Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. An Image of Patronage

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THE EXTENSION OF THE SNOW-ICONOGRAPHY FROM ROME TO SIENA

In the context of the general reorientation towards the Virgin in Siena Cathedral as discussed above, the installation of the Madonna della Neve constituted an original addition. In this chapter we shall attempt to trace what specific interest the snow-miracle held for Turino and Ludovica and how they learned about the legend. This will bring us to Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and to the protector and archpriest (archpresbyter) of this church, the intellectual and much-travelled diplomat Antonio Casini. We shall discuss Casini at length as a patron in his own right, since it is crucial to our understanding of his adviser's role in the genesis and realisation of Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. It will give us an idea of precisely what ideas and what advice he would have been able to provide to donna Ludovica and Sassetta in Siena.

From the outset, in 1423, Turino and Ludovica wanted to dedicate their chapel to the Virgin 'ad nomen gloriose Marie Virginis', because they firmly believed that Turino had overcome his first serious illness through the intervention of Mary and Saint Francis (Appendix 1, doc. A.11). Only on 25th March 1430, when Sassetta is commissioned to paint an altarpiece, do the surviving sources become more specific. Sassetta is to represent the Virgin and Child, saints Francis, Peter, Paul and John the Baptist, and is to devote the predella to the snow legend, 'quinque storiis Sancte Marie de Nive', eventually to become seven scenes. Ludovica's testament of 11th November 1432 records, for the first time, the new denomination of the chapel: 'sub vocabulo Sancte Marie della Nieve' (Appendix 1, doc. A.VII).278

Although the documents surrounding the testament were not at the time explicit, in 1423 Turino and Ludovica may well already have envisioned the installation of a chapel in the honour of the Virgin of the Snow specifically. As a matter of fact, during Turino's office as operario, a new choir book for the cathedral had been ordered. This contained four new offices, amongst them the feast of Mary of the Snow: 'Uno libro grande basso nuovo coverto con tavole e cuoio rosso e coppe di ferro, nel quale sono quattro officii nuovi solfati [...lacuna] l'Etternità, el Corpo di Cristo, Sancta Maria de la Nieve.'279 Thus the introduction of the new feast in the Siene cathedral can be credited to Turino di Matteo and his circle, and can be dated around 1423.280

The legend of the Virgin of the Snow, the founding-legend of the church

278 ROSE HENNESSY 1939, pp. 50-51 note 62.
279 ASS. Opera Metropolitana 29, fol. 3v. Apart from the explicit denomination of the book as 'new' in 1423, it should be noted that the choir book does not appear in the preceding 1420 inventory. KEMPERS 1994, pp. 114, 131 note 102, is unaware that the book was already registered in 1423, and refers instead to the inventory of 1426. Kempers therefore erroneously supposes that the Festum Nivis entered the cathedral's calendar only in 1429, long after Turino's term. The 1429 inventory does mention the first office which the scribe of the 1423 inventory could not remember, though the handwriting is unclear. It certainly does not read 'la Spirito Santa' (as transcribed by Kempers), but maybe 'la semper [sp] Trinità'; AOMS, 867 (num. Mosc. 1492), fol. 55v (insert 2, fol. 3v).
280 The general acceptance of the feast may have had some teething problems since it coincided with the Feast of Saint Dominic. For that reason the Arte della Lana for example, was not yet observing the Festum Nivis in 1426; ASS, Arti 64, fol. xir.
of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, already paraphrased in the introduction, consists of one of the most enchanting Marian miracles. A Roman patrician called Johannes and his wife had no children and, once they got to a certain age, they started to worry about what to do with their patrimony after their deaths. On the night of 3rd August 352, the Virgin appears to Johannes in his dream, declaring that a miraculous snowfall on Mount Esquiline would indicate to him the place where he would edify a church in her glory. Johannes thereupon rushes to the Holy Father, Liberius (352-366) and it transpires out that Mary has also appeared in a vision to the pope. Subsequently, a messenger arrives from Mount Esquiline to report that a miracle has indeed taken place. Liberius and Johannes together set out for the Esquiline, to find that snow has fallen from the summer sky and has remained unmelted on the hill
in the form of the floor plan of the church that has to be built. Liberius humbly takes a spade to reinforce the contours of the plan. Some versions of the legend have it that the pope's gesture was rewarded with an additional miracle: the ground sunk within the contours of the plan, facilitating the laying-in of the church's foundation.

The feast of Maria ad Nives has been celebrated on 5th August since its institution by Pope Honorius III in 1222. The legend was probably only designed around the twelfth century to lend authority to the antedating of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore to the time of Liberius. It was claimed that Santa Maria Maggiore was the earliest Marian church of western Christianity. The larger, European dissemination of the snow-feast was due to the Franciscans, who adopted it, together with the entire curial calendar, in
1223. The General Chapter of the order in 1269 once again stringently prescribed the celebration of the feast.

A Bildtradition for the representation of the miraculous foundation legend of Santa Maria Maggiore originated at the bosom of both Rome and the Franciscan Order. Nicholas IV (1288-1292) had directly succeeded Bonaventure as Minister General of the Franciscans, before being elected to the pontificate. It was Pope Nicholas IV who undertook the reconstruction and decoration of a new west end to Santa Maria Maggiore with a new apse and a transept, supported by Cardinals Jacopo (†1318) and Pietro (†1326) Colonna. After the pope’s death, the Colonna cardinals continued the project and entrusted Filippo Rusuti with the decoration of the façade (figs. 43, 44, 45, 46). Rusuti’s mosaics, now much restored and obscured by Ferdinando
Filippo Rusuti, The miraculous snowfall and the pope hewing out the ground-plan, circa 1300, mosaic, façade of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.

Fuga's eighteenth-century portico, show the legend of the Virgin of the Snow developing over four large scenes beneath a top register with Christ enthroned surrounded by saints. The nocturnal visions of the patrician and the pope are followed by the visit of the patrician and finally, coupled in one scene, the snow-miracle and the pope digging out the ground-plan. The patronage is made explicit through the Colonna arms and through a putative portrait of Pope Nicholas IV.

Rusuti's mosaics set the example of how the foundation legend could be used to reflect the situation of artistic patrons.

The local foundation legend of Santa Maria Maggiore held a fascination

that transcended the boundaries of Rome, due to a shifting of accents in its interpretation. Patrons identified themselves with the patrician Johannes and seized the opportunity offered by the legend for elegant self-presentations in a variety of artworks. Hubach coined this phenomenon 'Folie repräsentativer Selbstdarstellung'.

More than their contemporaries, the Franciscan Order realised the propagandistic potential held by representing the miracle. On top of its function as an ideal image of patronage, the legend offered the chance to reflect upon the benefit of collaboration between the Church and patricians. And on a different level, the revered snow legend attested to the Virgin’s power to work miracles on her own. In this sense, the prominent miracle became a referential example for later, more obscure Marian interventions.

Finally, composers of the liturgy for the Festum Nivis carved out an allegorical significance from the legend, as the snow became an attribute of the Virgin’s purity and immaculateness.

Outside Rome, representations of the snow legend first started to appear during the fourteenth century, particularly as miniatures accompanying the feast in liturgical books. The snow miracle was condensed into one scene only and, in accordance with the angle given to the story by the liturgical texts, the miniatures tended to single out the immaculate overtones of the whiteness of snow.

Isolated instances of single scenes showing the foundation of Santa Maria Maggiore occur on predellas, in Taddeo di Bartolo’s Volterra altarpiece for example, on windows and, once, in fresco and they mostly serve the social image of the patron. The beginning of the fifteenth century then witnessed Masaccio and Masolino’s double-sided altarpiece as an important expression of the iconography again rooted in, and designed for, the Roman basilica. Its back central panel, which represents the miracle of the snow, is the most significant and chronologically related precedent for Sassetta’s snow chapel in Siena Cathedral (plate xii and figs. 47–52). Still, Sassetta’s Madonna della Neve is the first fully-fledged altarpiece entirely dedicated to the legend with a predella that recounts the story in no less than seven scenes, almost twice as many as the canonical Rusuti mosaics, which had so far been the most extensive cycle. Sassetta divided the actual snow-miracle and the pope digging out the ground-plan over two scenes, adding the novel scenes of the construction and consecration of the church. Given the initial spread of an abridged version of the legend outside Rome, Sassetta’s sweeping cycle is all the more amazing (plates iv–x).

The circumstances of Turino di Matteo and his widow Ludovica blended beautifully with the legend and the opportunities it offered. Ludovica’s conviction that the intercession of the Virgin herself had cured her husband in 1421 suggests a kind of divine, miraculous inspiration comparable to the apparition of Mary to the patrician Johannes in Rome. Turino and Ludovica

282 Hubach 1996, pp. 158–166; the idea had already been developed in Van Os 1968.
285 See the miniatures brought together by Van Os 1968, pp. 24–32.
287 This was first observed by Blauwkuip 1980, pp. 24–31; followed by Van Os 1990, pp. 173–174.
were a wealthy, childless couple and their decision to dedicate a large sum to the construction of a chapel could be neatly likened to the magnanimity of the childless Roman patricians in founding Santa Maria Maggiore. Turino and Ludovica also contributed to the cathedral in other ways, since Turino was to leave the rest of his fortune to the Opera del Duomo, according to the new legislation instituted by his predecessor Caterino di Corsino. A legend that centred round the construction of a church offered, of course, a lovely analogy with Turino’s occupation as operaio. Sasseta represented this delicately in the sixth predella-scene where an operaio, probably a portrait of Turino, clad in the robes of his office, oversees the building activities, as we shall discuss more fully in the next chapter (plate ix). By presenting Turino as a patrician, he may furthermore have strengthened his social standing. Turino di Matteo was a non-name, he was not of noble descent but must have been himself responsible for gathering his considerable wealth and for gaining respect, probably by his activities as a merchant, which resulted in prestigious positions and a marriage to a woman from the aristocracy, as we saw in chapter 1.

Apart from the similarities between the patrons of the legend and Turino and Ludovica, yet another comparison can be made between the Franciscan efforts for the promulgation of the legend and the Franciscan religiosity of the Sienese couple. As we have seen, Turino di Matteo had been a member of the confraternity of San Francesco in Siena, while Ludovica would become a Franciscan tertiary and had manifold ties with the church of San Francesco. This Franciscan environment seems to have been a source of inspiration for Turino and Ludovica’s choice to institute the feast of the miracle of the snow and to dedicate a chapel to it in the Sienese cathedral.

Yet these similarities alone hardly seem sufficient to explain the grandiosity of Sasseta’s snow-iconography, considering the unsurpassed breadth of its narrative. It must have been triggered not only by a general compatibility but, more directly, by an immediate cause and it seems legitimate to search for a specific source of information. The circle of friends surrounding Turino and Ludovica, which has emerged from the newly discovered documents, provides the answer. The link between Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and Siena Cathedral is incarnate in Antonio Casini, bishop of Siena from 1408-1427 and well-versed in the scene of the Roman Curia of Pope Martin v, who created him cardinal with the title of San Marcello.\footnote{The first to put forward this suggestion was KEMPERS 1987, p. 181.} The new documents now make clear that the foundation of Turino’s and Ludovica’s chapel was indeed already an issue during Casini’s tenure as bishop of Siena and that Turino promoted the \textit{Festum Nivis} during Casini’s episcopate. From documents A.V, A.VI and A.VIII of Appendix 1 of the present study it now actually appears that the episcopal see of Siena oversaw the genesis of the chapel from 1424 to 1426. The official institution of the chapel and chaplaincy was ratified by Antonio Casini’s vicar general, Pietro di San Pietro, a Pisan canon. The vicar took care of Casini’s Sienese affairs since Casini mostly resided in Rome. However, Casini maintained ties with Siena over these years as shown, for
example, by the fact that his own chapel in Siena Cathedral was started in 1430, the same year in which Sassetta took up his brush for the Madonna della Neve. Casini’s expertise was therefore still at hand. Ludovica probably knew Antonio Casini personally from the years of Turino’s rectorate and contact between Ludovica and Bishop Casini would have been facilitated by the fact that Ludovica descended from a family of ecclesiastical aristocrats. One of her forefathers was Luca di Ser Ghino Bertini, bishop of Siena from 1378 to 1384. During Turino’s term as operaio, he and Ludovica had lived quite near the mansion of Bishop Antonio Casini, with only the cathedral between them. In the following excursus, we shall briefly discuss not only Casini’s life and his bonds to Siena and Rome in particular, but also his role as the commissioner of the Masaccio–Masolino altarpiece and that work’s location and function. We shall discuss this patron and his commission in as far as they are vital as a precedent to Sassettta’s Madonna della Neve. Of course, an entire book could easily be filled with the Masaccio–Masolino altarpiece, or for that matter with Antonio Casini. For the purpose of our study we shall therefore concentrate on Casini’s career and the genesis, patronage, original location and iconography of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece, especially in as far as they shed light on our understanding of the programmatical genius behind Sassetta’s Madonna della Neve. In doing so we shall also take into account documents so far unknown in the literature on Masaccio and Masolino’s altarpiece.

ANTONIO CASINI AND THE SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE ALTARPIECE

Antonio di Giovanni Casini, born around 1378, was a Sienese citizen. He was trained as a jurist in both canon and secular law, while his diplomatic capabilities ensured him an important career in the Church as well as the confidence of the popes of his lifetime. After initial nominations as pievano of Signa, canon of the Florentine cathedral and papal sub-collector for Tuscany, he was appointed pontifical treasurer around 1408 (see also Appendix 1, doc. E.69, 86). In that year he also succeeded Gabriele Condulmer, who had just received his cardinalate, on the episcopal see of Siena. As the treasurer and main confidant of Pope Martin V (1417–1431), Casini mostly resided in Rome, where he reached the summit of his political influence. He was the intermediary par excellence between the pope and the city of Siena during the toilsome preparations for the Council of Siena (1423–1424). On that occasion the...
Sienese diplomat Andreoccio di Marco Bindi, stressing Casini’s key position at the papal court, remarked: ‘Il vescovo nostro, che è lo altro papa ... tutti li faci suoi maxime i segreti mi pare che passino per le mani d’essa sua paternità.’ Martin V expressed his gratitude by nominating Antonio Casini cardinal with the title of San Marcello on 24th May 1426. Soon after this nomination Casini changed his Sienese episcopate for the bishop’s see of Grosseto, although Casini’s bonds with Siena remained intact throughout his career. Carlo d’Agnolino Bartoli succeeded Casini in Siena and the two knew each other well. The Commune of Siena sent Bartoli for negotiations to Pope Martin V and Casini in Rome, on various occasions between 1418 and 1427. In a 1436 addition to his will, Antonio Casini nominated Carlo Bartoli as one of his testamentary executors, as had Turino di Matteo. Casini had been actively involved in his Sienese succession, initially suggesting as a candidate Bernardino, future saint, whom he had met in Rome.

By special bull of Pope Martin V, on 23rd November 1429 Casini was permitted to draw up his testament (Appendix 1, doc. E.8, 69). A copy of the testament of 29th December 1431, with various codicils up to 2nd October 1438, composed by his private notaries Bartolomeo di Paulo of Pistoia and later by Gregorio di Ser Neri Spetialini, has been preserved in the archive of the Sienese cathedral. This previously unpublished document gives us a clear picture of Casini’s career and influential position at the Church and of the grandiosity of his patronage.

Casini travelled extensively. He was present at the Councils of Pisa, Constance and Basel. His wide-ranging interests in the welfare of churches and convents throughout Italy and even abroad, apart from the cities in which he resided, ranged from Vienn to Bologna, Cervia, Fermo, Impruneta, Lucca, Perugia, Poggibonsi, Recanati and Loreto to Salerno, Signa and Venice, across all religious orders. These interests are condensed into the myriad bequests of his testament (Appendix 1, doc. E.20, 35 41, 46-49, 62-63, 73, 78, 80-82, 93-99) and it seems that his testament favoured every single church with which he was associated. In the churches at the heart of his functions and activities he founded chapels, for example in the cathedrals of Siena and Grosseto, where he wore the bishop’s mitre. In other instances he expressed his close involvement through the foundation of chaplaincies, as in Senen. Civi optimo . Pastori . suo vigilantiss.° [...]”; BUTZEN 1996, pp. 105-106.

292 BRANDMÜLLER 1968, pp. 84, 96, 105, 110-122, 126-129; MENGOZZI 1918, pp. 53-54.


295 Appendix 1, doc. E.69: in this codicil Casini’s executors are to be Bartolomeo bishop of Fiesole, Cosimo and Lorenzo de’ Medici, el reverendo padre missere Carlo vescovo di Siena’ and Bastiano di Domenico, canon of Siena and prior of the church of San Giorgio. Carlo Bartoli is missing from the next list of executors.


297 IDEM, vol. II, pp. 246-282; see Appendix 1, doc. E.93.

298 The ‘monastero di Sancta Fide in Slestat [?] del diocesi Argentine’ might be identifiable with a convent in the French city of Sélestat (Appendix 1, doc. E.97).
47 Masaccio and Masolino, Saints Paul and Peter, part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 114.5 x 54.4 cm, John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, inv. nr. 408.

48 (above) Masolino, Assumption of the Virgin, part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 141.8 x 76 cm, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples, inv. nr. 33.

49 (on facing page) Masolino, Saints Gregory the Great and Matthias, part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 116.2 x 55.4 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. nr. 3963.
Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which we shall discuss shortly, and in the
cathedral of Florence, where he was a canon (Appendix 1, doc. E.3-6, 38, 66
(Siena), 1, 12, 14, 64, 67 (Santa Maria Maggiore), 9 (Florence), chapter viii
for Grosseto). He wanted the sacristies of these churches to be his universal
heirs, together with the sacristies of two convents where he lived during
the last decade of his life. He held apartments at the Benedictine monastery
of San Savino near Pisa (Appendix 1, doc. E.45, 88, 101). His privileged Roman base
was at his titular church of San Marcello, although this was sometimes exchanged for a
secret residence at Santo Spirito in Sassia, near the Vatican. The convent of San
Marcello belonged to the Servites, and Casini became the order's protector. He was
a person of great piety, illustrated not only by all these bequests, but also by his pro-
visions for many and far-reaching pilgrimages to be made after his death. For the welfare of
his soul, the destinations were to be Compostella, the church of Saint Anthony of
Vienne in France, the church of the Virgin at Montferrat, the church of the archangel
Michael at the promontory of Gargano in Puglia, the church of San Niccolò in Bari and
the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Appendix 1, doc. E.26-28). He was a person of great
wealth, the total of his testamentary bequests amounting to some 8500 florins. He was also
a person of great culture and wide reading, carefully instructing that writings by Saints
Jerome, Remigius and Thomas Aquinas, which he had borrowed from various con-
vent-libraries, should be returned after his death (Appendix 1, doc. E.89).

After the elevation of Gabriele Condulmer, who had preceded Casini as bishop in Siena,

299 Act of institution of the Florence chaplaincies: ACF, parchment
of 8th July 1430, drawn up by Casini's secretary Gregorio di Jacopo
di Ser Neri Spetialini, the cardinal's seal appended ('Antonius mis-
eracione divini tituli Sancti Marcelli [...] pro salute anime nostre
ordinavamus perpetuo duos capellanos in venerabili ecclesia
Florentina continue ad divinum cultum tenere et deputare cele-
brando et stare in missis et alius divinis officiis').

300 The abbey still exists, but was already suppressed in 1561;
guida toscana 1997, p. 328. Casini also lodged at Ogni Santi
while the papal court was in Florence around 1436, see Appendix 1,
doc. E.70, 84, 89-90.

301 Unfortunately, nothing remains of the medieval church of San
Marcello and its cardinal's palace as Casini knew it; gigli 1996, pp.
16-31. The church was destroyed by fire in 1519. For Santo Spirito
in Sassia, see Appendix 1, doc. E.59, 68.

302 GiAFF 1719, p. 441. Moreover, on 14th May 1427 Fra
Ambrogio Traversari begged on behalf of his Camaldolese Order
that Antonio Casini be asked to succeed in its protectorship
Cardinal Rainaldo Brancaccio, who was mortally ill; lightbown

303 See also note 316 below.
to Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) Casini’s close association with the Roman Curia simply continued. In fact Eugene IV bestowed another honorary function upon Casini; in 1437 he nominated him cardinal-archpriest of Santa Maria Maggiore. Casini’s affiliations with the basilica and its decoration had started much earlier. We shall shortly review the vicissitudes of this basilica during Martin V’s papacy, before staging Casini’s entrance onto its scene.

When Martin V was elected universal head of the Church at the Council of Constance in 1417, thereby ending the Avignonese period in the papacy and restoring the temporal sovereignty of the pontiff, the renewal of Rome immediately became one of his main objectives. His pontificate ushered in a new intellectual climate and a pursuit of a renaissance of the ancient glory of Rome. In Florence in 1417, when waiting for his departure for Rome, and again definitively in 1423, Martin V composed a committee of cardinals that had to inventurise the deplorable state of the Roman churches, and it was above all through the cardinals that the pope effectuated a complete face-lift of the neglected city. He ordered them to repair and embellish their titular churches. Martin V, to the secular world Oddone Colonna, must have felt particularly close bonds with the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, long affiliated with his family. In the first years of his pontificate he resided in its palaces during the summer and in the Vatican palace in wintertime, since the Lateran was as yet uninhabitable.

Santa Maria Maggiore was not a titular, but a patriarchal church. A chapter of secular canons headed by a cardinal archpriest officiated there. Rainaldo Brancaccio, cardinal of San Vito in Macello, archpriest of Santa Maria Maggiore (1412–5th June 1427), who had elected and crowned the new pope, gave following to Martin V’s request and initiated the restoration of this basilica. In 1428 Casini recalled that Cardinal Brancaccio had been generous towards the church of Santa Maria Maggiore: ‘a qua et in qua multas utilitates et honores consecutus fuerat per plures annos in quibus fuit archipresbiter eiusdem...’

304 Appendix I, doc. E. 77; Luciani 1996, p. 264; the precise date of Casini’s nomination is not known, but his predecessor died in 1437.


51 (above) **Masolino**, The miraculous snowfall or the foundation of Santa Maria Maggiore, *part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece*, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 144.5 x 76 cm, *Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples, inv. nr. 35*.

50 (on facing page) **Masaccio**, Saints Jerome and John the Baptist, *part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece*, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 115 x 56 cm, *National Gallery, London, inv. nr. 5962*.

52 **Masolino**, Saints John the Evangelist and Martin of Tours, *part of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece*, circa 1428-1430, tempera and gold on panel, 144.5 x 54.4 cm, *John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, inv. nr. 409*. 
It has been suggested that Rainaldo Brancaccio initiated, as a tribute to the pope, the commission to Masaccio and Masolino for their double-sided altarpiece. Some three years before Sasseta painted his Madonna della Neve in Siena, these painters would give the foundation legend a new home in Santa Maria Maggiore itself. One side of the now dismembered complex showed the miraculous snowfall and the foundation of the church flanked by four saints, whereas the other showed the Assumption, again flanked by four saints (plate XII and figs. 47-52).

The proposal that Rainaldo Brancaccio initiated the commission seems unlikely, however, since he probably died before the commission could have been given. Moreover, Rainaldo Brancaccio was Neapolitan, his name calling to mind false associations with Felice Brancacci, the Florentine patron of Masaccio and Masolino. But in fact his long testament shows that his feelings remained with his native city throughout his life, as it was there that he grandly rebuilt a hospital and founded two chapels, as opposed to only one obligatory bequest of a chalice of 35 florins to Santa Maria Maggiore. Neither are the two following archpriests likely candidates. The Venetian Francesco Landi, cardinal of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, lavishly endowed a new chapel dedicated to Saint Francis and the Assumption in the basilica, its partial dedication to Saint Francis precluding any association with the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece (fig. 54 nr. 12). Landi lived to be archpriest only for some months (1427). His successor was Jean de la Rochetaillé (circa 1428-1437), cardinal of San Lorenzo in Lucina. The heart of this French cardinal probably lay elsewhere, and he would find a final resting place in Lyon.

Instead, the commissioner of the altarpiece was Antonio Casini, who had a particular incentive of his own. He had a function and interest in the basilica predating his own archpriestate, which actually superseded Brancaccio, Landi and Rochetaillé. Casini did the honours at Santa Maria Maggiore, the crimson hat only just pressed on his head. He belonged to the very inner circle of Martin V’s court. As a matter of fact, rumour has it that Antonio Casini, despite the facts that he had family in Florence and Siena, etc.
indeed called himself ‘da Siena’, was related to Martin V through his maternal grandmother, who had been born to a Capocci father and a Colonna mother. Antonio Casini’s father Giovanni, as a doctor to the pope, may have met his spouse in Rome. Both Casini’s parents appear to have been buried in the Roman church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, which must have housed a Capocci family-tomb, where their son wanted to remember them by memorial masses, a disposition he overruled in the end, favouring instead similar masses in Santa Maria Maggiore (Appendix 1, doc. E.19, 100). Martin V carefully orchestrated his band of cardinals and, having elevated nepotism to a political level, elected amongst them, for example, his nephew Prospero. On the occasion of the 1426 elections, Gentile da Fabriano made a now-lost portrait of the pope and the new apples of his eye, amongst them undoubtedly Antonio Casini. Martin V entrusted Casini with the care of the education of his orphaned nephews. Crowning their close ties, from 1426 Casini and Martin V lived in neighbouring palaces in Rome. Casini’s kinship to Martin V would have sounded a note of personal interest to him in commissioning an altarpiece as a tribute to this Colonna pope for the church of Santa Maria Maggiore with its manifold associations with that family. Moreover, Casini must have been highly enthusiastic about the papal pomp which acquainted him with the main basilicas of Rome as, apart from Santa Maria Maggiore, he also made bequests to San Pietro, San Giovanni in Laterano, San Paolo fuori le Mura, San Lorenzo fuori le Mura and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.

In 1428 Casini’s executive role as intermediary between the pope and the archpriest of Santa Maria Maggiore is first attested. In the name of Pope at San Domenico in Siena; Appendix, doc. E.43.

315 See Appendix I, doc. E.8, 10, 60.
316 SALVINI ante 1752, vol. 1 sub anno 1395: 'il Padre F. Isidoro Ugurgieri Azzolini nelle Pompe Sanesi stando in dubbio se egli sia figliuolo di detto Giovanni o di Francesco suo fratello, ammende medici del Papa e seduti nel supremo magistrato di Siena, ottimamente afferma poi contro l'opinione dell'Ughelli essere di Siena questa famiglia de' Casini e non fiorentina. Aggiugne di più coll'autorità di Celso Cittadini celebre autore sennese in alcune annotazioni al Ciacconio che il nostro Antonio nacque d'una gentildonna romana de' Capsocchi nata per madre di Casa Colonna, zia paterna di Martino V, onde Antonio sarebbe stato nipote cugino di detto pontefice.' The Capocci were treated as consanguinei by the mighty Colonna and the two families were related by marriage. Martin V belonged to the Palestina-Genazzano line of the family. His father had two sisters, Giacoma and Francesca, both recorded in 1322 and one of whom could have been Casini’s grandmother. Giordano, grandfather of Martin V, had married Margherita Capocci; REHBERG 1999, pp. 87-88, 346 Tafel 11. Additional evidence of Casini’s Colonna lineage is provided by a rare eleventh- or twelfth-century manuscript he possessed, containing Letters of Saint Jeremy, with annotations probably by Petrarch. Casini gave it to the sacristy of Florence Cathedral in 1430 (now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Edili, 3). L. Fabbi, “‘Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum’: Una biblioteca pubblica nella canonica di Santa Maria del Fiore”, pp. 37, 53; A.C. de la Mare, pp. 102-103 cat. nr. 3, both in: FABBRI & TACCONI 1997. It may have been a Colonna family possession passed on to Casini. Petrarch had been a familiarius of Cardinal Giovanni Colonna in Avignon (1330-1347); REHBERG 1999, p. 486 nr. G 26.
317 Both Giovanni and his famous brother Francesco were papal doctors; SALVINI 1752, p. 27 nr. 262. See note 291 above.
318 Lello Capocci, murdered in 1415, was buried by his family in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva; FELICI 1975, p. 600.
319 LANCIANI 1897.
322 Martin V had a palace built next to Santi Apostoli, where he lived since around 1424. This palace would have been opposite the entrance of the medieval church of San Marcello (now turned 180° around) and its palace; VON PASTOR 1958, p. 229.
323 Appendix I, doc. E.21-25, 79.
324 Act drawn up in Casini’s residence of San Marcellino, on 24th May 1428; BAV, Manoscritti, Santa Maria Maggiore, cartella 72,
Martin V, Casini imparted the different destinations of two bequests to Cardinal-Archpriest Jean de la Rochetaillé and to the canons and chapter of the basilica. The first bequest of 100 florins, made by Pietro Morosini (†1424), cardinal of Santa Maria in Domnica, had been intended to exhume the body of Saint Jerome from its much venerated tomb in the basilica floor and to install it in a silver casket on top of its altar. Martin V and Casini judged that the amount fell far short of the expenditure involved in such an operation and decided to divert it to restore the church building ‘in necessariis reparationibus ecclesie possit et debeat applicari’, which fits in with the general restoration campaign of the churches of Rome ordered by the pope. The second bequest had been made shortly before by Rainaldo Brancaccio, who left 25 florins (sic) for a chalice. Since the basilica already possessed too many chalices, this sum too was to be used ‘in dictam reparacionem et renositatem dicte ecclesie’. This act does not seem to pertain to the altarpiece, as has been maintained, but rather to the architectonic restoration of the church. It does attest to Casini’s intimate efforts in the affairs of the basilica.325

Significantly, no expenditures are registered in the Camera Apostolica for Santa Maria Maggiore up to 1437.326 The archpriests financed its restoration themselves. Similarly, Casini would have paid for the altarpiece out of his own pocket. The cardinals were not only spiritual and practical, but also financial backers to the pope. They paid him an *obligatio capelli* but also spent other money on his causes liberally.327 In his 1432 testament, Casini records the immense drain on his personal fortune during the papacy of Martin V, which forced him to sell his silver. He thus spent and lost his money not only on the wars and the indigence of the court, but also on the renovation of

325 In a discussion of Casini’s career in their 2002 article, which appeared during the preparation of this book, Strehlik and Tucker similarly suggest that Casini was involved in the genesis and commission of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece and of his portrait which is incorporated in the altarpiece, unaware of Casini’s testament. However, the interpretation they make of the two newly discovered documents is essentially mistaken. They regard the present document as the raising of funds for the altarpiece. Their argument, that Casini had an affiliation with the iconography because of an alleged Snow-chapel in Florence Cathedral, is incorrect. Only by the eighteenth century was this iconography known in Florence Cathedral, when the fourteenth-century *Madonna della Pala* (Museo dell’Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore) became venerated as a miraculous Snow-Virgin; HUBACH 1996, p. 133; G. Brunetti, in BECHERucci & BRUNETTI 1971, p. 281 cat. nr. 38, fig. 253. In fact only SALVINI ante 1752, referred to by Strehlik and Tucker, associates Casini with a Snow-chapel: ‘avendo fondato nel predetto nostro duomo due cappelle col titolo di Santa Maria della Neve sul’altar maggiore’. Casini did not endow two chapels, but provided for two chaplains to say masses for his salvation at the occasion of various feasts (not Nivis) at the main altar in Florence Cathedral; see note 299 above. Contrary to the case of the institution of the chaplaincies in Siena (see note 243 above), Casini makes no reference to an altar of his own in Florence Cathedral.

326 The restoration of San Giovanni in Laterano was financed directly by the papal treasury, while central funding for Santa Maria Maggiore started only in 1437; CORBIO 1969, pp. 43-54-57. STREHLIK & TUCKER 2002, p. 125, erroneously conclude that the architectonic reconstruction would not yet have been an issue during Martin V’s reign.

327 In Casini’s case a (partial) payment of 125 florins recorded under Eugene IV: ASV, Camera Apostolica, Oblig. et Solut., 63, fols. 230r-v ‘Obbligatio capelli Sancti Marcelli’ (26th September 1432), which he paid via the Medici-bank. In 1432-1433, he revoked his 1431 promise of 1000 golden ducati to the memory of Martin V, leaving them to Eugene IV, through different channels, instead (Appendix 1, doc. E.54-56, 60, 84).

II2 CHAPTER VII
Rome, 'le novità di Roma' (Appendix 1, doc. E.56). This might refer, among other things, to his expenditures for the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece. Obviously his testament does not mention projects Casini had previously brought to an end (see also Appendix 1, doc. E.74). Unfortunately, Casini's private archive seems to have been lost, either in the fire which destroyed his titular church of San Marcello in 1519, during the Sack of Rome, or due to other tortuosities of history.

The choice of artists for the double-sided altarpiece was probably Casini's. Casini was acquainted with Florentine painting: his tenure as canon of the Florentine cathedral, the church where he had established two chaplaincies and which would become one of his future universal heirs, brought him to the forefront of the early Florentine Renaissance (Appendix 1, doc. E.9, 29, 51, 69, 88). His bankers and later testamentary executors were Cosimo (1389-1464) and Lorenzo (1394-1444) de' Medici, stimulators par excellence of the new art (Appendix 1, doc. E.15, 69, 72, 87). Casini witnessed and appreciated the rise of the arts in Florence and, in accordance with his functions, developed a passion for beautiful ecclesiastical utensils, missals, mitres and paraments. He possessed an (unfinished) missal that had been illuminated in Florence and that he would leave to the sacristy of the Florentine cathedral. Lorenzo Ghiberti was probably invited by Casini to come to Siena to work on the baptistery font. The humanist Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) was amongst Casini's friends and this would have placed Casini in the front line of the novel taste and thought. Casini was most certainly amongst Masaccio's clientele and he possessed the exquisite little devotional panel of the Madonna del Solletico by Masaccio's hand (fig. 53a). On its reverse are painted Casini's arms surmounted by the cardinal's hat (fig. 53b). It is usually dated around 1426, the year that Casini was elevated to the cardinalate, and it was possibly made for that occasion. It must have been Casini too who lured the renowned painter-couple Masaccio and Masolino to Rome. The enterprise of his chaplaincy and embellishments in Santa Maria Maggiore seems to have been a product largely imported from Florence, also given the fact that he initially opted for a Florentine chaplain (Appendix 1, doc. E.1). The execution of the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece indicates that the two

328 See note 299 above. Bequests to other Florentine and Fiesolan churches, amongst them San Lorenzo: Appendix 1, doc. E.30-37.
329 Casini, together with Rainaldo Brancaccio and Branda Castiglione, another patron of Masolino, was among those at the papal court most trusted by the Medici-bank; STREHLKE & TUCKER 2002, p.125; DE ROOVER 1963, pp. 203-204.
330 At first he intended the missal, illuminated in Florence, to go to San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, later changing its destination to the cathedral of Florence (Appendix 1, doc. E.24, 70); on the missal, now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Edili 120, see: M. Tacconi, "Secundum constructuinem Romanae Cariae in Maiori Ecclesiae Florentina": i codici liturgici della Cattedrale di Firenze", p.67, and A. Dillon Bussi, 'La miniatura quattrocentesca per il Duomo di Firenze: prime indagini e alcune novita', p. 95, and M. Tacconi, cat. nr. 73, in: FABBRI & TACCONI 1997, taking it (erroneously?) to be Siennese. On liturgical vestments bequested to Santa Maria del Fiore see Appendix 1, doc. E.29. See also POGGI 1988 [1909], vol. II, pp. 141 nr. 2124, 206-208 nrs. 2417-2421.
331 On Antonio Casini as patron and reviver of the arts in Siena, see SANI 1987, pp. 402-408.
probably set out to work together, but that Masolino finished the lion’s share. The inception of the altarpiece should therefore be dated slightly before Masaccio’s death in Rome in 1428. It may have been the couple’s first commission in the city. Masolino was to stay there for some time and deliver grand projects for other influential cardinals, such as the frescos in the chapel of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in San Clemente for Cardinal Branda Castiglione, and the cycle of famous men for Cardinal Giordano Orsini in the Orsini palace at Monte Giordano. It is interesting that Casini seems to have deliberately asked two Florentine painters to come to Rome, whereas local availability on the whole seems to have been a major incentive in the patron’s choice of artist. A particular appreciation for their work may have been decisive, on top of the dearth of capable Roman painters at the time. Pope Martin V also invited various painters to Rome, amongst them Gentile da Fabriano,
who set out in 1419, and Pisanello, who probably arrived around 1430 and both of whom worked in the Lateran basilica.  

Apart from an artistic appetite for images, Casini also had great trust in their spiritual power. Four of his bequests relate to wondrous Madonnas (Appendix 1, doc. E. 12, 37, 42) and he asks for masses to be said by his own chaplain at the altar of the Salus Populi Romani icon in Santa Maria Maggiore, as we shall see shortly (figs. 54 nr. 8, 55, 56). A lamp has to be kept burning in front of the image of the Annunciate in the Servite church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence at his expense and has to be addressed by two low masses every month. Similarly a lamp would burn in his perpetual memory in front of an image of the Annunciate at his church of San Marcello in Rome, much venerated by the cardinal.  

In Siena the street tabernacle of the Madonna dei Magalotti also enjoyed his special attention.  

After Casini’s efforts for the basilica in the second half of the 1420s, his stake in Santa Maria Maggiore would only continue to grow. He became so attached to the basilica that on 29th December 1431 he decided he wanted to be buried there, above all the five other churches with which he had close associations. His eagerness was such that he provided for the transferral of his corpse in case he did not die in the eternal city (Appendix 1, doc. E. 10). He also instituted a chaplaincy in Santa Maria Maggiore, as we see below. A year after he had become archpriest himself, he decided to add the sacristy of Santa Maria Maggiore to the five other churches already chosen as his universal heirs.  

After his death, the inventories of the basilica mention the gifts of the cardinal of San Marcello, a chalice, altar cloths and a precious mitre (Appendix 1, doc. E. 13, 14, 77). It is the earliest version of Casini’s testament that provides not only further confirmation of Casini’s role in the early fifteenth-century renovation of Santa Maria Maggiore, but also informs us about the liturgical layout of Santa Maria Maggiore in the early fifteenth century and brings us closer to the original location and significance of the altarpiece. When, in his 1431 will, Casini makes provisions to be buried in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, he already has a precise idea of the exact location where the mosaic pavement would have to be opened up for his tomb, as he had previously pointed out to

335 SYSON & GORDON 2001, pp. 16-19, with further literature.  
336 GIANNI 1719, p. 441: ‘Tanta enim fuerat devotione in Deiparam Annunciatam propensus, ut Rome mortiens centum aureos.11. (neque enim fuerat opulentus Cardinalis) ad luminaria ejusdem Sacelli conservanda pro sua pietate legasset.’ See also Appendix 1, doc. E.16-18, where Casini also provides for the ornament of the church’s relics.  
337 On the now lost Madonna-tabernacle in the Vicolo Magalotti, see LEONCINI 1994, p. 198.  
338 A copy of the part of Casini’s testament pertaining to the bequest to the basilica is preserved in BAV, Manoscritti, Santa Maria Maggiore, cartella 72, pergamen 199, on which see FERRI 1907, p. 159 nr. CCIV. It is drawn up in Florence, authenticated by five notaries and dated 21st February 1440 (old style).  
339 BAV, Manoscritti, Santa Maria Maggiore, 116, fols. 5r, 6r, 15r (fifteenth-century inventory, see inv. SAXER 2001, p. 591) all following entries added by a somewhat later hand: ‘Item unus calix argenteus deauratus cum porno smaltato cum armis reverendissimi domini cardinalis Sancti Marcelli in pede cum patena suo cuio in medio est crucifixus cum stellis azuris ponderis uncias xx’; ‘Item mintera relicta per reverendissimum dominum cardinalem Sancti Marcelli cum cassa sua. Que est ornata pernis et lapidibus et est in similus ornatus pernis et lapide inceol[?] quem donavit reverendissimi dominus cardinalus.’; ‘Item una tobalea de sirico cum listis aureis et de sirico diversorum colorum cum armis domini Antonii episcopi Senensis et nec cardinalis.’; on fol. 15v appears the altar-linen of his chapel in the Palazzo di San Marcello, as promised in his testament (Appendix 1, doc. E.13, 14, 77).
canons of Santa Maria Maggiore as well as to two Sienese canons, Giovanni Lapi and Bartolomeo of Pistoia. His tomb is to be at the foot of the Epistle ambon at the right hand or northern side of the church, near to the stone choir in the direction of the wooden choir, at the side of the altar or chapel of the relics (fig. 54 nrs. 4, 6, 7, 9): '...dispose, ordenò et giudicò el corpo suo o vero cadavara essere portato a la sepultura et doversi seppellire ne la chiesa di Sancta Maria Maggiore di Roma a pici del pultito dove si dice la pistola apresso al coro de le pietre verso el coro de legname cioè da quella parte presso al altare de’ reliquìi overo capella.' (Appendix 1, doc. E. 10 as well as 83, 87).  

Casini further provides for all costs to open and close the pavement and for a simple tombstone, for candles to be carried by the canons and for vestments for the members of his household; 650 ducati in total. He sets the rules for his own exequies. On the association of the Epistle side with the northern ambon, see DE BLAUAUW 1994, vol. 1, pp. 91 note 276, 420; IDEM 1987, pp. 206, 415 note 251.
D'Estouteville around 1460, when only two ambons were left in the nave. The main choir was then relocated to the apse in front of the cathedra. As to the canon’s choir, it was previously thought that, on the occasion of the transformation of the west end around 1300, it had been moved from an original location at the side of the main choir to the southern transept in front of the altar of Saint John the Baptist founded by Jacopo Colonna. Casini’s testament shows that in the early fifteenth century the twelfth-century enclosure of the main choir, apparently with remarkable Cosmatesque inlay-work, judging by the unusual use of the plural in its description (‘de le pietre’), with its ambons was indeed intact. More importantly, the wooden stalls of a canon’s choir were still situated alongside it. The canon’s choir has therefore never been in the southern transept, as De Blauw hypothesised for the period 1300 to circa 1460. The canon’s choir remained in the nave up to D’Estouteville’s time. By then it could no longer have been relocated to the southern transept area, as this had become an entrance area, following the opening of two doors in the west end of the basilica. Once the wooden enclosure in the nave had been demolished, the canon’s choir was probably integrated with the cardinal’s choir in the apse. Casini’s testament suggests a disposition of the two choirs as existed in San Giovanni in Laterano up to 1425 and in old Saint Peter’s until after 1500. That said, at Santa Maria Maggiore the canon’s choir was located at the other, northern side of the nave, possibly born out of a desire for the canons to be near to the sanctuaries of the presepe and Saint Jerome (fig. 54 nrs. 13, 14). In the documents no explicit mention is made of a canon’s altar. However, for functional reasons, the presence of such an altar must be postulated. Contrary to the situation in San Giovanni in Laterano, for example, where the Magdalen-ciborium altar is explicitly recorded as the altare capituli, the ciborium altar of the relics in Santa Maria Maggiore appears to have been unrelated to the canon’s altar, as in fact Casini mentions the canon’s choir and the altar of the relics separately. The canon’s altar would have been situated at the top of the choir and must have been free-standing. Both choirs, together with the twin ciboria, were indeed squeezed into the nave, which with a width of circa 17 metres is far smaller than the naves of old Saint Peter’s and San Giovanni in Laterano. This disposition is further affirmed by the fact that Casini’s tomb-slab, which he desired to be more or less in between the two choir-enclosures, is later recorded in the nave.

This is of interest for the location of the double-sided altarpiece. De Blauw, discarding the possibility of a high altarpiece has suggested, on the
basis of the central iconography of the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece, that it would perhaps have been intended for the canon's choir, which he identified with the altar of Saint John the Baptist.\textsuperscript{350} In essence this holds true, although we now need to envisage the location of the canon's choir in the nave (fig. 54 nr. 7). The stone choir was used for the occasions when the pope came to celebrate at the high altar, which was reserved for him alone. The wooden choir, possibly with choir stalls, would have served the canon's daily offices.\textsuperscript{351} The free position of an altar in the centre of the choir accounts for the double-sidedness of the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece.\textsuperscript{352} It must thus have stood on top of the choir altar in the lateral wooden canon's choir located in the northern side of the nave.\textsuperscript{353}

The canon's masses were attended by the beneficiares of private chapels in the basilica as well, all of whom were obliged to reside in its palace or adjacent buildings.\textsuperscript{354} Casini himself instituted a well-endowed chaplaincy in Santa Maria Maggiore in 1431, initially asking specifically for a Florentine priest (Appendix 1, doc. E.1, 11, 12, 14, 67). He proposes that a house has to be bought or built in the near vicinity of the basilica and that vineyards are to be bought totalling a dazzling 1000 ducati for the housing and maintenance of a chaplain to say masses in the church four days a week. It is the largest bequest that Casini made and its importance to him is shown by a 1433 disposition in his testament. When his finances grew tighter due to the war, he ordered that at least the bequests to the pope, to his servants and to the chaplain of Santa Maria Maggiore be financed, just as his funeral in the basilica (Appendix 1, doc. E.64). The chaplain had to officiate all year round at the already men-

\textsuperscript{350} His assumption that the canon's choir was located in the southern transept in this period is actually based upon an assertion to that effect of DE ANGELIS 1621, who does not give his source; DE BLAAUW 1996, pp. 90-91; IDEM 1994, vol. 1, pp. 426-428; IDEM 1987, pp. 208-210. On different grounds, the altar of Saint John the Baptist was designated as the probable original location of the double-sided altarpiece by DAVIES 1961, p. 355. Lately DE BLAAUW 1996, esp. pp. 91-92, stated that the Roman basilicas did not have any high altarpieces at all up to the sixteenth century, due to their specific liturgical layout and use. The high altar was reserved for the pope or, with special permission, occasionally for cardinals. Since the principal basilicas were built with the apse towards the west, the priest officiated behind the high altar. Due to fenestellae beneath the altar at the ridge of steep altarpodsiums, there was in any case no place for the celebrant in front of the altar, according to De Blauw. Some authors maintain that the double-sided altarpiece stood over the high altar of Santa Maria Maggiore (see most recently O'POGHULUHA 1998, esp. pp. 133-135, unaware of De Blauw's publications).

\textsuperscript{351} In the 1436 inventory, altar cloths are mentioned for the 'altare maior', for the 'altare conventualis' or 'pro usu cotidianis altaris et chori'; cited in DE BLAAUW 1994, vol. 1, pp. 425-426; IDEM 1987, p. 208. On the officiation of the choir altar, see SASSER 2001, pp. 194-196.

\textsuperscript{352} Another argument against the hypothesis of the ciborium altar as choir altar (see p. 103 above), is the fact that the ciborium altars, according to the scaled engraving of DE ANGELIS 1621, pp. 87, 83, measured no more than circa 1.40 m in width and therefore could hardly accommodate the double-sided altarpiece (width circa 1.85 m without framing elements). Some sizes for the Capocci tabernacle of the relics can be found in GARDNER 1970.

\textsuperscript{353} A location in the canon's choir of old Saint Peter's is quite convincingly suggested for Giotto's Stefaneschi altarpiece in the important article of KEMPERS \& DE BLAAUW 1987. It might be objected that the dedication to the Virgin of the canon's altar of old Saint Peter's is hardly reflected by the iconography of the altarpiece, showing only a small Virgin Enthroned in the predella on the Christ side. Yet, by force of analogy, our reconstruction of the location of the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece reinforces their hypothesis. As in the case of the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece in Santa Maria Maggiore, the iconography of the Stefaneschi altarpiece also ties together references to the main cults of old Saint Peter's and to the main saints venerated there. LISNER 1995, pp. 128-139 and GARDNER 1974, pp. 78-79, cling to the hypothesis of a high-altar destination, suggesting the Stefaneschi altarpiece was moved for mass.

\textsuperscript{354} As recorded in the statutes of 1448; BAV, Manoscritti, Santa Maria Maggiore, fol. 13r. On 20th December 1561, Archpriest Carlo Borromeo abolished all chaplaincies, instituting a Collegio of beneficaries and clerics instead; ASV, Misc. Arm. vii, 46, fols. 484r-485v, 498r-499v.
tioned altar of the relics, founded by Johannes and Vinea Capocci in 1256 and dedicated to the Virgin, containing the most venerated relics of basilica, amongst them the crib and windings of the Nativity (figs. 54 nr. 9, 55).  
Casini's chaplain also had to take care of the twin altar at the Gospel-side of the nave: 'a la capella de Ie decte reliquie, overo altare et etiandio al altare de la Nostra Donna, la quale di sopra si chiude, la quale è capella d'uno cardinale di Colonna' (Appendix 1, doc. E. 12) (figs. 54 nr. 8, 55). This altar had been erected by Cardinal Agapito Colonna underneath a Gothic ciborium which housed the most venerated Marian icon of Rome, the Salus Populi Romani (fig. 56).  
At a certain stage the altar was dedicated to Saint Gregory the
Great, probably due to the procession that this bishop of Rome undertook with the icon in the year 590, miraculously curing the city from the plague. Casini thus asked for offices at two of the most central altars in the basilica. These two tabernacle altars had also been endowed by the two Roman families of the Capocci and the Colonna, to both of whom Antonio Casini was related through his maternal grandmother. On 20th January 1433, Casini bestows an extra 500 florins upon his chaplaincy, to be converted in properties (Appendix 1, doc. E.67). The profits of these are to be used to distribute amongst those canons and chaplains present at different masses in the period around Christmas, at the feast of the Conception of the Virgin and for another mass to be said on 15th December in honour of the Virgin. In the latter instance Casini harks back to another office he had apparently supported in a similar way by a previous act, the Festum Nivis: ‘con altro officio di Sancta Maria de le Nievi.’ Three of the four masses of Nativity and its octave were included in the papal statio and would thus have been celebrated by the pope at the high altar. The other masses favoured by Casini would have been concentrated in the canons’ choir. Casini thus put his imprint on the major feasts celebrated in the basilica by stipulating perpetual offerings in his name to those present and by providing a splendid backdrop and centrepiece to the ceremonies: the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece. Casini’s annual memorial mass was attended by the canons. Casini’s chaplain would also have joined the communal choir-masses in front of the Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece over the choir-altar. Antonio Casini died in Rome on 4th February 1439 and was indeed buried in the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, to be remembered by his own desired inscription on a tombstone.

The choir altarpiece was thus located in an area of great personal and great liturgical significance for Casini, an area that staged the fulcra of activities during the first half of the fifteenth century. The chapels of two successive archpriests were situated there (fig. 54 nrs. 7, 12). The iconography of the
Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece that was designed under Casini's aegis linked together, for the convenience of the assembled canons and chaplains of lateral altars who officiated at the altar daily, references to the main venerated relics, altar-tituli and feast-days of the church. It formed an optical complement to Jacopo Torriti's mosaic of the Coronation of the Virgin, wedged in between the ciborium-altars with the Salus Populi Romani-icon, the altar with the relics, the altar with the tomb of Saint Jerome and the presepe chapel. The front of the altarpiece showed the Assumption, one of the most important feasts in the Marian basilica, implicitly referring to the venerated icon in the companion tabernacle altar, which was the protagonist of the festivities on 15th August, and to Archpriest Landi's recently-founded chapel close by (fig. 54 nrs. 8, 12).362 To the left of the spectator, the altarpiece was flanked by the prime apostles Peter and Paul. To the right was Saint Gregory, who had effected the plague miracle by carrying the Salus Populi Romani in procession (fig. 56).363 At the extreme right stood Saint Matthias, whose relics and name adorned the papal high altar.364 Those visiting the confessio and the tabernacle altar at the back of the choir, as well as the canons in the rear part of the enclosure, would have been presented with the back of the altarpiece (figs. 50-52). At the outer positions were represented Saint Jerome, whose venerated tomb-altar was nearby, and Saint Martin, clad in a mantle adorned with a column-motive and letters M as a reference to the reigning Colonna pope, Casini's lord and parent. The two prominently positioned Saints John were echoed inside the church at the altar of Jacopo Colonna, which was dedicated to the Baptist.

Alternatively, it is conceivable that the two Saints John made a complimentary reference that stretched outside the church-walls to the Basilica Salvatoris, by then already known as San Giovanni in Laterano, which was associated with both Saints John and which also enjoyed the special attention of Martin v. The two basilicas were linked by the papal statio. Moreover, Santa Maria Maggiore had originally been constructed to take over some of the function of the Basilica Salvatoris.365 In this respect, another idiosyncrasy of the altarpiece gains significance too. Typical only of Roman representations of the Miraculous foundation is the clypeus showing the miracle actually being enacted by Christ, his mother standing behind Him (plate xii, figs. 46, 57).366 Leaving aside the theological implications, this Roman conception of Christ as an indispensable, capital force behind the founding of a church in Mary's honour might refer to the historic relation of the two basilicas. The two Saints Johns at the back of the double-sided altarpiece thus possibly further strengthened the ties with the Lateran. The Lateran enjoyed the predilection of Pope Martin v above even Santa Maria Maggiore. Martin v was eventually buried in San Giovanni in Laterano in front of the high altar, which con-

362 WOLF 1990, pp. 37-59. I follow JOANNIDES 1993, pp. 414-415, in hypothesising that the Assumption formed the front of the altarpiece.
363 IBIDEM, pp. 131-169.
tained the relics of the heads of the apostles Saints Peter and Paul, which in turn might account for the presence of these prime apostles on the front of the altarpiece, together with their general importance in the city of Rome.367

The central panel at the back presented the canons and priests with the foundation of their church, which had become a feast very much at the heart of the liturgy in the basilica, but which also provided an allegory of their own efforts for Santa Maria Maggiore (plate xii). The programme of the altarpiece seems to be a crystallisation of the campaign in name of Martin V to reconstruct Rome and this basilica in particular. Through its central panel with the Miraculous Foundation, the altarpiece claimed on the part of the cardinals their continuation of Liberius and Patritius’ obedience of the Virgin’s demand to honour her with a church. In the spirit of the miracle which induced Pope Liberius, Johannes Patritius and the people of Rome to construct a church in the honour of the mother of God, the current custodians of the church held themselves responsible for continuing to decorate it: ‘Hodie tamen eam divinis maneribus et spiritualibus domus ampliare atque decorare dignatus est.’, as proclaimed by a fifteenth-century version of the legend sung by the canons.368

The portraits of Martin V and of a cardinal can be detected in the representation of the miracle on the central panel of the altarpiece (plate xii). Strehkle and Tucker rightly suggested identifying Casini with this assiduously worked cardinal’s portrait.369 The bullish head is similar not only to Jacopo della Quercia’s relief-portrait of Casini, but also to the cardinal as represented in a miniature attributed to Nicola di Ulisse, although he is younger there. The miniature adorns a missal that Casini himself ordered following his elevation to the cardinalate, first using it at his titular church of San Marcello, then finally leaving it to the sacristy of Siena Cathedral (plate xiii).370 In the same way, and as we shall see, Masolino’s portrait-head resembles the prominent cardinal in Sassetta’s predella-scene of the pope hewing out the ground-plan of snow (plate viii). It was the signature of patron Cardinal Antonio Casini on the altarpiece that he gave to Santa Maria Maggiore, the basilica he treasured at the core of both his family and his official life. It was a tribute to Pope Martin V by Casini, his closest attendant.

Masolino’s representation of the snow legend embodies a social image of the patron, as did Rusuti’s mosaic. This would be present yet again in Mino da Fiesole’s relief for the 1461 canopy over the high altar of Santa Maria.
Maggiore (figs. 57, 58). Mino inserted a portrait of Cardinal and Archpriest of the church D'Estouteville under the guise of the patrician, as well as in the vests of an attendant to the Assumption.\footnote{CAGLIOTI 1987; J. Fernández-Alonso, 'Storia della basilica', in PIETRANGELI 1987, p. 31; F. Mancinelli, 'La basilica nel Quattrocento', in IDEM, p. 196.} In fact when, only a few decades after the altarpiece's erection, Archpriest D'Estouteville (1445-1484) made his radical changes to the basilica, among other things demolishing the choirs in the nave and installing a new choir underneath the apse, he transferred the iconography of the double-sided altarpiece to the ciborium which he constructed over the high altar, with the addition of a Nativity and Adoration scene relevant to the basilica's relics of both the crib and cave of the Nativity.\footnote{DE BLAAUW 1994, vol. I, pp. 363-365, 367-377, 393, 420-421, 868; IDEM 1987, pp. 180-187; 195, 206, 608.} The Masaccio-Masolino altarpiece itself must have ended up, only a few decades after its manufacture, on the Colonna altar dedicated to Saint John in the southern transept, set against the wall, where Vasari and Michelangelo could actually only admire the Foundation-side.\footnote{VASARI [1906], vol. II, pp. 293-294 (only in the 1568 edition).}

It can be concluded that the patrons who adapted the legend not only wished to use it to present themselves in a devout manner, but also to reflect upon a collaboration between the pope or the Church in general on the one hand, and the (ecclesiastical) patriciate on the other. This application of the legend proved a reason for its dissemination, on top of its allegorical Marian qualities and its use as 'Folie représentative Selbstdarstellung'. We shall see that documented cases of works of art showing the snow legend, both inside and outside Rome, often reveal patrons from the ecclesiastical aristocracy. In their official religious functions, all of these patrons were involved in the building campaigns of churches. In Rome they were cardinals-archpriests, in Siena we met an operaio of the cathedral and below we shall come across a bishop and a provost.\footnote{Heinrich Reitzmann, who constructed a chapel for the Virgin of the Snow in Assnafenburg and commissioned Grünewald to paint the altarpiece, was a canon, studied theology and/or canon law and later presided over the archiepiscopal court; HUBACH 1996, pp. 13-15.}

The documented affiliation of Casini with the church of Santa Maria Maggiore thus dates at least back to 1428-1431 but may have started even earlier with his cardinalate in 1426. He was closely involved in the vicissitudes of the basilica out of personal interest and as an intimate and relative of the papal court of Martin V, reconstructor of the western Church. He provided for memorial masses at two of the most venerated and central altars of the basilica which, moreover, belonged to his distant family. Given his personal as well as professional ties with the basilica, his acquaintance with Masaccio, the location of his tomb and the presence of his portrait on the central panel, it must have been he who ordered the double-sided altarpiece for the choir altar in the nave from Masaccio and Masolino, thereby sharpening and renewing the significance of the snow-legend. In 1431 Casini chose to be buried in an area that he himself had recently embellished. Casini's dispositions for Santa Maria Maggiore fit into a fixed formula of patronage consisting of provisions for the daily officiation of the basilica by the chapter, and the donation of an altarpiece or altar-ciborium, combined with a tomb for the donor that is also
exemplified by Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi’s munificence in old Saint Peter’s and Cardinal Gherardo Bianchi’s (†1302) in the Lateran basilica.375

Casini stood with one leg in the very centre of papal confidence, matters of the pontifical court, the renovation of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, the daily officiation of the basilica, his commission to Masaccio and Masolino for a double-sided altarpiece for the choir, and the testamentary commission for his own tomb and for memorial masses in the basilica. He stood with the other leg in the middle of the bisdom of Siena, the diplomatic interests of this city and its cathedral. He was the bridge over which a subtly grasped version of the snow legend could travel and he was the link between two important altarpieces, that of Masaccio and Masolino in Rome and that of Sassetta in Siena Cathedral. The triad Casini, Sassetta and donna Ludovica, initially together with Ludovica’s husband, would have discussed the project for the Sienese Madonna della Neve at length. Casini’s function must have resem-

375 For Bianchi, archpriest of San Giovanni in Laterano and for his tomb in front of the canon’s altar, see DE BLAuw 1999, pp. 477-478; GARDNER 1992, p. 87, fig. 66. For Stefaneschi, see KEMPER & DE BLAuw 1987, esp. pp. 80, 99-100.
bled the more formal involvement of his friend Leonardo Bruni, whom the Florentine guild of merchants, the Arte di Calimala, asked to compose the programme for Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise for the baptistery in 1424.376 It seems that Casini informed Ludovica and Sassetta above all about the iconography. One is tempted to suppose that Casini also shared his general experiences as a mecenas of the Florentine and Roman art-scene, as sketched above, with Sassetta and his patroness. One might thus account for the much-noted felicitous perspectival inserts in Sassetta’s painting, such as the crown-bearing angels viewed from below, which seem to have had a breath of fresh air from beyond the Sienese boundaries and the renovatio Lorenzettiana alone (plate 1, 11). However style, contrary to iconography, is difficult to convey by words alone, and one would have to suppose that Casini carried drawings or other portable examples of the new art. Such a specific relationship is not warranted by the visual evidence, as no precise formal relationship between the Florentine painters and Sassetta is indicated in the Madonna della Neve. We should therefore give Sassetta’s artistic genius more credit of its own. In a sty-

376 KRAUTHEIMER 1982, pp. 159-162, 372 doc. nr. 52.
listic respect the fact that the master of perspective himself, Filippo Brunelleschi, visited Siena in the late 1420s, might carry weight. Brunelleschi lectured on river works and harbours, as was recorded by the Sienese engineer Mariano Taccola. It is possible that this visit might also have afforded an occasion for an inquisitive artist such as Sassetta to consult Brunelleschi on matters of pictorial representation.377

As to Casini’s stylistic taste, he opted for painters who were locally available, with the important exception of Masolino and Masaccio whom he personally persuaded to come to Rome. Casini’s artistic appetite was not restricted to Florentine painters alone: Jacopo della Quercia designed Casini’s chapel in the Sienese cathedral, Nicola di Ulisse illuminated his missal, and Domenico di Bartolo may have painted his theologically well-wrought Virgin of Humility for Casini in 1433.378 The cardinal’s collaboration with Ludovica and Sassetta must have stirred his admiration for this Sienese painter. Around a year later Cassini invited Sassetta to paint an altarpiece, the Madonna delle Ciliegie, for the cathedral of his episcopal see at Grosseto, still in Sienese territory, as will be proposed in chapter ix.