Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. An Image of Patronage

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The emergence of individual commissions in the cathedral.

The choice for the snow-iconography had been made by the private patrons of the chapel, Turino di Matteo and donna Ludovica and their individualised patronage is a manifestation of a broader tendency which surfaced in Siena in this period. In this chapter we shall study the emergence of private patronage on other altars in the cathedral, in order to provide a context for the achievement of donna Ludovica and Sassetta. In the cathedral, the feverish re-decoration activities were concentrated mainly on the choir and transept areas. In the decoration of all altars here a shift in devotion took place towards a novel veneration of the Virgin. We shall also consider the general importance of private commissions in Sassetta's oeuvre and the way he gave shape to these patrons' requirements.

The highly personal input of donna Ludovica in particular in her chapel, as discussed in chapters 1 and 11, is remarkable. Previously, the decoration of the cathedral had been the affair of the Opera del Duomo, the collegium of canons and the city-government. A notable, early exception is the patronage of the important Malavolti family over the chapel of San Vittore, which operaio Bertoccio Malavolti and Azzolino Malavolti, canon and future bishop, managed to obtain. Although they probably paid for Bartolomeo Bulgarini's Nativity, the altarpiece itself complies entirely with the general programme for the four chapels of the city patrons and has no 'personalized' iconography. The most opulent tomb in the cathedral, of Cardinal Riccardo Petroni by Tino da Camaino of 1318, was commissioned by the Commune itself in commemoration of its illustrious citizen. The visual manifestation of the individuals who supported the cathedral and were buried there, was curtailed and channelled into civic and ecclesiastical values. In the fifteenth century, however, the quantity and importance of commissions by wealthy individuals grew steeply. More private patrons were involved and were allowed to exhibit themselves more exuberantly than ever before. The attention of the patrons was not exclusively focussed on their spiritual well being in the hereafter, but was self-consciously directed to create for themselves a more worldly memorial, concomitant with the beginning of the Renaissance. This development in the character of patronage resulted in a change of iconographic choices for chapel-decorations.

To begin with, on 10th July 1404, it was decided to remove the altars that stood against the choir screen. This decision was taken by operaio Caterino di Corsino, the college of canons presided by its prior Francesco di Biagio Tolomei and a committee of twenty citizens elected for the purpose. This

196 VAN DER PLOEG 1993, p. 32.
197 BUTZK 2001, p. 38.
199 MILANESI 1854, vol. II, p. 17 doc. nr. 11; these were probably the altars of San Giovanni Battista and of San Michele, mentioned in the 1389 inventory; AMMS, 864 (num. Mosc. 1489), fols. 12r-v. On the position and appearance of the choir enclosure in this period: STRUCHHOLZ 1995, esp. pp. 35-53.
intervention must have entailed a shift of emphasis in the cathedral interior: the way had been cleared for a more focussed view of the choir and the high altar behind it, as well as the ensemble of altars of the city's patron saints (fig. 2 nrs. 1-5). A more organic dynamic between the altars in the transepts and those behind the screen must have followed. In 1404, Taddeo di Bartolo was commissioned by Caterino di Corsino to fresco the chapels and pass ways ('passine') around the main altar. Shortly after, the chapels of the city-saints were subjected to a massive fresco-campaign. The activities extended into the southern transept three years later, when Paolo di Giovanni Fei frescoed the chapel of the Passion near the chapel of the Crucifix. Next, in 1415, came the chapel of the Crucifix itself and the vaults above the Porta del Perdono, painted by Gualtiero di Giovanni and Vittorio di Domenico.

Once all these painters had frescoed almost the entire transept, it was the turn of the altars and their equipment to be renewed and it was here that private patrons made their entrance, bringing with them an iconography related to individual devotional practices. In the following we shall consider some neighbours of the Madonna della Neve: the chapel of the Crucifix of notary Galgano di Cerbone; the chapel of the Visitatiion, patronised by Francesco di Biagio Tolomei; the chapel of Saint Crescenzio claimed by Carlo Bartoli and, in the opposite transept, Antonio Casini's chapel dedicated to the Virgin and Saint Sebastian, the project for a chapel by Jacomo Pecci and, somewhat further away in the north aisle, the chapel of the Magi accorded to Giorgio di Andrea di Pietro Tolomei. We have already encountered three of these figures in the circle surrounding Donna Ludovica. These munificent patrons seem all to have shared a common ideal, to propagate a personal identity and devotion, tied to a novel veneration for the Virgin.

The notary Galgano di Cerbone, well known to Turino di Matteo, acquired the patronage over the altar of the Crucifix (fig. 2 nr. 13). On 6th June 1407, he drew up a contract with operaio Caterino di Corsino on the institution of the chapel to be built 'a sua divozione e per l'anima de' suoi pasatti'. The small door in this bay of the transept was to be walled in order to make a place for his chapel. In exchange for his endowment of the chapel and its chaplaincy, he was permitted to erect his tomb in front of his chapel, consisting of a stone slab showing his coat of arms. In the late 1430s he would be buried there.
Domenico di Niccolò de' Cori made his intensely grievous Mary and John the Evangelist to mourn at the sides of the older, pre-existing crocefisso delle vedove in 1414-15 (figs. 34a, 34b). In 1421 more sculptures were commissioned to Alberto di Betto da Assisi to be put underneath the altar table (fig. 35). This second commission fell under the supervision of operaio Turino di Matteo, acting in the name of Galgano di Cerbone. The group of figures represents the Lamentation over the dead Christ.

ante altare dicte capelle et crurucifissi est tumulum dicti ser Galgani et sculta fieri in nuno dicti tumuli lapide arma dicti ser Galgani'; the two documents are preserved together in AOMS, 1848 (num. Mosc. 2166), doc. 10 (MOSCADELLI 1995, p. 240). Towards the end of the year 1407, work on Galgano's chapel was already underway, as the Lombard stonemason Marchese d'Adamo and his compagni are paid 20 lire and 10 soldi 'e quali sono per suo fadigha e magistero de la porta muri del Crocifisco e echonciò el marmo'; AOMS, 385 (num. Mosc. 235), fol. 59r, see also fols. 56v, 57r. I thank Monika Butzek for drawing my attention to this document.

205 A. Bagnoli in EXH. CAT. SIENA 1987, pp. 116-118 cat. nrs. 26a-b, with references to previous literature.
206 Turino would have known the chapel as described in the inventory drawn up immediately following his death: 'La cappella del Crocifixo rilevato in croce grande con 11 more da lato a decto altare, la figura di Nostra Donna, e Sancto Giovanni da piei a la decta croce rilevata con ferri da capo, le tende d'intorno. In sull' altare del decto Crocifixo, vien dentro a una bella graticola di ferro a porporelle, una figura del nostro Signore rilevato levato di croce, co le figure de la Nostra Donna, di Sancto Giovanni e la Magdalena, stanno a piei la croce, con predelle e 11 gradi e 11 sedii da la latora di legname tarsiati con 11 lampanari pendentii, e con una tavolletta in tela de Nostra Donna.'; ASS. Opera Metropolitana 29, fol. 18v.
207 It is presently to be found underneath the small altar of Saint John the Evangelist to the side of the entrance to the Libreria Piccolomini (fig. 3). TORRITI 2000, p. 100; G. Aronow, 'A Description of the Altars in Siena Cathedral in the 1420s', in VANN...
Such a monumental group was new for Siena, and for Tuscany as a whole. Its origins must have been in the German *Vesperbilder* which could, in fact, be found in Alberto’s native Umbria and in the nearby Marche. The theme of the *Pietà*, distilled from the story of Christ’s Passion, had developed into an important devotional theme, inviting the beholder to contemplate Christ’s suffering, but also confronting him at close range with Mary’s sorrow (*Compassio Mariae*). The personal, devotional bias of this large-scale *Pietà* is shown by its subsequent fortune in Siena. Vecchietta followed the trail set out by Alberto di Betto. For his own devotion, he sculpted an impressive Virgin with an emaciated dead Christ hanging over her knees. It was once adorned by an inscription, reading: ‘hoc opus fecit Laurentius dictus Vecchietto pro sua devotione’ (fig. 36). Vecchietta’s sculpture is an ideological precursor to
the Pietà-groups that Michelangelo and, later, Bandinelli intended for their own tombs, both even incorporating their portraits in the guise of the figure of Nicodemus.²¹⁰

That the occurrence of the Pietà theme in Siena developed under a personal propensity is also attested by the subject’s modest pictorial tradition in the

recorded it in the church now known as San Donato in San Michele Arcangelo, where it could be found until its recent removal to the Museo Diocesano in Siena.

²¹⁰ Michelangelo’s Florentine Pietà of circa 1550-1550 is now in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo in Florence and Baccio Bandinelli’s Dead Christ supported by Nicodemus of 1554-1560 is still over Bandinelli’s tomb-altar in Santissima Annunziata in Florence. Their function as tomb-sculptures was noted by Vasari 1568, vol. vii, pp. 188-189, vol. VII, p. 218. Titian similarly intended his Pietà-altarpiece to go over his tomb in the Frari, now in the Galleria dell’Accademia; see e.g. G. Nepi Sciré, entry in exh. cat. Venezia & Washington 1990, pp. 373-374.
city. Two fourteenth-century panels with a Pietà, both by the Master of the Campana Pietà, have been identified, their small size indicating monastic or maybe domestic use. Interestingly, the painted Pietà resurfaces in Siena in the cathedral in the early fifteenth century in connection with a private person: the Maestro dell'Osservanza painted a Pietà, most likely to serve as an epitaph, for the memory of Peter Volckammer, citizen of Nuremberg. Volckammer came to Siena with Emperor Sigismund, died there in 1432 and was buried in the cathedral. Volckammer's arms are displayed on the painting and he himself is represented kneeling in contemplation of the dead Christ, who lies on the lap of the Virgin underneath the cross (fig. 37).

Both with Volckammer and with Galgano di Cerbone's chapel of the Crucifix, the theme of the Pietà had been brought from the more enclosed devotional sphere to the public space of the cathedral by means of a private person.

When Galgano di Cerbone added the sculptures of the mourning Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist and those of the Lamentation to the chapel of the Crucifix in the early fifteenth century, a change in emphasis in the perception of the death on the Cross was brought about. Instead of the sole Christ suffering his redemptive passion, the beholder was now presented, in particular, with Mary's grief over her dead son. Additionally, the Crucifixion and the Lamentation were both apt tomb images of death as well as promises of resurrection. Though little is known about the architectural decoration of the chapel, its patron Galgano was in any case present through the display of his arms on his tomb and on a davanzale of the altar. Galgano turned his chapel of the Crucifix into a private tomb-chapel with a related iconography.

Another individual, Canon Francesco di Biagio Tolomei (†1432) came into possession of the patronage of an altar next to the chapel of the Crucifix shortly before 18th August 1422 (fig. 2 nr. 14). In this case too, a more pronounced personal character as well as a Marian veneration, novel for the Sienese church altar, are at play. In 1368, the guild of stonemasons had constructed this altar and maintained it since that time. The guild had appropriately dedicated it to the sculptor saints of the Quattro Coronati, who had allegedly been martyred under Diocletian because they refused to carve an idol and venerate it. Turino di Matteo relocated the stonemasons to the

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211 D. Boucher de Lapparent in EXH. CAT. AVIGNON 1983, cat. nr. 93 pp. 252-253; MEISS 1946.
212 A. De Marchi in MONTE DEI PASCHE 1988, pp. 298-302; von Erffa 1976, pp. 4-7. See also Vecchietta's detached Pietà fresco (1445-48) from the sepulchral chapel of the Martinuzzi at San Francesco, f.e. A. Paolucci in Berti & Paolucci 1990, pp. 210-211 cat. nr. 75. Its size (109 x 208 cm) suggest it went under the altar table, analogous to Alberto di Betto's sculpture group.
213 ASS, Opera Metropolitana 31, fol. xxvii: 'Uno davanzale di velluto vergato nero e rosso, con fregio d'oro in campo rosso, con fioretti azurri e bianci] con l'arme di ser Galgano di Cerbono, foderato di panno lino bianco. Per l'altare del Crocifisso.' The altar was entirely renovated in 1651 by Dionisio di Francesco Mazzuoli; LANDI 1655, p. 52.
214 Canon Francesco di Biagio Tolomei, who died on 21st January 1432 (CRONACA ECCLES. 1477, vol. 11, fol. 359r) should not be confused with the later Canon Francesco di Jacomo Tolomei who died in 1458 or 1459. It is the latter's tombstone that can be found in front of the chapel of the Visititation; MUNMAN 1993, pp. 148-149 cat. nr. 29. FREULER 1994, p. 312 note 49 mistakes Francesco di Jacomo for the patron of the chapel of the Visititation. The altar would have been moved from the southern wall of the transept to the western wall adjacent to it, following the walling up of the porta piccola in 1407 (which it originally flanked together with the primitive Crucifix-chapel) and the construction of the new chapel of the Crucifix (see note 204).
215 GOOSEX 1992, pp. 282-283. In Florence the guild of carpenters and stonemasons had commissioned Nanni di Banco to adorn their niche at Orsanmichele with figures of the same saints.
38 Gregorio di Cécco, altarpiece of the Madonna of Humility, 1423. Tempera and gold on panel, width circa 265 cm, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Siena.
altar of San Daniele in the first bay of the north aisle of the nave, to make place for Francesco Tolomei. The canon was swift in endowing his altar and changed its dedication to the Visitation. On 18th August 1422 the Opera del Duomo, on the authority of the patron, commissioned for the sum of 60 florins a marble superstructure for the altar, with capitals and pillars adorned with figures in niches, and with Tolomei’s arms. That same year, Gregorio di Cecco signed and dated his polyptych with the Madonna of Humility for Francesco Tolomei’s chapel (fig. 38). Due to the earlier removal of the altars against the choir screen, an initiative of Francesco di Biagio Tolomei himself, his altar against a west wall was now more or less juxtaposed to Duccio’s Maestà on the high altar.

Gregorio di Cecco’s work for this chapel is the first known altarpiece inside the Siennese city-walls to introduce the Madonna of Humility. The theme was a Siennese iconographic invention, but in its native city it had only fulfilled its role on small-scale panels, intended for individual devotion (f.e. fig. 39). The creation of Gregorio di Cecco’s Madonna of Humility inaugurated a modest series of Siennese altarpieces with this subject, of which Giovanni di Paolo’s Malavolti and Branchini altarpieces (1426 and 1427) for the church of San Domenico are the best known examples. Gregorio presents a Virgin nursing her Child on the central panel, her humility expressed by her lowly seat. The sublimity of her humility was the reason for Mary’s glorification and in fact, in Gregorio’s central pinnacle, she is accompanied to heaven by seraphim.

The introduction of the novel subject matter on the altarpiece is related to the titulus of the altar. Canon Francesco’s rededication of his altar to the Visitation is first attested in the year 1429. This feast was hotly debated in the church in those years, having been instituted by papal bull in 1389, confirmed at the Council of Basle in 1441, and definitely accepted in 1451.

216 G. Aronow, ‘A Description of the Altars in Siena Cathedral in the 1420s’, in VAN OS 1990, pp. 235-236. Bartolo di Fredi probably frescoed the chapel for the guild and did not make an altarpiece for it as Aronow supposes, see FRELIXER 1994, pp. 105, 416 doc. nr. 25 (who however mistakenly already locates the activities at the altar of San Daniele (fig. 2 nr. 12). By 1425 the stonemasons had put their altarpiece on the altar of San Daniele as, in that year, San Bernardino borrowed it for his sermons on the Campo; ISRAELS 2001, p. 539, note 40. In fact, it already figures in the 1423 inventory: ASS, Opera Metropolitana 29, fol. 18r: ‘La cappella di Sancto Daniello con una tavola dipinta co le figure di Nostra Donna e de’ IIII Coronati, con tende e ferro e predelle da piei e 11 gradi e t cam­panella da capo.’.
217 AOMS, 708 (num. Mosc. 500), fol. 32r (18th August 1422): ‘Misser Fransescho di Biagio Talommei chalonacho di duomo die dare a di xviii d’agosto fiorini sesanta e quagli ci a promessi di dare e paghare per che noi gli dobbiamo adornare una cappella la quale è a lato al crocifisso di duomo, la quale chappella dobbiamo adornarla di marno chon phapitogli chon cholone chon ficheure e tabarnachogli e cho la sua arme per quello modo che ssta la chappella di Sancto Bonifazio salvo che le cholonne deba essare di marno biancho’, followed by the payments in various instalments up to 8th May 1423 (see also fol. 220r). The elaborate ornamentation of the chapel seems to indicate the larger Bonifazio-chapel in the south aisle. I thank Monika Butzek for drawing my attention to this document. Nanni di Jacomo da Lucca walled ‘sei fregi di colonna’ in 1423; FRELIXER 1994, p. 312 note 49; LUSINI 1911, vol. 1, p. 37 note 1.
218 On the altarpiece, see VAN OS 1990, p. 77; EXH. CAT. SIENA 1987, pp. 198-199 cat. nrs. xvii and xviii (R. Bartalini, publishing a pinnacle with the angel of the Annunciation. There is no trace yet of its counterpart); EXH. CAT. AVIGNON 1983, p. 309 (L. Bellosi); CARL1 1979, p. 85; VAN OS 1969, pp. 122-123, 164. On Gregorio see also CORTI 1981.
221 See note 227 below.
shortly after the end of the Western Schism.222 The Christian coupling of the concepts of humility and glory, as represented by Gregorio di Cecco, is crucial to the Magnificat, the words Mary spoke to Elisabeth on the occasion of the Visitation. One of its lines reads: 'Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.'223 Gregorio's Virgin of Humility therefore perfectly suited the altar's dedication to the Visitation.224 Gregorio would have been well aware of the significance of the Magnificat, since he gilded and polychromed the statue of the Madonna del Magnificat for Sant'Agostino together with his adoptive father Taddeo di Bartolo and the entire text of the hymn is wound in pastiglia-letters around the hem of the Virgin's mantle.225

Still, the denomination of the altar in itself is not enough to explain Gregorio's iconography. He could have represented the Visitation as a narrative, in keeping with the famous patron saint altarpieces in the cathedral, and in analogy to Bartolo di Fredi's previous depiction on the Malavolti altarpiece in San Domenico. The reason to condense the significance of the Visitation into an image of the humble Virgin must be found in the context of the private and funerary character of the commission. The Madonna of Humility was an intimate theme that was a novelty for the public realm of the cathedral. Van Os has already pointed to the frequent funerary overtones of the occurrence of the Madonna of Humility.226 As prior of the chapter of canons of the cathedral, Francesco di Biagio Tolomei had requested as a special favour ('per singulare gratia') to be buried in front of his chapel on the occasion of its institution in 1429. Concluding a long list of endowments and requirements regarding the officiating of his chapel, he turns to the matter of the tomb, which was of such

39 Andrea di Bartolo, Madonna of Humility, circa 1415, tempera and gold on panel, 52.7 x 34.3 cm, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection, Washington.

223 Lucas 1: 46-55 (quotation: 48 ‘For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.’).
224 It was Henk van Os who noticed that the Virgin of Humility in this case was not so obvious and that it was in fact a hitherto unobserved pictorial translation of the altar's titulus. I thank him for sharing this with me.
226 VAN OS 1990, pp. 74-85; IDEM 1969, pp. 75-142.
importance to him that two days before, on 9th July, he had sent a messenger round the city to convocate all the canons to (unanimously) ratify his request. Gregorio di Cecco’s *Madonna of Humility* was therefore intended to accompany a tomb, stressing the image’s funerary associations not only with Mary’s role as mediatrix, but also as protagonist of a vision one dreamed of experiencing at the day of Judgment (‘MADRE DI CONSOLATIONE’ and ‘MATER. PULCRE. DILECTIONIS’). The dedication of the chapel was perhaps not sufficiently clear to all through the iconography of its altarpiece alone. Between 1429 and 1435 a painting on a textile support was added, possibly to render the dedication of the chapel more explicit: ‘uno telaio dipento de la Visitazione di Santa Lisabetta’.

The changes to Francesco Tolomei’s chapel are yet more examples of the fifteenth-century transformations resulting from this new type of individual patronage, which in turn brought about a more emotional attitude towards the Virgin. The trend could still be felt when at the end of the fifteenth century, Paolo di Giovanni Fei’s small *Madonna of Humility* of 1390 was cut down to be inserted in Andrea Bregno’s marble chapel in the northern aisle of the cathedral. The construction of this chapel, dedicated to the Virgin had been the wish of another private patron, Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini (the short-lived Pope Pius III).

Shortly after the erection of the chapel of the Visitation, another Tolomei-altar came into existence, somewhat off-centre in relation to the examples under discussion here. Freuler has suggested that the Tolomei family had commissioned Bartolo di Fredi to paint his *Adoration of the Magi* for the nave-chapel of the Magi, presently in the Pinacoteca of Siena, by around 1385-1388 (fig. 2 nr. 10). This hypothesis is dubious, since Freuler’s earliest documentary evidence for the presence of the Tolomei in the chapel is an inventory of 1458. It records the Tolomei coat of arms not on the altarpiece,
but on the chapel’s canopy.\footnote{231} In fact, as Monika Butzek kindly pointed out to me, the patronage over the chapel was actually conceded to a Tolomei in 1439-1440. On 23rd March 1439, an offer by Canon Giorgio di Andrea di Pietro Tolomei to endow the chapel of the Magi was rewarded by the concession of its patronage, out of the hands of the Opera who had apparently held the patronal rights before. That same day the Opera decided to heighten the arch of the chapel’s niche, in order to align it with the other chapel-niches in the aisle.\footnote{232} Shortly before his death, on 11th August 1440, Canon Giorgio di Andrea di Pietro Tolomei, doctor in canon law, vicar general to the Sienese bishop and rector of the parish church of San Cristoforo, made up his testament.\footnote{233} He provides for the endowment of his cathedral chapel and asks the Opera in return to take care of the provision of liturgical utensils for the chapel and of its decoration just as, the testator claims, they had done in the case of Francesco di Biagio Tolomei’s chapel.\footnote{234}

Little is known about any resulting iconographic transformations of the chapel, although the personality of the new patron was certainly brought to the fore. From the testament it appears that the chapel was rededicated to both the Magi and Saint George, obviously a gesture towards its new patron. In 1447, when the arch of the chapel had been heightened, the Opera commissioned Nastagio di Guasparre, a close colleague of Sassetta’s, to re-paint the fourteenth-century frescos on the niche’s back wall.\footnote{235} The above-mentioned 1458 inventory documents the presence of Tolomei’s coat of arms: ‘con ornato di marmo sopra detta chapella con armi de’ Tholomei’. Giorgio Tolomei was already known to the tight circle of the influential new patrons in the cathedral, as is shown by the fact that he was present as a witness to the

\footnote{231} Cathedral inventory: AOMS, 867 (num. Mosc. 1492), fol. 36r (insert 7, fol. 26r); published by LUSINI 1939, vol. II, p. 37. insert 8, fol. 26r (fol. 36r).

\footnote{232} AOMS, 21, fol. 41r: ‘[in margine:] Pro capella Magi et domino Georgio/ Etiam inteso che misser Giorgio Thalomey predecto a fiso ne la mente sua di fare uno doto a la capella de’ Magi posta ne la chiesa magiore per la quale possi tenere continuamente uno capellano o meglio in caso che a lui sia concessa la decta capella. Et volendo bonificare la chiesa in quel che l’è possibile. Solenemente tutti d’acordi i prefati operario, consiglieri e camerlengo assente Jacomo [d’Andreuccio] antedecto uno de’ deci consiglieri deliberero acciò che la cosa abbi migliore effetto che sia pienamente rimesso et commesso nel operario et in Meo di Nicoî predetti e quali a le spese del Operario possino fare alzare l’archo de la decta capella de’ Magi al par de l’altre che sono inn dal lato per orevoleza de la chiesa. Et da poy cederla, darla et concederla sicondo che s’usa di fare de le capelle al decto misser Giorgio dotandola in quello che saranno d’acordo i prefati operario, misser Giorgio e Meo e con quelle convenzioni, pacti et modi che saranno in concordia et questo fecero per ogni miglior modo etc, potendo fare di tutte le cose predette scripture e rogi che vaglino et tenghino di ragione’; partial transcription, also of the continuation published in LUSINI 1939, vol. II, pp. 37-38 note 1.

\footnote{233} He endowed the ‘venerabile cappelle Magorum et Sancti Georgii site in dicta maiorii Senensis ecclesie’ with half of the profits of five shops, asking in return: ‘Et quod dominus operarius qui pro tempore fuerit quanto citius poterit ad laudem omnipotenti Dei et ad ipsius testatoris anime salutem vigore iam prehabite [. . .] convetiones et pacti cum presenti domino operario facere debeat construi et actari pingi et ornari sufficere et commode dictam cappellam sumptibus et expensis dicte Opere ipsum que fulciri paramentes et ornamentes necessaries, convenientibus et condignis veluti, missali, calce aureo et alii congruis ornamentis ad offitiandum dictam cappellam eo modo et forma qua et quibus et prout et sic pro cappella bone memorie quondam domini Francisci de Ptolomeis sita in dicta maiorii senensis ecclesie dicitur fuisse provisum.’; ASS, Diplomatico Tolomei, 1440 agosto 11 (notary Jacopo di Nuccino di Duccio). I am indebted to Monika Butzek for drawing my attention to this document. For Giorgio Tolomei and his patronage of the chapel of San Giorgio in the church of San Cristoforo, see LOSERIES 1857.

\footnote{234} See note 217 above.

\footnote{235} Two frescoed arches at different heights, as well as Nastagio’s Saint Leonard in substitution of the underlying fourteenth century fresco of the identical saint, can still be discerned in the fresco, which was uncovered and photographed at the occasion of the temporary removal of the present baroque altarpiece; FREULER 1994, pp. 287 fig. 255, 311 note 21; MILANESI 1854, vol. II, p. 291 note to
official assignment of donna Ludovica’s chapel in 1426 (Appendix 1, document A.V.I and A.IX).

Carlo d’Agolino Bartoli is another example, although he was less fortunate. Bartoli, who was bishop of Siena from 1427 up to his death in 1444, wanted to be buried in the chapel of San Crescenzio. His testamentary executors contracted Pietro del Minella for an ambitious restructuring of the chapel for the sum of 400 florins.\textsuperscript{2} It was to be about nine metres high and more than four metres wide, with statues mostly in marble. It is not known what programme Bartoli, his testamentary executors and Pietro del Minella had thought up. The medieval altar of San Crescenzio in the southern transept, immediately outside and adjacent to the choir screen, against the eastern wall, was one of the four altars of Siena’s patron saints, adorned by Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s \textit{Purification of the Virgin} (figs. 2 nr. 5, 23).\textsuperscript{237} For fear the Bartoli project would intrude upon the unity of these four altars, the Opera del Duomo aborted the construction in 1447.\textsuperscript{238} Bartoli would still remain buried there, underneath a tomb-stone with his effigy as a bishop. The only other mark the Opera permitted his heirs to impress on the chapel was a marble step with Bartoli’s arms.\textsuperscript{239} It was only when the Opera itself had the appetite to embellish all four patron chapels with marble niches, that Pietro del Minella’s project was executed, complete with Bartoli’s coats of arms.\textsuperscript{240}

A request for private patronage over the chapel of Sant’Ansano befell a similar fortune, dragged by initial rejection. The rich bankers Rinaldo and Jacomo di Marco Pecci had solicited to obtain the patronage over the chapel of Sant’Ansano in 1406 (figs. 2 nr. 3, 22).\textsuperscript{241} The Opera and the canons were taken by surprise and for confirmation played the affair as high as the supreme civic authority of the Concistoro, which in turn was undecided and advised asking the bishop. A disappointed Jacomo Pecci in 1412 started constructing
a chapel outside the cathedral’s walls, behind the altar of Santa Caterina, where the chapel of the Baptist would later be raised (fig. 2 nr. 7). He had it dedicated, appropriately, to his name saint but we know nothing about its decoration. In 1442 the Pecci Chapel was at a stage that allowed for the opening up of an entrance from the cathedral. However, fate had it that ten years later the Opera was in need of the area of Pecci’s chapel and his heirs accepted, by an irony of fate, the chapel of Sant’Ansano instead.242

A clash of two eras is evident in the case of the chapels of San Crescenzo
and Sant’Ansano. In the preceding century, the decoration of the cathedral had been the affair of the Opera del Duomo, the chapter of canons and the city-government, while some rights were conceded to public institutions such as guilds. However, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, commissions by rich individuals all of a sudden leapt to the foreground. Their urge to manifest themselves in the cathedral was initially treated with circumspection and was sometimes restrained, particularly in the case of the patron altars.

Carlo Bartoli’s predecessor, Bishop Antonio Casini, created cardinal with the title of San Marcello by Pope Martin V in 1426, had been successful straightaway, restructuring the chapel of San Sebastiano in the northern transept of the Sienese cathedral (fig. 2 nr. 6). In 1430, he endowed the chapel with substantial funds, instituted two chaplaincies and re-dedicated it to ‘Sancta Maria et Sancto Sebastiano’, contributing again to an elaboration of the veneration towards the Virgin in the cathedral. Jacopo della Quercia executed an ornate design with marble sculptures. Casini’s provisions for the chapel were protracted up to 1437. A lunette has survived, showing a full-size portrait of the kneeling Bishop Casini presented by his abbot-name saint to the seated Virgin (fig. 40). An unknown polyptych that had previously adorned the altar was reused but stripped of its three pinnacles. Casini’s coats of arms must have been scattered across the complex. Casini thus strongly manifests his own personality in the chapel, even though this would not be his burial chapel, as we shall see later. Carlo Bartoli must have envisaged a project similar to the chapel of his predecessor on the episcopal see. Casini, a diplomat of great importance to the Sienese Commune, was in an advantaged position, while he had also been more fortuitous in choosing an altar that was less laden with collective Sienese history. Casini endowed his chapel at the same time as Sassetti started work on the Madonna della Neve. Ludovica and Casini must have known of each other’s project, even though Casini was by then bishop of Grosseto and was frequently demanded at the papal court in Rome in his cardinal’s vests. A similar spirit of self-propagation and manifest Marian devotion permeated both chapels. We shall later return to this point when discussing Casini as an adviser of Ludovica. Their artists must have been in contact too. Interestingly, a drawing showing the Virgin, a female saint and a donor, has been identified as a preparatory drawing by


244 See p. 51 above.

245 ASS, Sante Visite 13, fol. 230r: the ‘Inventario della chappella di Sancto Bastiano in duomo’, drawn up in July 1466, mentions, apart from the endowment in immobilia, the fornimenta of the chapel: two chasubles, a missal, a chalice and ‘Due davanzali uno di diapo ch’arte del charde[nale] di Sancto Marcello e una vi lasso misser Bastiano stanno in sagrestia.’ For the missal see f.e. the 1473 inventory: ‘Uno messale a la modcrna viso e buono miniato col arme del cardinale di Sancto Marcello e una vi lasso misser Bastiano stanno in sagrestia.’ For the missal see also AOMS, Opera Metropolitana 34, fol. 5r.
Della Quercia for the Casini Chapel. The sheet passed into the possession of Pisanello, but was also copied in the model book of Cecchino di Francesco da Verona, Sassetta’s first arbiter in establishing the price of the Madonna della Neve. 246

So, in the redecoration of the chapels in the transept of Siena’s cathedral during the first half of the Quattrocento, a clear picture of their individual patrons emerges. We are witnessing here a broadening of the traditional preoccupation of patrons with their spiritual welfare in the afterlife into a Rennaissancistic attention for the glory of themselves and their relatives.247 They make themselves present through the simple inclusion of their arms, or even by means of an effigy, as well as by markedly influencing the iconography generally more related to the individual religious sphere. The increasingly private character of patronage, unlike the civic- and cathedral-related projects of the preceding period, is reflected in a fresh emphasis on Marian spirituality. New themes are introduced such as the Madonna of Humility, the Pietà and, as we shall discuss below, the Virgin of the Snow, corresponding to a more focussed and emphatic devotion, echoing a religiosity that was much alive in the individual sphere, while at the same time expanding the general Sienese devotion towards the Virgin.248 This emergence of private patrons comes at a relatively late date in Siena. It could be said that the trend of individualising the cathedral space culminated with the cathedral of Pienza in the Sienese contado, constructed around 1460 by Pope Pius II, who turned it into a family affair, bestowing to his nephews three of its chapels, dedicated to their onomastic saints.249 Maginnis recently made a survey of late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century patronage of the arts in Siena, which poignantly highlights its pervasive communal, corporate character, almost to the exclusion of any private commissions at all.250

The privatisation of patronage over side altars was not limited to the cathedral and, as Sassetta’s active life covers the second quarter of the fifteenth century, we can use his work as examples. And these examples reinforce the changes outlined above: apart from commissions by the city government, by a guild and by several convents, quite a few of his works appear to have been commissioned by individuals. Sassetta’s altarpiece in the church of San Domenico in Cortona, significantly featuring a Madonna of Humility, was painted around 1434 for Niccolò di Angelo di Cecco, a rich merchant of that town. The chapel showed the patron’s arms and the flanking saints on the altarpiece each represent one of the closest members of his family.251 We also

248 The veneration for the Virgin would continue to spread over the altars of the Sienese cathedral, as if to represent Mary in all her facets. In 1500, Pietro di Daniele di Pietro acquired the patronage over the chapel of San Jacomo Interciso (in the fourth bay of the south aisle leaning against the bell tower) and had it rededicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; Cohn 1988, p. 108.
251 Israëls 2003.
know of eight small-scale panels that Sassetta painted for personal use, all showing the Madonna of Humility, with the exception of the courtly Adoration of the Magi.

The custom of another Sienese family from the nobility can be surmised. The learned Fabio Chigi, future Pope Alexander VII, saw an altarpiece signed by Sassetta on the altar of the noble Petroni-family in the church of San Francesco in Siena, before the church was ravaged by fire in 1655: 'La tavola de' Petroni. Stephanus Io. de Senis me pinxit'.

The location of this altar seems to correspond to an altar of Saint Nicholas described in 1575 by Bossio who, however, confusingly states that it had no proper patron. In Chigi's manuscript, the Petroni-tavola immediately follows 'L'altare de' Tolomei'.

The Petroni-panel (Chigi does call it tavola and not altare) may have been a satellite of the Tolomei altar, perhaps placed against a wall or over a smallish altar next to it when a new altarpiece, the Magdalen by Francesco Vanni seen by Chigi, was put up on the Tolomei altar.

Signs of these intertwined interests of the Tolomei and Petroni first appear in relation to donna Francesca, daughter of Francesco di Spinello Tolomei and widow of Niccolaccio di Caterino de' Petroni. In an unpublished act dated 4th July 1404, the well-to-do Francesca received a chapel in the basilica of San Francesco dedicated to Mary Magdalen. This chapel, situated to the left of the main entrance against the counterfaçade, had already been started and Francesca 'Petroni-Tolomei' was allowed to choose her burial-site there and to adorn the chapel with her arms and with frescos at her own expense. In return, Francesca was to provide the convent with the profit of two shops underneath her palace on Piazza Tolomei. She would give 40 florins to start work on the chapel and would furnish the altarpiece ('tabula picta') and pro-
41 (left) Sasseta, Saint Nicholas, mid-1430s, tempera and gold on panel, 126.6 x 44 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. nr. RF. 1981-57.

42 (right) Sasseta, Saint Anthony Abbot, mid-1430s, tempera and gold on panel, 134.6 x 47.3 cm, collection of the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena S.p.A., Siena.
vide for liturgical necessities. Donna Francesca drew up her testament on 11th March 1421. Although no further reference is made to the decoration of her chapel, it is conceivable that Sassetta was commissioned by her or, more likely, her heirs, to paint the altarpiece, which must have boasted the Petroni arms or Francesca’s name, in turn enabling Chigi to identify it two centuries later. Francesca must have been a woman-patron comparable to donna Ludovica, moving in the same circles.

Quite a few puzzles remain to be solved, as to the relation between the two altars of the Magdalen and of Saint Nicholas, their patron families and their altarpieces. From the inception, the title of Saint Nicholas may have had some relationship to donna Francesca’s altar (perhaps as a secondary title?), since Francesca’s husband had carried that saint’s name. Following this line of enquiry we might further suggest, albeit cautiously, a candidate for the altarpiece: two lateral panels of a triptych, or maybe the outer panels of a pentaptych by Sassetta, a Saint Nicholas and a Saint Anthony, datable to the 1430s (figs. 41, 42). The presence of Saint Anthony could be accounted for if Cittadini is correct in affirming that Niccolaccio Petroni had a son by the name of Antonio. The Magdalen, titular saint of the altar, would then have

256 She leaves money on the condition that ‘sia obligata la detta compagnia [di San Francesco] fare ogni anno uno officio per l’anima sua nel convento de’ frati minori da Siena con doppiere et candele come è usanza et a le mantellate quatro lire di candele et le candele in mano a’ frati che vadano a dire l’ufficio a la sua sepoltura. Et la piantana a frati due staia di pane et due staia di buono vino et cinquanta libre di carne. Item sieno tenuti sempre ciascuna volta ch’e frati minori fanno capitolo provinciale a Siena, la detta compagnia facci fare uno officio per l’anima sua con doppiere et candele al coro et a le mantellate et la piantana a tutti frati honorosamente di pane et di vino buono et carne d’ogni cosa abundantemente et le candele in mano a’ frati che vadano a fare l’officio a la sua sepoltura. A partecula of the testament preserved in ASS, Diplomatico, Patrimonio Resti, Compagnie, 1421, marzo 11 (notary Mariano di Nicola, authenticated by two later notaries in 1470); see also ASS, Diplomatico, Spedale, 1422 aprile 1 (notary Mariano di Nicola), referred to by BANCHI 1877, p. 221, regarding Francesca’s enormous donation of 3000 florins to the hospital of the Annunciation which she had constructed in Buonconvento and which she wanted to be governed by the Spedale della Scala in Siena.

257 Both lived near San Pietro a Ovile, and Francesca too obviously had a predilection for the Franciscans, the friars acting both as witnesses to her testament and serving as testamentary executors, together with a.o. the prior of the Compagnia di San Francesco and Giorgio di Andrea Tolomei, the canon and later vicar of the bishop who had partaken in the winding up of Ludovica’s chapel affairs (Appendix 1, docs. A.V.I and 1X) and who later acquired the patronage over the altar of the Mag in Siena Cathedral.

258 In 1956 the Saint Anthony was discovered by ZERI 1956. This
figured on the central panel or, more likely, on one of two now lost lateral panels.\textsuperscript{260} The direction of the downcast glances of the two surviving saints could point to a lowly positioned main subject on the central panel, such as the child of a Madonna of Humility. Francesca’s was the first private Petroni-related altar inside the church of San Francesco, even though the family had possessed a tomb-chapel with a monumental sculptural entrance in the main cloister since the preceding century.\textsuperscript{261} This again attests to the trend, even in a mendicant church traditionally directed towards the laity, that private citizens were increasingly and more conspicuously taking over the public ecclesiastical space.

In addition to the Niccolò di Angelo altarpiece at Cortona and the Petroni altarpiece, we shall discuss in chapter IX a chapel endowed by Cardinal Antonio Casini in the cathedral of Grosseto, which was adorned by another Sassetta altarpiece. Apart from the well-known commission for the Madonna della Neve, documentary evidence thus brings to the surface the private character of another three out of the dozen or so major commissions that, as far as we know, were received by Sassetta.

When the Sienese urban elite belatedly entered the stage of commissions for altars in the cathedral as individuals, and when they started to explicitly assert their patronage over altars in monastic churches in early fifteenth-century Siena, they did so with a self-awareness tempered by the manifestation of an involved, personified religiosity. Before, patronage in Siena had been closely tied to its communal, collective spirit and state form: civic and ecclesiastical authorities had the say over the cathedral. Vauchez showed that civic influence was paramount even in the mendicant churches, where the Commune itself subverted the promotion of the cult of local saints.\textsuperscript{262} It is significant that coats of arms as well as donor figures occur rarely, if at all, in Sienese altarpieces of the fourteenth century. In order to establish the specificity of this situation in Siena, it is worth considering briefly some examples of the range of patronage by individuals in churches of other cities in the fourteenth century.

In Florence, as in Siena, the cathedral as civic symbol should be our test case for the pervasiveness of the presence of private patrons.\textsuperscript{263} The organisation of the cathedral works in Florence already presents a picture quite distinct from its Sienese counterpart. From 1330-1331, the city’s powerful guild of woolworkers supervised as patron the Opera of Santa Maria del Fiore.\textsuperscript{264} It therefore need not amaze us that the family of a high official of the Arte della Lana, Noferi di Giovanni Bischi, could obtain an altar against a pillar in the cathedral and present his coats of arms, an inscription and likenesses of fam-

\textsuperscript{260} There was hardly a Sienese tradition for altarpieces of saints represented on the central panel; VAN OS 1990, p. 80. Bossio records both on the Petroni and on the Tolomei altar a gilded icona showing the titular saint with other saints (see note 253 above).

\textsuperscript{261} SEIDEL 1978, pp. 119, 123; CARLI 1971, figs. 45-49.

\textsuperscript{262} VAUCHEZ 1977.

\textsuperscript{263} BRAUNFELS 1953, pp. 145-147.

\textsuperscript{264} PAATZ 1940-1954, vol. III (1952), p. 325, on p. 391 is mentioned a now lost cathedral-altarpiece with the Madonna, commissioned in 1300 by domina Bonina, widow of Cecchio Guiffo.

\textsuperscript{265} The family was given a tomb in its vicinity. L. Becherucci, in BECHERUCCI & BRUNETTI 1971, vol. II, pp. 284-285 nr. 43, fig.
ily members on its tabula with Saint Catherine of Alexandria, executed around 1378.265

The mendicant churches called in the rich families of their neighbourhood to help enhance their churches. In Florence, the programme for the chapels itself, as Hueck shows for Santa Croce, had been designed by the friars.266 The effect was that lay patrons were allotted chapels whose dedication did not have a specific individual bearing. Patrons like the Bardi did, however, clearly proclaim their status and munificence not only by displaying their coats of arms, also the case in Sienese mendicant churches,267 but also by representing themselves as donors. Francesco Rinuccini’s chapel in the sacristy of Santa Croce, to stick to the same church, provides a more pronounced example. In 1379 Giovanni del Biondo painted its altarpiece with an intricate image of the Madonna of Humility, an iconography that had individual devotional overtones as we have seen, and also included Rinuccini’s name saint.268

In Florence, maecenatism of individuals had been dictated by the desire of its self-made families, their fortunes always remaining prey to the uncertainties of fate, to impress a visible stamp of their power, preferably in their neighbourhood churches. On the contrary, in Venice, apart from the class of wealthy citizens, the hereditary nobility had been formally secured its privileges in the late thirteenth century. They therefore had greater liberty in choosing a church of their liking and were often driven by personal motives in their patronage, as argued by Goffen.269 This liberal pattern of patronage did not extend, however, to the church of San Marco. The ducale church, although not the city’s cathedral, certainly the most central and prestigious church, was supervised by the committee of Procurators. It filtered and tempered requests for private chapels and burials up to the sixteenth century, even those made by the dogi themselves.270 Though in Venice, as in Siena, there existed a certain reticence in the donor’s self-promotion, we already encounter here small donor-portraits, for example on the Saint Donatus relief of 1310, which served as high altarpiece to the church of Santi Maria e Donato at Murano.271

In Rome, the political power of Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi at the papal court enabled him to commissioning Giotto and his workshop a double-sided altarpiece for old Saint Peter’s with an iconography referring to the main cults of the basilica, but complemented by the cardinal’s portrait as donor.272 Private commissions for chapels and altarpieces by rulers of autocracies in

258; PAATZ 1949-1954, vol. Ill, p. 403, on another Saint Catherine altarpiece with a donor attributed to Bernardo Daddi and datable around 1345, see ibidem, pp. 360, 400.
266 HUECK 1976; see also LONG 1988. JACOBSEN 2001, pp. 306-314, gives a very useful sketch of the patrons in early Renaissance Florence, stressing that initially the scene was not dominated by the Medici but mostly by their rival families.
267 To take one example only: the Sozzini Chapel in the church of San Domenico in Siena was provided already in the early fourteenth century with a relief with a coat of arms and an inscription indicating the patronage; KIRCHEN 1992, vol. 2.1.2, p. 752 nr. 42.
268 OFFNER & STEINWEG 1969, part II, pp. 77-83.
269 GOFFEN 1986, pp. 22-29.
270 HUMFREY 1993, pp. 124-126.
271 IBIDEM, pp. 29-40, (p. 31 for the wooden Saint Donatus relief of 201 x 143 cm), 104-110, for a survey of earlier Venetian altarpieces and individual patronage; WOLTERS 1976, pp. 19, 149 cat. nr. 6, fig. 13.
272 See esp. KEMPERS & DE BLAAUW 1987, with further literature.
important churches of their cities would seem likely, although one should be careful in interpreting the evidence. It was, for example, thought that Pietro Lorenzetti’s high altarpiece of 1320 for the important Pieve in Arezzo had been commissioned by Bishop Guido Tarlati, the later ruler of the city, as an individual patron. As a matter of fact, though, Tarlati commissioned the altarpiece as a representative of the clergy of the Pieve. The Arethine cathedral did, however, come to house the lavish tomb of Guido Tarlati in 1330 and also, in 1334, a chapel of a relative, Ciuccio Tarlati, now the only one remaining of the many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chapels in the cathedral, which is still adorned by a fresco with a Crucifixion, Virgin and saints and the figure of the donor.

Van Os has shown how at the end of the fourteenth century in Pisa, private families were accustomed to commission high altarpieces, a trend completely unthinkable in Siena. The Pisan patrons visibly left their stamp by including their coats of arms or by choosing representations of onomastic saints that could also be portraits in disguise. Similarly, Trasmundo Monaldeschi, bishop of Sovana, donated the high altarpiece to the church of San Domenico in Orvieto. It was painted by Simone Martini, who incorporated the diminutive figure of Monaldeschi presented in prayer to the Virgin.

In early fifteenth-century Siena, the symptoms of a changing patronage might have resulted from the bouncing back of the city after the period of hardship triggered by the Plague of 1348 and the shrunken capacities and appetites of human resources, both in terms of patrons and of painters. In the case of the cathedral this becomes manifest when we consider that the decoration campaign backed by individuals, as described above, was the first major intervention in the cathedral since the failure of the construction of the Duomo Nuovo (1339-1357). At the same time the new emphatic religiosity, aiming at a life in imitation of Christ and the Virgin, may have grown into a vogue of such impetus that its themes had ripened up to their acceptance, even desirability, on the public church-altar in Siena. The collective civic identity and the centrality of the divine witnessed in the city-state of the previous period gradually made way for a new spirit of the age, in which the human perspective was paramount. Politically and socially the republic of Siena in the fifteenth century moved slowly towards an oligarchy, thereby creating a class interested in the pursuit of private patronage in an arena where the more ostentatious presence of the individual was now embraced.

The transformation of the altar near the Porta del Perdono engineered by Sassetta for donna Ludovica in the memory of her late husband Turino fits in with the developments sketched out above for the neighbouring cathedral chapels. This was a burial chapel. Both shields of arms of the patrons are present even on the altarpiece itself (plate 11). Ludovica commissioned the altarpiece...
piece directly, without the intervention of the operaio, as had been the case with the chapels of Galgano di Cerbone, Francesco Tolomei and Giorgio di Andrea di Pietro Tolomei. Although the altar conceded to Ludovica was already dedicated to the Virgin, Ludovica and her advisers expressed a specific veneration for the Marian legend of the snow that left room for a particular, private manifestation of the patron, while at the same time introducing a new theme in the devotion to the Virgin. In chapter vii we shall endeavour to chart Sassetta’s highly original responses to the trend of more individualised chapels to the special exigencies of his patron and the location of the altar. But before we can venture into the end-result of Ludovica’s commission, a final determining agent in its genesis needs to be studied. We shall discuss the connotations of the snow-iconography more fully, particularly the way in which Turino and Ludovica learned in such detail about a specifically Roman legend.