modern style] lire dieci soldi uno denari III, i qua’ sono per statia cinque e 3 quari di
in the church of San Francesco in the tomb of the tertiaries. Her father had been buried in the same church. Turino’s funeral would therefore remain the only one associated with the chapel of Santa Maria della Neve. Ludovica makes the Spedale della Scala her universal heir, the main bulk of her heritage consisting of the property at Santa Regina. The church of San Francesco once again enjoys her special devotion as she wants the friars to say a yearly mass of the dead for herself, Turino and both their forefathers, in exchange for grain and wine, later converted by codicil into a sum of 50 florins for the ornament of the sacristy. Ludovica wants the commemorative mass to be on the day following the feast of Saint Elisabeth of Hungary, a sainted sister-tertiary. The guardian of the Franciscan friars and the guardian of the tertiaries are to be Ludovica’s testamentary executors. The infirmary of San Francesco is to have her bed with all its belongings, while the learned friar Daniele, who visited the Holy Sepulchre, is to have a bed-chest and a pair of sheets. Ludovica makes two small, obligatory bequests to the bishop and to the Opera del Duomo and further favours her nephews and nieces. Bequests befall Magdalena (provided she gets married and has children) and Francesco, both children of Ludovica’s brother, the notary Nanni di Francesco Bertini, as well as Guido, Taddea (married to Nicola di Salamone Ricasoli) and Bindoccia (widow of Nicola di Bernardo), children of her late sister Andrea and Nicola di Guido Finetti, whom we encountered as one of the fideicommissaries of Turino. She acquires her mediarius, Matteo Gricciuoli, of all his debts towards her. There are also bequests for servants and, just as in Turino’s testament, for Nanni and Iboni di Angelo from Santa Regina.

As to the chapel in the cathedral ‘unam cappellam pro anima sua, domini Turini et mortuorum suorum prope portam Perdoni dicte ecclesie sub vocabulo Sancte Marie della Nieve’, Ludovica’s testament is only intent on safeguarding its patronage and officiation. It is here that the chapel is first explicitly indicated by its new title. She wants the patronage to pass into the hands of her nephews Guido and Bartolomco but, in the event of misconduct in the handling of the chapel-affairs, she threatens to give away the patronage to the Opera of the cathedral, the rector of the Spedale and the friars of San Francesco. To the chaplain of the chapel she leaves a house and its land in San Poro bigio lavamo per farle la vesta ch’è che si sotero, el quale pano levamo da Ghalghano e Giovanni di Ghucio Bichi ritaglieri e so posti a loro ragione in questo a fo. 362 — lire x soldi i denari tr’.

Her medicine bill was also settled after her death: ‘E die dare a di xviii di fermo 1433 [=1434 m.s.] lire otto soldi tredici denari otto per lei Antonio di Franciescho speziale per piu spezierie e medicine die a mona Lodovicha nel tempio della sua infermità a uscita del kamarlengo a fo 78 — lire viii soldi xvi denari 8’; ASS, Spedale 518, fol. 122v.

The necrology of San Francesco for this period has gone up in flames; see Negrologio di S. Francesco del 1644, BCS, MS.CIII.1, fol. 11: ‘L’antico negrologio brució ncirincendio della chicsa di detto convento la notte del 25 agosto 1655.’

78 The payment is made by the Spedale on 24th June 1439; ASS, Spedale 518, fol. 171v.

79 Fra Domenico Bertini had been a guardian of the convent in 1420 and 1426, testifying once again to the close ties between the Bertini family and this church; 1.1 SIM 1894, p. 66; DE ANGELIS 1827, p. 47.

80 The payment is made by the Spedale on 24th June 1439; ASS, Spedale 518, fol. 171v.

81 Francesco di Nanni di Francesco Bertini is one of the beneficiaries in the testament of the painter Giovanni di Paolo of 29th January 1482, for unknown reasons: ‘... Item reliquit jure legati Francisco Johannis Bertini jura que habet supra capitalibus de Monte Comunis Senarum, contra dictum Comune’; published by POPE HENNESSY 1937, p. 159 note 1.
Viene in the Masse of Siena to provide for two further masses each week, in addition to those which had already been arranged in 1426 (Appendix 1, doc. A.v). To the sacristy of the cathedral she leaves an annual amount of oil for the lamp in front of her chapel as well as a pair of candles with candlesticks adorned with the arms of Turino to be kept in the cathedral, as is the custom ("ut moris est per alios nonnullos cives Senenses in dicta ecclesia").

Judging by the testament, the chapel had been completed by November 1432, although the altarpiece still resided in Sassetta's workshop in December of that year. By 30th April 1433, however, the Madonna della Neve had definitely been placed over its altar. Between that date and 20th August 1433, Sassetta finally receives instalments of the payment for his altarpiece: ‘una tavola dipense d'altare a la chapella di Santa Maria de la Nieve, la quale è ne la chiesa del domo di Santa Maria di Siena’ (see also its description in the 1435 cathedral-inventory, Appendix 1, doc. B.1). Sassetta collects his payments from the Spedale della Scala who, as Ludovica’s universal heir, also looked after the settlement of her debts, the distribution of her bequests and the arrangements for her funeral. Ludovica probably did not even witness the installation of Sassetta’s altarpiece. She had had little worldly time to enjoy her chapel.

The ratification of the establishment of the chapel by the board of canons of the cathedral postdates Ludovica’s death (Appendix 1, document A.viii). The document refers to the act containing the conditions that Turino’s testamentary executors had to follow in edifying the chapel, a copy of which indeed precedes the ratification (see Appendix 1, document A.iii). The canons address the operaio Bartolomeo di Giovanni di Cecco, who was in office until 22nd July 1435. The ratification should therefore be dated after Ludovica’s death, on one of the first days of January 1433 and before the end of Bartolomeo’s term. The canons definitely consign the chapel and declare themselves in accordance with Turino di Matteo’s last will and with the intentions of the fideicommissaries. Ludovica’s place next to the fideicommissaries was taken after her death by ‘domina Magdalena’, probably her niece. In the general practice of the time, when women were restricted in any independent activity regarding official affairs, it is indicative of the high social standing of Ludovica’s circle that a woman could take care of the affairs of another woman.

A last document pertaining to the endowment of the chapel is a complaint by its chaplain, Jacomo d’Antonio, before Giorgio Tolomei, vicar of the bish-

83 Settlement recorded in the Libro dei conti correnti of the Spedale della Scala, which in this case apparently took care of Ludovica’s finances. ASS, Spedale 518, fol. 134v, referred to by Romagnoli 1835, vol. iv, pp. 421-422; published in part by Milanesi 1854, vol. 11, pp. 244-245; Gallavotti Cavallero 1985, pp. 238 note 51, 420 nr. 126; Pope Hennessy 1939, pp. 50-51 note 62, all transcribing the parts relevant to the chapel, but not those concerning the rest of Ludovica’s heritage (fol. 122v, 171v, 327v, 375r).
84 See note 77 above. Her parish church (San Pietro a Ovile) supplied ‘otto pretti e otto cherici’ for the novella; ASS, Spedale 518, fol. 122v.
85 It actually addresses the operaio through an intermediary, Paulo di Jacobo, who is also twice present as a witness in 1426, Appendix 1, doc. A.v.
86 It is striking that none of Ludovica’s male heirs took on this role. Alternatively, it is conceivable that Magdalena was the guardian of the tertiaries, appointed testamentary executor by Ludovica.
op, and two canons, Pietro the archdeacon and Niccolò di Cecco Ugurgeri (Appendix I, doc. A.IX).\(^87\) Jacomo d’Antonio was the same chaplain that Ludovica had appointed in 1426 (Appendix I, doc. A.V). His complaint is undated, but it postdates Ludovica’s death. The war to which the chaplain refers is probably the Florentine one that lashed the Sienese countryside in the early 1430s and ended in 1434.\(^88\) The income from the possession with which the chapel had been endowed had devalued.\(^89\) The post-war income was therefore not enough for the chaplain’s obligations to say two masses each week, with two additional masses on Sundays every month, as well as to provide for wax and oil to keep the chapel’s lamp burning, as requested by Ludovica’s testament: ‘secondo che si contiene nel tastamento [sic] che fu della buona memoria di monna Lodovica, donna fu di misser Turino di Matteio operaio di questa chiesa, esso fu edificatore d’essa chappella.’ Turino was the actual founder of the chapel and his widow was the enthusiastic executor of his wish – not only did she oversee the chapel’s construction, but also continued to provide for its officiation in her own testament.\(^90\) The chapel grew very much into a chapel of Ludovica’s own, so much so that the Spedale in 1433 refers to it three times as ‘la sua chappella in duomo’ and only once as ‘la loro chappella detta la chappella di Santa Maria della Nieve’ (see also Appendix 11.1).\(^91\)

Ludovica, a childless widow who was free of obligations towards male heirs, acquired a high measure of independence in taking charge of her own and her husband’s considerable properties. Her husband had given her this liberty by the magnanimity of his testament which left her, with the exception of a few bequests, all his property and belongings. Usually, a widow with relatives at this time would have to be happy with the conditional restitution of her dowry, a roof and some alimentation. A comparable woman patron who realised a chapel in Siena, albeit half a century later, was Eustachia Bichi. Eustachia, the young widow of Cristoforo Bellanti, founded a grand chapel in Sant’Agostino in 1482. The chapel was intended as a memorial for her late husband, but also became a glorification of the Bichi-family. Eustachia’s name-saint was represented on the altarpiece by Luca Signorelli, but pride of

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87 ‘domino Georgio Andrei domini Petri de Tolomeis de Senis’ had witnessed the negotiations for the chapel of Santa Maria della Neve on 4th November 1426 (Appendix I, doc. A.V).


89 The petition dates at least two years after the war. The property, bought for 432 florins, had at first yielded 22 florins. When the war was over, the chaplain had received 12 florins a year. The year preceding his petition, he would have had 14 florins, had the tenant not fled with the money. The document predates 1447 with certainty, since the chapel was then officiated by another chaplain, see Appendix I, doc. B.III.

90 See Appendix I, doc. A.VII. ASS, Spedale 518, fols. 122v, also 375r: ‘E die dare a di xi di giugnio 1434 lire settantacinque soldi diciotto facemo per lei a ser Iachomo d’Antonio per lo suo salario de ufiziare la sua chappella di duomo per quatordici mesi e sette di che ufiziata avesse e restava a essere paghata e lasci per lo suo testamento che chosi si dovesse paghare sicchiono chiarisse Ghuindo di Nicholo Finette. Et chosi chiarì questo di detto a ragione di fiorini sedici l’ano di lire 4 per fiorino roghato di detto testamento ser Lucha di Nanni notaio inanzi che abi datti a lui a fo 134 — lire lxxv soldi xvi’; ‘E die avere a di detto [30th April 1433] lire venticinque soldi dieci e qua denari sono per la valuta di più masarizie e d’uno stata d’oglio vendemo a ser Jachomo chapelano a la sua chappella di duomo chome apare a libro de le memorie a fo. 4 e sono posti debi dare in questo a fo. 134 — lire lxxv soldi x denari —’.

91 ASS, Spedale 518, fols. 122v, 134r, 375r.
place was given to a statue of Saint Christopher in the centre. Eustachia was the first to be buried and commemorated in the family-tomb. All acts were drawn up with her father, Antonio Bichi, as her procurator. Ludovica, with her personal wealth and influence on the one side and the lack of any close family-relations on the other, possessed an even more independent position and achieved a still greater personal imprint on her chapel. Ludovica surrounded herself with influential fideicommissaries and procurators, who, though they may have been required by law to legalise the woman’s actions, were in no sense restrictive, but rather instrumental in helping her realise her aims. Ludovica adhered to the traditional scheme of commissioning art to commemorate a male relative, designing a chapel which housed his grave and represented his arms. She chose a dedication to the Virgin of the miracle of the snow, which reflected her late husband’s personal situation and which referred to Turino’s lifetime occupation as the cathedral’s operaio. And although she therefore paid due attention to the requirements of an appropriate and devout memorial for her late husband, none of this prevented her from presenting herself at his side. She manoeuvred the chapel into a vehicle for the couple’s collective piety by giving prominence to Saint Francis, protector of Turino’s confraternity and founder of the order to which Ludovica’s heart belonged. She chose a dedication to the Virgin of the miracle of the snow, a miracle particularly dear to the Franciscans, as we shall see. The way in which Sassetta gave visual expression to such personal interests will be studied in chapter VIII.

3 Master of Tressa (attr.), Opera Madonna, circa 1215, tempera and gold on panel, 97 x 67 cm, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.

4 Guido da Siena (attr.), Madonna del Voto, circa 1261, tempera and gold on panel, 112 x 82 cm, Chigi Chapel or Cappella del Voto, cathedral, Siena.