Sassetta's Madonna della Neve. An Image of Patronage

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As a conclusion to the delicately spun web of patrons, counsellors and painters outlined above, we shall, in this final chapter, consider an altarpiece that Sassetta painted immediately after his Madonna della Neve. Not only does it spring forth from the same social context, it also elaborates compositionally upon its predecessor in Siena Cathedral.

Antonio Casini exchanged the bishop's see of Siena for that of Grosseto in 1427 and he would remain bishop of Grosseto and as such head of its cathedral, until his death in 1439. In the case of the Madonna della Neve, Casini had circled around Sassetta in his capacity as adviser to the painter's patrons, but he also actually commissioned the artist himself while bishop of Grosseto. It will be argued that their collaboration resulted in the now fragmentary altarpiece of the Madonna delle Ciliegie or 'Madonna of the Cherries', which was discovered in the sacristy of Grosseto Cathedral in 1904.

Mason Perkins, who came across the panel, recognised it as a Sassetta and this attribution, and a date of around 1435, have since been accepted.

The history of the Grosseto Madonna prior to its discovery in the cathedral sacristy is shrouded in mystery. Pope Hennessy at first inferred that it would have been painted for the cathedral itself, but later unconvincingly attempted to link it to Chigi's reference to the Petroni altarpiece in the church of San Francesco in Siena. The sacristy of Grosseto Cathedral was the obvious gathering place for altarpieces and objects from the cathedral itself once they had become redundant after various redecoration campaigns or, occasionally, for works from ill-fated churches in its diocese. Francesco Anichini, chancellor of the episcopal curia of Grosseto, actually describes the situation in his compilation Storia ecclesiastica [... ] di Grosseto of 1751: 'la sagrestia ripiena nelle sue pareti di quadri da altare antichi in tavola'. Pope Hennessy's first intuition, that the Madonna is the remnant of an altarpiece in the cathedral itself, is thus more likely. We shall consider the historical situation in Grosseto and its cathedral before turning to the commissioning of Sassetta's Madonna delle Ciliegie.

Grosseto is situated on a plane in the Maremma not far from the sea, on the...
road between Rome and Pisa. The city had been under Sienese hegemony since 1336. In 1138 Pope Innocence II had transferred the cathedral of San Lorenzo in the nearby decayed city of Roselle to the new prosperous centre of Grosseto, where it merged with the Pieve of Santa Maria Assunta.\textsuperscript{417} Construction of a new cathedral in Grosseto probably started in 1295. The cathedral was dedicated to Saint Lawrence, but the Virgin continued to play no less important a role in this church, as is attested by the fact that the cathedral works were called the Opera di Santa Maria. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Grosseto had been reduced by the pest to a sorry population of only 180 men. According to a petition made by the \textit{Grossetani} to the Sienese government, they could no longer even man their walls and city-gates. Eventually this was resolved by an influx of Pisans, who were received with open arms by Grosseto, while the Sienese Concistoro, recognising the importance of the immigrants, granted them the same rights as native \textit{Grossetani}. In the same period, a channel was dug from Grosseto to the sea-port of Talamone to enable the passage of ships carrying grain.\textsuperscript{418} The cathedral was a ruin: in 1434 part of the building collapsed and possessions of the cathedral works had to be sold to pay for the repair.\textsuperscript{419}

Upon his arrival in Grosseto in 1426, Cardinal Casini must have encountered this desolate situation. The new bishop saw to the construction of the presbytery and of the episcopal palace.\textsuperscript{420} He must have embarked on these projects early in his career, as reflected in his testamentary dispositions of 29th December 1431, in which he bequests 200 ducats to the sacristy of the cathedral of Grosseto, to be used for the benefit of the church and the neighbouring buildings of the \textit{vescovado} (see Appendix 1, doc. E.44). Casini's coats of arms were apparently scattered over the annex buildings of the cathedral. One has survived, walled into a flank of the Campanile (fig. 65).\textsuperscript{421} Casini's

\textsuperscript{417} CAPPILLI 1910, pp. 11, 18.
\textsuperscript{418} PECCI post 1759, pp. 133-135.
\textsuperscript{419} This appears from cathedral-books now lost, but obviously known to ANICHINI 1751-1752, p. 93 (fols. 36r-v): 'Nel 1434 rovinò buona parte della nostra chiesa e rinvienisi deliberato che, affine di rimettersi nello stato primiero e con stabilità, si vendesse etc.'.
\textsuperscript{420} PECCI post 1759, p. 134: the memory of Casini's piety in Grosseto lived on thanks to a.o. 'la fabrica del \textit{Palazzo Vescovile} e Canonica'.
\textsuperscript{421} BOLDRINI 1760, p. 176: 'di marmo puramente son quelle [arme gentilizie] del Conte Casini e di Mons. Agazzari, che sono all'esterno del \textit{Palazzo Vescovile} per quella parte, che si dice Pretoria, del detto Conte Antonio Casini sono ancora altre due Arme simili nelle case della Canonica, contigue al Duomo'. The surviving marble plaque was already signalled by F. Fumi Cambi Gado, 'Opere d'arte del secolo XV nella Cattedrale di Grosseto', in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 45, 56 note 2.
individual input in the cathedral seems to have outstripped his official responsibilities.

Almost five years later, Casini adds the sacristy of Grosseto Cathedral to the list of his universal heirs, a list which already consisted of the sacristies of the church of San Marcello in Rome and of the cathedrals of Florence and Siena (see Appendix 1, E.69). Shortly before his death he then stipulates that, in return for his heritage, each of his heirs (the list now comprising six sacristies) should provide for an oil lamp to burn continuously in front of the tabernacle with the Sacred Host in those churches and that they should perpetually celebrate the anniversary of his death (see Appendix 1, doc. E.88). On 17th October 1441, one of Casini’s testamentary executors laid down in a notarial act that 400 florins, apparently the sixth part of Casini’s heritage, would be given to the cathedral works of Grosseto, on various provisions.\footnote{422} A lamp should indeed be kept burning, and a most elaborate mass was to be celebrated every 4th or 5th February (the former being Casini’s day of death) with at least twelve priests present, accompanied by the liberal distribution of candles and gifts. Additionally, a separate chaplain to be called ‘il cappellano della eredità di monsignor di San Marcello’ was to be maintained and was to celebrate all year round whenever other chaplains officiated at the cathedral’s altars. The Grosseto Cathedral works acquitted itself grudgingly of these prerequisites, which were hardly covered by the 400 florins. The extra requirements were probably fanciful additions by Casini’s testamentary executor, apparently Sienese priest Sebastiano di Domenico, and the Grossetans tried in vain to lay their hands on the original testament.\footnote{423} Whereas Casini’s executors had thus made him rule from the grave in a somewhat despotic manner, during his lifetime Casini did make generous and worthwhile contributions to the cathedral. 

As bishop of Siena, Casini had been eager to acquire a chapel in the Sienese cathedral, which he would endow in 1430. It was to be expected that Casini also founded a chapel in his second episcopal church, the cathedral of Grosseto. Fortunately, later visitors to the cathedral rather elaborately discussed the chapel of the Crucifix, founded by Antonio Casini, cardinal of San Marcello. Strangely, in contrast to the chapel in the cathedral of Siena, in Casini’s 19-page long testament, no mention is made of a chapel or chaplaincy in Grosseto. It may have reached completion during his lifetime and in fact Casini himself stipulates in the testament that bequests only be carried out in cases where he had not already provided for the churches in question during his lifetime (Appendix 1, doc. E.74).

Don Vittorio Burattini of the Archivio Vescovile in Grosseto pointed the way to the detailed Apostolic Visit to Grosseto and its diocese by Francesco Bossio of 1576, now in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, for which I am very grateful.

\footnote{422} This act, drawn up in Grosseto by notary Baldino di Domenico di Baldino of Lucignano in Val di Chiana, was known to Anichini through a copy in a Libro di ricordi of monsignor Borghesi of circa 1550. Quoted in extenso by ANICHINI 1751-1752, vol. I, fols. 40r-40v.\footnote{423} ANICHINI 1751-1752, vol. 1, fols. 42v-43r. It is referred to by Bossio in his Apostolical Visit of 1576 (see Appendix 1, doc. E.15).
grateful. Copies of Bossio’s visits to Siena, Massa Marittima, Montalcino and Pienza, were also sent to the Vatican and are still to be found there.\textsuperscript{424} The manuscript was unknown to previous writers on the cathedral and other churches of Grosseto and its diocese. Its discovery is of importance, given the fruits that the study of Bossio’s longer-known Apostolical Visit to Siena and its diocese has already born and continues to yield to post-war (art)historians of Siena and its churches, especially regarding the original decoration of churches and the dedication of their altars. The discovery is of particular importance in light of the fact that early archival records for Grosseto and for its much-troubled cathedral are scarce.\textsuperscript{425} Bossio, bishop of Perugia, embarked upon his visit to Grosseto on 11th February 1576 by papal mandate of 22nd April 1575 (see Appendix 1, doc. F.1).\textsuperscript{426} About a third of the locations Bossio visits in Grosseto and its immediate surroundings are in ruins, due to hardships the city had endured by the first half of the sixteenth century. Another pest epidemic struck the city in 1527 and, in the decades leading up to the fall of the Sienese Republic, Grosseto had been occupied by the Spanish, then fortified by the befriended French, but had finally been taken by Grand Duke Cosimo I in 1559.\textsuperscript{427} More tranquil, though hardly more prosperous, times had followed with the subjection of Grosseto to the Medicean State of Florence in 1559. The cathedral itself was in a deplorable state. In the following we shall examine Bossio’s manuscript regarding his observations of the cathedral interior and regarding Casini’s involvement in its construction and decoration in particular.

Garzelli, in her monograph on the cathedral, has clearly outlined the sixteenth-century stages of its construction. She found that the transformation of the cathedral was undertaken by the Sienese architect Anton Maria Lari in 1538. Works were well advanced and the first five bays at the western end of the church of the monastery of Santa Chiara, the confraternities of the Carità, of San Gherardo and of the Misericordia, the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala of Grosseto, the operario of the cathedral works, the chapel of Santa Maria della Neve, San Giovanni and the collapsed church of Sant’ Andrea. On the historical situation in Grosseto during those years, see PECCI post 1759, pp. 143-145.\textsuperscript{428} Garzelli 1967, pp. 40-45, on p. 42: ‘E probabile però che per accelerare l’uso della fabbrica fosse stata lasciata incompleta la zona dell’abside con una chiusura provvisoria in prossimità del transetto.’ The nineteenth century witnessed another burst of transformations, under the sceptre of architect Fabio Nuti; see F. Rotundo, ‘Gli interventi ottocenteschi nella Cattedrale di Grosseto’, in GNOLI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 73-86 (pp. 73-74 with a useful resumé of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interventions: Garzelli 1967, pp. 34-37. P. Vichi, Geo-Carte Manoscritte e a Stampa nell’Archivio di Stato di Siena, Siena 1990, p. 124, is mistaken in identifying a ground-plan in the ASS, Quattro Conservatori 137 (Mappe) with Lari’s project for the cathedral of Grosseto. The church represented is the cathedral of Pienza, while the drawing and handwriting is probably seventeenth-century or later.

\textsuperscript{424} Resp. ASV, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Apostolica, 58, 59, 61, 62.

\textsuperscript{425} A fire reduced the communal residence and its archive to ashes in 1560; GARZELLI 1967, p. 115. On the state archives and the Archivio Vescovile, with similarly late material, see resp. PETRONI 1971, and S. Bacci, L’Archivio Vescovile di Grosseto, Grosseto iyœSS, to be consulted in the archive itself. On Bossio’s visit see also BLOVIN 1998, p. 27 nr. 3.1.2.23.

\textsuperscript{426} Bossio’s records of churches in the diocese consist of: Montepescali, Batignano, Campagnatico, Roccastrada, Lattaia, Gavorrano, Scarlino, Castiglione della Pescaia, Badiola al Fango, Istia d’Ombrone, Montorsaio, Sticciano, Buriano, Colonna, Caldana, Ravi, Giuncarico, Montemassi, Sassofortino, ‘Arci Riodorigoni’ (Castel Federighi?), Tatti, Baccheggiano, Torniella, Belagaio, Casale di Pari, Sasso di Maremma (or Sasso d’Ombrone), Colle Massari, Vicarello.

\textsuperscript{427} Bossio visited the following locations inside the city of Grosseto: the cathedral, the parish church of San Michele Arcangelo, the ruined parish church of Santa Lucia, the commenda of San Leonardo, the collapsed churches of San Benedetto, San Galgano and San Jacopo, the conventual church of San Francesco, the
the church were in use in the second half of the century, but the demolished eastern end had, according to Garzelli, been closed off with a wall at the height of the transept, the church thus extending probably no further than four or five bays, a situation witnessed by Bossio (fig. 66). The church was eventually finished in 1610 and consecrated in 1655. In Bossio’s time, the standing parts of the cathedral were still in a bad condition: the roof was leaking, the pavement was brittle, the walls had holes in them and windows had been walled (Appendix 1, doc. f. 12, 18). Bossio describes a total of eight altars. To the left of the main altar for those entering the cathedral, at the northern side (ad cornu Evangelii, the Gospel as a protection to this most ‘evil’
side) was situated an altar dedicated to the Annunciation (Appendix 1, doc. F.7) (fig. 66 nr. 2). The choir was in a strange position, to the right of the main altar, because the part behind the main altar had only just been demolished to make way for the new construction project (fig. 66 nr. 8).

Fortunately for our present investigation into Casini’s patronage, Bossio recalls that an altar of the Crucifix endowed by the cardinal of San Marcello had been situated in the demolished part of the church, of which hardly any vestiges remained (Appendix 1, doc. F.13) (fig. 66 nr. 12). To Bossio’s dissatisfaction, its title had not yet been transferred. Bossio records that Cardinal Casini wanted the ius patronatus to pass on from provost to provost. That much had been notarially fixed on 17th October 1441, posthumously that is, and thus probably by Casini’s testamentary executors. In Bossio’s time, mass had to be said twice a week at this altar, with an additional twelve masses a year. Bossio also admonishes that Casini’s lamp be reinstated in front of the Sacrament and that celebrations of his annual memorial, which had dwindled, be taken seriously (Appendix 1, doc. F.18, 19).

During the building activities, the altar of the Crucifix as well as its title and duties had entirely disappeared. Bossio therefore urges that the title of the altar of the Crucifix be moved to the altar of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, as long as the reconstruction of the church and of the altar of the Crucifix have not been accomplished (Appendix 1, doc. F.19) (fig. 66 nr. 3). It is unclear where the chapel’s inventory was stored, though the crucifix that would undoubtedly have belonged to it may have been temporarily moved to the sacristy.430

In 1751-1752 Anichini witnessed the new, baroque location of the chapel of the Crucifix in the southern transept arm and he was still aware that the chapel as an institution had been founded by Casini.431 He even continues to quote literally the acceptation of the endowment of this chapel on the part of the cathedral Opera of Santa Maria on 6th October 1468.432 He thereby offers us, in addition to Bossio’s 1441 document, another record of the pacts for the endowment of the chapel. The endowment consisted of various houses, grounds and a mill in and around Grosseto. Amongst them was a vegetable garden next to the church, later bought by the Opera and converted into a cemetery.433 As in the case of the oil lamp, ‘il cappellano dell’eredità di mon-

429 In the eighteenth century the lamp was still there: ANICINI 1751-1752, vol. I, fol. 40r, as transcribed by S. Buetti in GNOMNI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, p. 95; PECCI post 1759, p. 133: ‘lascio memoria in Grosseto della di lui singolare pieta, con un lume continuo avanti l’Altare del SS. Sacramento e la frequenza quotidiana a’ Divini Officii d’un Sacerdote di vantaggio’.

430 Appendix 1, doc. F.16, mentions a crucifix, as well as pedestals, and various panichis to cover it at different occasions. On fol. 18r of the same manuscript is mentioned a ‘Crux lignea pro mortuis’, which might be identifiable with the small early fifteenth-century crucifix, now in the Museo Archeologico e d’Arte della Maremma e Museo Diocesano di Arte Sacra, Grosseto, on which see A. Bagnoli in GNOMNI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 127-129, cat. nr. 6. No altarpiece, candle-sticks or the like coming from the chapel of the Crucifix are described in the sacristy.

431 ANICINI 1751-1752, fol. 43r; transcription by S. Buetti in GNOMNI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, p. 95. A second beneficio under the title of the Crucifix had been added to the altar in 1612 by testamentary bequest of Baldassare Baccellieri; IDIEM, fol. 44v, p. 95.

432 ANICINI 1751-1752, fol. 43v-43v; omitted by S. Buetti (see previous note). The parchment, which in Anichini’s time was preserved in the archive of the Curia, had been cut at the bottom, leading to the loss of the notary’s name.

433 ANICINI 1751-1752, fol. 37v; transcription by S. Buetti in GNOMNI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, p. 94; see also A. Famiani,
signor di San Marcello’ and the commemorative masses to be held on each anniversary of Casini’s death, the legacy hardly covered the services that Casini had asked in return, and the cathedral works regretted having accepted.\textsuperscript{434} At the start, the chaplain was obliged to celebrate mass daily at Casini’s altar, later mitigated to mass twice weekly.\textsuperscript{435} It is not entirely clear to what degree the bequest for the chapel of the Crucifix was intertwined with the testamentary legacy discussed above. This bequest to the sacristy of the cathedral had consisted of one sixth of Casini’s fortune, amounting to 400 florins.

\textsuperscript{434} ANICHINI 1751-1752, fols. 43v-44r.

\textsuperscript{435} ‘Questo beneficiato ex fundatione parebbe obbligato alla celebrazione quotidiana, tuttavia trovasi, che fino dalla visita appostoli-
ca applicava due sole messe la settimana, ed il medesimo monsignor Bossio gli fisse i giorni, che furono il martedì, e venerdì come può vedersi al fascio visitate A da monsignor Turamini in quella del 1637, si dice, che avesse l’obbligo anche di far la festa di Sancta Croce il 3. di Maggio’; ANICHINI 1751-1752, fol. 44r.
It is clear that rather a lot of paperwork regarding the chapel has gone missing.

So we now know that Antonio Casini had provided not only for a lamp to burn and memorial masses to be said at the main altar, but that he had also endowed a chapel of his own, dedicated to the Crucifix.436 Prior to the sixteenth-century transformations of the cathedral, this chapel was situated in the posterior part of the church. Generally, altars of the Crucifix had a central position in the church, often erected against the choir-screen and serving

436 The chances that Casini had a further stake in the main altar are slim, and it is even less likely that he saw to the realisation of a main altarpiece. Though much could have changed in the meantime, the altar was devoid of an image in 1576, see Appendix 1, doc. f. 6.
as the layman's altar. This may have been the case in Grosseto Cathedral before the sixteenth-century transformations. Alternatively, it may have been positioned to one of the sides of the main altar, at the Epistle-side, opposite the chapel of the Annunciation. In Siena Cathedral too, we saw that the altar of the Crucifix was located to the side, in the southern transept (fig. 2 nr. 13). The appearance of the primitive cathedral corresponded in the width of the aisles to the present one and was presumably just as long. It did not have the transept at this point, and had an irregular, polygonal apse (fig. 66).

Once the transept had been constructed, the altar of the Crucifix was re-instituted in the south arm of the transept (fig. 67). The present chapel of the Crucifix is the result of nineteenth-century transformations. In that century it was known as the chapel of the Holy Sacrament. Around 1860 the marble balustrade and niche were made by Domenico Iardella from Lucca, in explicit imitation of Antonio di Ser Ghino’s 1474 niche for Matteo di Giovanni’s Assumption or Madonna delle Grazie, which had been moved in the same year to the opposite transept chapel (figs. 68, 69). His Neo-Renaissance style, as other antiquicising styles in the cathedral at this time, seems at first glance misleadingly authentic.

Given the desolate state of fifteenth-century Grosseto outlined above, it comes as no surprise that it was an ‘imported’ foreigner who started on a personal decoration campaign, for the simple reason that the much-plagued citizens of Grosseto did not have the surplus of time and money to embark on such a project. Similarly, no artisans from Grosseto could be hired, but all had to come from the much more prosperous Siena. The only remnant of early fifteenth-century decoration still preserved in Grosseto, Sassetta’s Madonna delle Ciliegie, should almost inevitably be linked to the presence of Antonio Casini as probably the one noticeable foreign official who was, furthermore, familiar with the painter. The city itself had only bounced back sufficiently in the sixteenth century, as only then was the cathedral seriously rebuilt. It cannot have been by accident that another, late fifteenth-century burst of decorative activities in the cathedral was related to the drive of another foreigner, this time an operaio of the cathedral works, Salvatore di Lemmo, who came from Castellamare (Naples). From Bossio’s visit it now appears that the Assumption of the Virgin by Matteo di Giovanni was actually intended from the outset to be framed by Antonio di Ser Ghino’s marble niche of 1474 (which features the arms of Giovanni Agazzarri (bishop of Grosseto 1452-1458)), inserted in the back wall of the chapel of the Assumption. This was a semicircular niche projecting outside the perimeter of the church wall in the first bay to the left of the church. The altarpiece and its tabernacle were probably set up behind a free-standing altar-block (‘icona que est post altare in muro condita’) (Appendix 1, doc. F.9) (fig. 66 nr. 4). In the bay at the opposite side of the church could be found Salvatore di Lemmo’s extraordinary

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440 Since the publication of Anichini’s manuscript, it is clear that its altar was originally situated in the first bay of the northern aisle, prior to its relocation in 1614 to the opposite bay in the southern aisle. It is now in the northern side chapel, for the second time inserted in Antonio di Ser Ghino’s marble tabernacle, though much cut down. This marble niche originally fitted it like a glove, judging by Bossio’s description. The populace of Grosseto already held the Madonna of the Assumption in the sixteenth century (it was also known as Madonna delle Grazie) in deep veneration, affixing ex-votos next to it. Its location must have been similar to that of the chapel of Santa Maria delle Grazie in the Sienese cathedral, where the Madonna del Voto was also positioned behind the altar, in the recess of the deep chapel, see figs. 1, 12. I thank Ludwin Paardekooper for sharing with me his thoughts on Matteo di Giovanni’s pola, thoughts which he will discuss at length in his forthcoming dissertation. On the fragmentary Madonna and the marble niche of 1474 by Antonio di Ser Ghino which originally contained it, see: PAARDEKOOPER 2002, p. 28, appendice nr. 11, fig. 22; BURICCHI 1998, pp. 57-58; F. Fumi Cambi Gado, ‘Opere d’arte del secolo xv nella Cattedrale di Grosseto’, in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 46-49, 53-56; ANICHINI 1751-2, fols. 557-56r, transcription by S. Buetti in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI, p. 98; TRIMPI 1985, pp. 144-146, with the now untenable theory that Matteo designed his Madonna to fit the present format.
70 Vecchietta (attrib.), Monumental Crucifix, late 1430s, polychromed wood, southern transept, cathedral, Grosseto.
baptism font of 1470, also sculpted by Antonio di Ser Ghino (fig. 66 nr. 5). The glass windows with theological virtues, prophets and saints, possibly by Benvenuto di Giovanni around 1470-1475, are suspiciously close in date to the two documented projects of Salvatore di Lemmo.\textsuperscript{441}

Now that we have recovered documents that reveal that Antonio Casini instituted such a chapel, we can see that the Madonna delle Ciliegie must have been intended for the chapel of the Crucifix. It is now time to establish, as far as possible, how the cardinal decorated his chapel at Grosseto Cathedral. Unfortunately, no descriptions survive of the chapel prior to the sixteenth-century transformations, as Bossio visited the cathedral only after the demolition of the original chapel. Undoubtedly, the chapel boasted a substantial crucifix, which as a matter of fact the present chapel still does (figs. 68, 70). It has been suggested, without documentary evidence, that Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, Casini’s successor on the bishop’s see of Grosseto (1439-1444), donated this large wooden sculpted crucifix (fig. 70). Fumi Cambi Gado accepted this unfounded supposition, but dated it to the 1460s or 1470s and attributed it to Vecchietta.\textsuperscript{442} With the new perspective afforded by the patronage of Antonio Casini over the chapel of the Crucifix, of which she was unaware, we may now explore the possibility that Antonio Casini donated the crucifix or, alternatively, that the sculpture may have been delivered after Casini’s death under the episcopate of Cesarini.\textsuperscript{443} This hypothesis does entail a reconsideration of the style and date of the crucifix.

A discussion of the original location, authorship and chronology of the crucifix is relevant both to the iconographic link between the crucifix and Sassetta’s altarpiece for the chapel, and to the relationships between the patron, the sculptor and the painter involved. The decoration of the chapel appears to have consisted of a combination of a crucifix by Vecchietta and an altarpiece by Sassetta. We shall start by reviewing the period in which, on stylistic grounds, the crucifix may have been executed. Vecchietta was inscribed in the Sienese painters’ guild in 1428, but appears to have been absent from the city until 1439, perfecting his art, and growing in independence, in the workshop of Masolino. On his return to Siena he was employed by the cathedral works to polychrome a sculpture group of the Annunciation.\textsuperscript{444} Vecchietta’s activity as a sculptor can thus be documented from quite early in

\textsuperscript{442} F. Fumi Cambi Gado, ‘Opere d’arte del secolo xv nella Cattedrale di Grosseto’, pp. 45-46, and A. Mazzolai, ‘Una Cattedrale per la città’, p. 27 (as Florentine school), both in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 45-47. Fumi Cambi Gado quotes A. Mazzolai, Maremma, Storia e Arte, 1967, p. 101, for the suggestion of Cesarini’s patronage. Another crucifix is preserved in the cathedral. Given that it seems to have been produced in a late Gothic context at the very beginning of the century, it is probably unrelated to the chapel of the Crucifix, while its size (a height of 65 cm) seems inadequate for a dedication of an entire chapel to the Crucifix. See note 430 above.
\textsuperscript{443} F. Fumi Cambi Gado, ‘Opere d’arte del secolo xv nella Cattedrale di Grosseto’, in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, pp. 45, 56 note 2, remarks that no records seem to survive of eventual commissions by Casini for the Duomo, but she fails to notice Anichini’s record of the chapel of the Crucifix for the cardinal of San Marcello (transcribed in the same volume), as she is unaware that Antonio Casini and the cardinal were one and the same person.
\textsuperscript{444} MILANESI 1854, vol. ii, p. 366; VIGNI 1937, pp. 11, 18, 59 note 6; C. Strehlke, in CHRISTIANSEN, KANTER & STREHLKE 1988, pp. 258-259, erroneously takes the 1439 document to refer to a sculpture.
his career, which immediately involved prestigious commissions: the Annunciation in 1442, followed by a wooden Salvator, both carved and polychromed by the artist ("intagliatura et dipentura") and intended for the main altar of the Sienese cathedral. A sensitivity to Donatello’s strong expression of the inner stirrings and the spatial development of figures originated early in Vecchietta’s career. This may have been prompted by Donatello’s collaboration on the Sienese baptism font at the end of the 1420s or, alternatively, by the travels of the Sienese artist who, as a member of Masolino’s workshop, could have encountered the Florentine sculptor when the latter visited Rome during the years 1430-1433. This dramatic feeling is pronouncedly present in Vecchietta’s Pietà, datable between 1445 and 1448 (fig. 36). The Grosseto Crucifix could therefore be related to this early work, instead of to the more agitated bronze Salvator of 1476, as Fumi Cambi Gado proposed. Christ’s exasperation is expressed in both sculptures through the open mouth, half-closed eyes and swollen veins that Vecchietta would emphasise far more in the late Salvator. Stylistic idiosyncrasies also correspond in the two Christ-figures, such as the low implant of the parted hair and the meagre chest with the rectilinear ribs, narrowing towards the breastbone, looking much like the rushed seat of a chair.

Though no other sculpted crucifix by Vecchietta is documented, he was experienced in the subject through the medium of fresco painting. The execution of the nervous, narrow wrinkles of the drapery of the perizoma adhering to the body is like a first attempt when compared with the pliable, light fabric suggested for the Salvator perizoma, as is the quite unyielding posture of the body. Vecchietta and his workshop had painted a Crucifixion in the hospital sacristy in 1441 before they embarked on the cycle of the Creed and on the decoration of the Reliquary in the same room. In this fresco, the body of the Crucified has a straight, upright contour, without any gross curves deviating from the shape of the cross, just as the sculpted Grosseto Crucifix. Vecchietta represented the theme for a second time in the chapel of Saint Martin in the palace of Cardinal Branda Castiglione at Castiglione Olna in the latter half of the 1430s. Of the fresco only the torso of the Crucified remains, displaying a great vigour in the bony anatomy, with the peculiar ribs now heightened in white and with a mouth distorted in pain.
These comparisons make a date in the late 1430s, before even the Pietà, feasible for the expressive Grosseto Crucifix.

Antonio Casini must have met Vecchietta in Siena, during his Sienese episcopate or, alternatively, the young talented artist could have been presented to Casini by his fellow-cardinal, Branda Castiglione, in Rome. Both cardinals were patrons of Masaccio and Masolino. Shortly after Casini’s Santa Maria the back wall, should be dated considerably later, perhaps even to the 1460s. Stylistic arguments apart (especially the disposition of figures is inconceivable for the 1430s), Vecchietta’s representation of a male and female donor is compulsive evidence for Van Os’ hypothesis that those frescos were commissioned by the cardinal’s heirs after the latter’s death in 1443. The tapestries covering the lateral walls during Pizzolpasso’s visit in 1431 would have served much longer, being anyhow far more prestigious and desirable than frescos. Van Os’ thesis has been rejected with little attention to his arguments by e.g. Joannis 1993, p. 248; C. Strehlke in Christiansen, Kanter & Strehlke 1988, pp. 258-259; Natali 1984, p. 12 note 17.
Maggiore altarpiece, Branda Castiglione commissioned Masolino to fresco the chapel of Saint Catherine in the church of San Clemente in Rome (1429-1431), followed by the invitation to decorate the Collegiata and the palace of Castiglione Olona in the cardinal’s hometown near Milan. Vecchietta may already have been employed in Masolino’s workshop in Rome. Vecchietta certainly travelled in the years preceding his return in Siena. He could have worked on the crucifix elsewhere and had it transported to Grosseto upon completion. In this case Casini could thus be tentatively identified as a patron of Vecchietta too.

Another part of the decoration for Casini’s chapel was finished earlier: Sassetta’s Madonna delle Ciliegie. The panel shows the Madonna, wearing a blue mantle over her head, with a once gilded and glazed, but now tarnished, vermilion dress underneath, sitting on a throne with projecting arms (plate 451 BERTELLI 1994, pp. 58-596; JOANNIDES 1993, pp. 199, 403).
XV). With her right hand she holds the Christ Child upright on a brocaded cushion on her right knee, looking staringly at him and proffering a handful of cherries. The Child, holding the hems of his mother’s mantle clasped together in front of her breast, has just put a cherry in his mouth, as he is holding its stalk to detach it. The rather crude delineation of the hair of the infant, of the transparent veil that his mother draws over his back compares well to the broad technique of the San Martino Crucifix of 1433, to the coarsely undulated hair of the grieving Saint John for example (figs. 71a, 71b). Another idiosyncrasy of the Sassetta of these years, the missing fingers of the foreshortened hands of the mourning Virgin of the San Martino Crucifix, also occurs in the left hand of the Grosseto Madonna, which holds the cherries. The hand appears to have four fingers only. Another experiment with this kind of foreshortening is the tilting of the disks of the Madonna’s irises in her slanted eyes. The halos of the Grosseto Madonna and Child do not yet have the rays that Sasseta starts to employ from the time of the Cortona triptych onwards. The Madonna delle Ciliegie should therefore be dated to 1433 or shortly after. The Cortona altarpiece of around 1434 already marks a return to a greater delicacy.452 The similarity of the throne with the seat of honour of the Madonna della Neve is obvious, with its high structure and projecting arms covered by a red velvet cloth, achieved by glazing a lake over metal leaf. As the solution for the throne in the Madonna delle Ciliegie is much simpler than the pavon-cloth covered structure with the angelic attendants of the Madonna della Neve of 1432, the Grosseto panel is likely to be a derivative and thus posterior to it.

The Madonna is a fragment of the central panel of an altarpiece, cut down along all its four sides. The figures are set beneath a perfect round arch, lined with punches in the shape of a gothic trilobate arch, finished off with a small trefoiled punch. Along this arch, the lipped edge of the paint layer has been preserved, where the engaged frame is now missing. By completing the semicircle, one can calculate the loss of 5.5 cm to the left, 3.5 cm to the right of the panel and 5.0 cm at the top, arriving at an original width of the painted surface of around 79.5 cm. The centre of the arch is positioned in the Stella maris on the Madonna’s right shoulder. It is unlikely that the original altarpiece had a rectangular format such as the Madonna della Neve – its structure is different and has none of the exceptional heavy double panelling of the altarpiece for the Sienese cathedral. At the back of the panel of the Grosseto Madonna, traces of a horizontal batten circa 8 cm thick can be found (fig. 72). The rough wood of this panel has been dubbed to attain an acceptable level for the batten. Four nails, hammered in from the front, are still visible. This batten would have fastened the central panel to lateral panels of what therefore would originally have been a triptych or polyptych.453 Dowel marks are

452 On the date of the Cortona altarpiece, see ISRAELS 2003.
453 I am very grateful to Maria Grazia Celuzza, who enabled my examination of the panel in a depot when it was awaiting its installation in the new museum at Grosseto. The central panel itself is composed of a large middle plank, with two smaller strips (4.8 cm wide at the left, 5.0 cm wide at the right, as seen from the back) added at the sides. The top of the batten would have been situated around 35 cm from the top of the present panel. Its thickness varies from 3.2 to 3.7 cm.
visible in both sides of the panel.\footnote{Two at the left: 13.7 cm from the top and 18 cm from the bottom and two at the right: 15.0 cm from the top and 20.9 cm from the bottom, all circa 0.15 cm.}

Its lateral panels appear to have been lost, notwithstanding Pope Hennessy who claimed that the \textit{Saint Nicholas} (now in the Louvre, Paris) and the \textit{Saint Anthony} (now in the Monte dei Paschi collection, Siena) were its lateral panels.\footnote{Ressort 1983, referring to a letter by Pope Hennessy; \textit{Pope Hennessy 1987}, p. 189; followed with hesitation by R. Bartalini, entry in \textit{Monte dei Paschi} 1988, p. 267.}

This is impossible, as neither the dowel marks, nor the width of the batten, correspond.\footnote{The interstice between the upper dowel holes of the lateral altarpiece panels is circa 50 cm, whereas this interstice measures circa 64.5 cm in the case of the Grosseto Madonna. The batten of the \textit{Saint Anthony} and the \textit{Saint Nicholas} was approximately 6 cm in width, whereas the batten of the Grosseto Madonna was approximately 8 cm in width.}

The Grosseto Madonna seems to have formed part of a triptych or polyptych with a central panel with a semicircular top, just as the altarpiece in Cortona.

Given the fact that Sassetta's fragmentary Grosseto altarpiece can be dated during Casini's tenure, and given Casini's particular efforts for the chapel of the Crucifix and his previous contact with Sassetta during the execution of the Madonna della Neve, the conclusion that he commissioned the Madonna delle Ciliegie altarpiece and that he intended it to go over his altar seems a natural one. The combination of a fully fledged triptych or polyptych with a monumental sculpted crucifix, need not be of any surprise. The outfit of the chapel of San Jacomo Interciso in the Sienese cathedral, for example, consisted of a marble statue of the Virgin and Child on top of the altar and a three-dimensional crucifix above it.\footnote{\textit{Ass, Opera} Metropolitanana 30, fol. 19r (31st December 1435): 'La capella di Santo Jacomo Interciso l'altare con una Nostra Donna di marmo col suo figliuolo in collo rilevata messa a oro con uno crocifisso rilevato da capo...'. The same configuration appears in the earlier inventories of 1420 and 1423.}

The Bellanti altar of the Crucifix in the church of San Domenico in Siena in 1575 showed an altarpiece with various saints surmounted by a sculpted crucifix and flanked by yet another Marian image.\footnote{\textit{Rossio} 1575, as transcribed in \textit{Kirchen} 1992, vol. 2 I.2, p. 910 doc. nr. 169 [14]: 'iconam vero cum figuris variiorum Sanctorum in tabulis depictis, et desuper Crucifixum opere elevato... et a sinistro latere aderat imago Beate Mariae Virginis ...'. See also I. Bähr, in \textit{Ibidem}, p. 768 nr. 73. The altar is documented from 1358.}

In Grosseto itself a similar arrangement, possibly an echo of the Casini Chapel, could be found in the convent church of San Francesco, where...
Bossio describes, to the left of the main altar, a chapel of the Crucifix with an altarpiece surmounted by the image (in an unspecified form) of the crucifix. There is thus strong evidence that both Sassetta’s altarpiece and a crucifix attributable to the young Vecchietta were designed for Casini’s chapel in Grosseto. This also means that the two artists may have had the opportunity to collaborate or tune their ideas to each other. A sign of the professional friendship that must have existed between the artists is also provided by the fact that in 1452, Sassetta’s heirs chose Vecchietta to establish the price of Sassetta’s work on the fresco on the Porta Romana that had been truncated by Sassetta’s death. It is remarkable that Casini displayed an interest in coupling the sculptural and pictorial arts in his chapels, both in Siena and in Grosseto.

There is another, iconographical indication that Sassetta’s Madonna delle Ciliegie altarpiece originally adorned Casini’s chapel of the Crucifix, apart from the familiarity of the patron of the chapel of the Crucifix and the painter. The cherries held by the Christ child of Sassetta’s Madonna delle Ciliegie may actually be a reference to the title of the altar of the Crucifix. Carli saw the influence of Masaccio’s Pisa altarpiece in the motif of the cherry-eating Child. But in fact, Masaccio’s Child holds a bunch of grapes and suckles his other hand. Sassetta’s Christ child has picked a cherry out of the hand of his mother, holding with his left hand its stalk and waiting for the cherry itself to come off in his mouth. This is an invention pictorially and iconographically unrelated to Sassetta’s Florentine contemporary. As the first tree to flower in spring, the cherry can be a reference to the Annunciation and the Incarnation, heralding the start of Redemption of mankind. Cherries are also taken to symbolise the heavenly fruit that Christ brought mankind and they therefore express the hope of Salvation. Due to the colour of its juice, this fruit was taken to suggest the blood of Christ, spilt at the cross. As such, the cherry was often used in paintings with a eucharistie context. Sassetta is the first painter who makes his Christ Child eat the cherry. By consuming the fruit that points to his Passion and to future Salvation, the Child turns the cherry from symbol into action and the story of Salvation is set in motion. Mary offers the cherries to the Child with melancholy and thereby makes explicit her contribution to Salvation. Christ’s actual sacrifice must have hovered over the altarpiece in the form of Vecchietta’s crucifix. The now-lost parts of the altarpiece, such as a predella or a central pinnacle, may of course have been used to express the title of the altar even more explicitly. One can only guess at the identity of the lateral saints. That the altar, from the outset, had a link...
to the Virgin too, might be confirmed by the affiliation of the confraternity of the Santissima Vergine del Suffraggio with the altar that started in 1741.\footnote{465 ANICCHINI 1751-1752, fol. 46r; partial transcription by S. Buelti, in GNONI, MAVARELLI & MARTINI 1996, p. 95.}

On top of the historical, social and iconographical indications, the shape of the throne of the Madonna delle Ciliegie can be adduced to suggest that Casini may have wanted to imitate part of the success of the Madonna della Neve, the altarpiece that he had been involved with in an advisory role in the period 1423-1432, immediately predating his own Grosseto commission to Sassetta. This analogy consolidates the connections between Sassetta's Madonna delle Ciliegie altarpiece of around 1433, Antonio Casini and his chapel of the Crucifix in Grosseto Cathedral.