

A Private Chapel as Burial Space:  
Filippo Strozzi with Filippino Lippi and Benedetto  
da Maiano in Santa Maria Novella, Florence

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### Introduction

Chapel decoration as burial space in Renaissance Florence had two distinct tendencies, apparently opposing but not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the one hand, there was a growing demand for spatial coherence in religious buildings, especially in churches newly built in the Renaissance style, such as San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito. Chapels in these churches indeed generally entailed commissioning a few choice objects, such as an altarpiece or a painted window, and the funeral monuments were rather modest, comprised in many cases only of simple tomb-slabs.<sup>1</sup> Chapels with a greater degree of spatial independence, on the other hand, permitted the patrons to develop highly personalized burial settings. One such example is the Sagrestia Vecchia in San Lorenzo, where Cosimo de' Medici had a sarcophagus installed under the table at the center of the space as a funeral monument for his parents. In traditional gothic churches, too, family cha-

1. See for example E. Capretti, "La cappella e l'altare: evoluzione di un rapporto," in C. Acidini Luchinat ed., *La chiesa e il convento di Santo Spirito a Firenze* (Florence, 1996), 229-238.

pels, especially those in transepts, were decorated with lesser regard for the cohesion and unity of the church structures, and often involved sumptuous funeral monuments. In this latter context, murals with traditional narrative scenes continued to maintain prominence. Filippo Strozzi's chapel in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 1) typologically belonged to this category, which included some other important examples from the same period, such as the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita (See Fig. 5).

Filippo Strozzi's chapel was undoubtedly one of the most lavishly decorated burial spaces in Florence around 1500. Situated on the right of the chancel on a square plan, the chapel opened towards the transept. Although already in possession of another site in the west nave, where his first wife Fiammetta Adimari and other relatives were buried, Filippo di Matteo Strozzi acquired the chapel's *jus patronatus* from the Boni family on July 3, 1486 to assure an honorable burial space for him and his family members. He continued to maintain the old site, but began to design tombs for himself and his descendants in the newly acquired chapel.<sup>2</sup> The main funeral monument under the lancet window consists of a black marble sarcophagus for Filippo himself, and a white marble *tondo* featuring the Virgin and Child flanked by four angels (Fig. 2). The tomb for the descendants, marked by a *lastra tombale*, is placed on the pavement, between the main funerary monument and the freestanding altar in front. These tombs, along with the altar and decorative pavement, were commissioned from Benedetto da Maiano, while the fresco paintings depicting the life of St. Philip the Apostle, the patron's namesake, and of St. John the Evangelist, to whom the chapel was dedicated, was carried out by Filippino Lippi, another important Florentine artist. Lippi also provided designs for the stained glass window representing the Virgin and Child and the above-mentioned saints. In addition, the chapel was equipped with some objects which are no longer traceable, such as wooden benches (probably also of

2. Many of the documents relating to the chapel's decoration are published in E. Borsook, "Documents for Filippo Strozzi's Chapel in Santa Maria Novella and Other Related Papers: I-II," *The Burlington Magazine* 112 (1970): 737-746 and 800-804. See also *ead.*, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany from Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1980), 122-127. For the chapel's decoration in general, J. R. Sale, *Filippino Lippi's Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella* (New York, 1979).

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Fig. 1 Benedetto da Maiano and Filippino Lippi, Chapel of Filippo Strozzi. Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Lippi's design), an altar-frontal, and other equipment.<sup>3</sup>

Although the chapel's setting as a burial site clearly dictates that its ornaments reflect Strozzi's wish for his soul's salvation, scholarly opinions have differed greatly in the interpretation of iconographic details. There is yet no consensus, for example, on how the abbreviated inscriptions are to be deciphered.<sup>4</sup> Deliberation on the chapel's overarching iconographic program was also based on an assumption that the patron supplied such a program. This issue calls for careful re-examination, especially since the decorations were actually completed only in 1503, more than a decade after Strozzi's death. This paper thus suggests a different avenue of inquiry — one that focuses on the patron's initial intentions and the process of the chapel's design, rather than on its final appearance. To meet this end, the general plan of the chapel and the funeral monument will be the center of the discussion, although some parts of the fresco paintings will be examined as well. An in-depth examination of the patron's role, social standing, and familiarity with exemplary funeral monuments should reveal important and long-overlooked aspects of this space.

### Process of decoration

The frescoes by Filippino Lippi, especially those on the window wall, have received a great deal of scholarly attention for their unique expressive quality. Mysterious elements are scattered across the pictorial surface, in-

3. For the fresco paintings by Lippi, see P. Zambrano and J. K. Nelson, *Filippino Lippi* (Milan, 2004), 513-555; for the stained glass, G. Marchini, "Un restauro," *Antichità viva* 12, no. 5 (1973): 3-6, and my recently published *La vetrata nella Toscana del Quattrocento* (Florence: Olschki, 2011), ch. IV.11; for the design of the lost wooden benches, A. Cecchi, "Filippino disegnatore per le arti applicate," in E. Cropper ed., *Florentine Drawing at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, (Florence, 1994): 55-61, esp. 59-61. For the sculptural works, D. Carl, *Benedetto da Maiano: A Florentine Sculptor at the Threshold of the High Renaissance*, (Turnhout, 2006): 314-324. I follow these studies in the analysis of the working process unless specifically noted.

4. For the iconographic program in relation to the function of the chapel as burial space, in addition to the studies cited in the precedent notes, see especially E. Winternitz, "Muses and Music in a Burial Chapel: An Interpretation of Filippino Lippi's Window Wall in the Cappella Strozzi," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 11 (1965): 263-286; D. Friedman, "The Burial Chapel of Filippo Strozzi in Santa Maria Novella in Florence," *L'Arte* 9 (1970): 109-131. For the interpretation of the inscriptions, see for example L. Müller Profumo, "Per la fortuna di Ermete Trismegisto nel Rinascimento: Filippino Lippi e la cappella Strozzi," *Athenaeum* 58, nos. 3-4 (1980): 429-453.

Fig. 2 Benedetto da Maiano,  
Funerary monument for Filippo  
Strozzi. Chapel of Filippo  
Strozzi, Santa Maria Novella,  
Florence

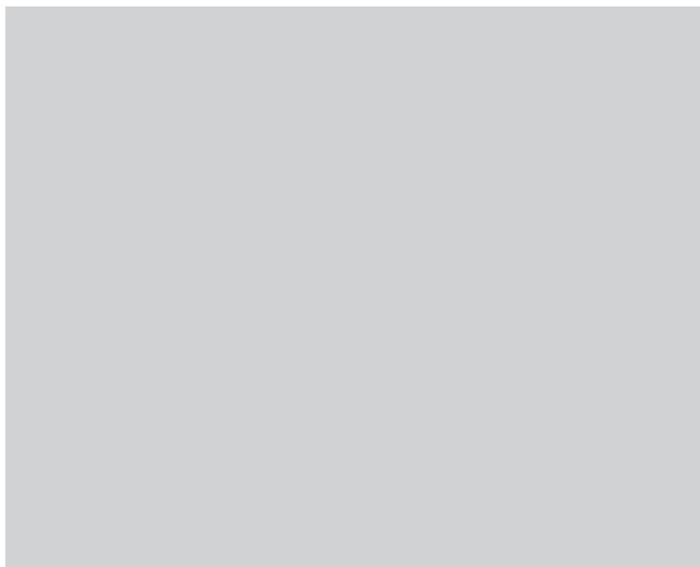
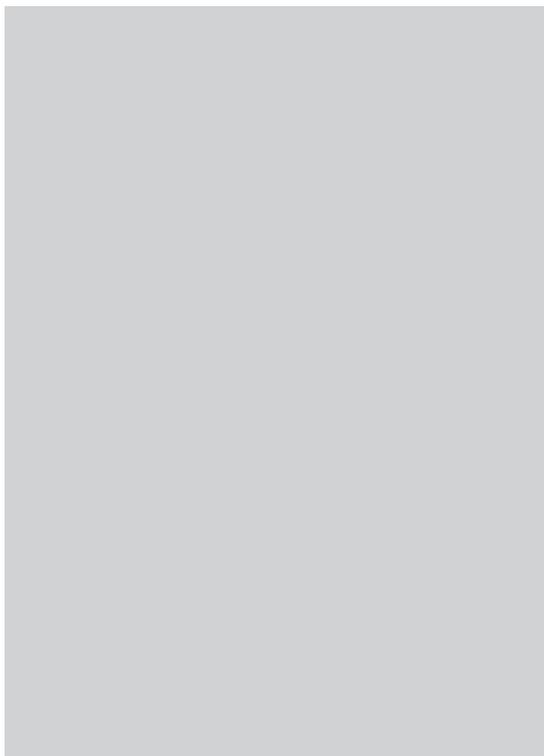


Fig. 3 Arch of  
Constantine.  
Rome

cluding inscriptions quoting ambiguous sources, and obscure personifications. Recurring grotesque elements, as well as the general composition, markedly demonstrates Lippi's antiquarianism and deep knowledge of Roman relics. Entering the chapel, two gigantic classical columns meet the eye. On each stands a winged figure, while the tall plinths are occupied by the allegorical figures of Faith and Charity in high relief. A brief examination of these frescoes, however, suggests that the ideas the patron might have had at the inception of the project may not necessarily be reflected in the fresco paintings we see today.

Many elements in Lippi's frescoes clearly derive from Roman triumphal arches, especially that of Constantine (Fig. 3), with freestanding columns, statues of Dacian prisoners above, and reliefs on the square plinths. It is worth noting that, in appropriating the structure of the Roman monument for his fresco, Lippi substituted the main archway with the Gothic lancet window. Moreover, in the Roman arch, the personifications of victory are sculptured in the spandrel above the main arch, whereas in the Florentine chapel Lippi painted similar figures in the lower part, above the arched niche containing Strozzi's funeral monument. It is clear that Lippi here did not simply imitate or replicate the antique monument, but reconstructed its classical imagery according to a newly devised program. His choice of imagery suggests an altogether different type of triumph, dictated by the specific setting.

We know, however, that when the contract for the fresco was signed on 21 April 1487, the subjects were still to be settled. It prescribed that Lippi should represent on the vault "four figures of Church Doctors or Evangelists or others, based on the selection of the said Strozzi [...]. And on every face of it [the chapel] should have two stories, as they will be given him by the said Filippo Strozzi." And finally, "on the face of the window, and pilasters and the arch of the chapel, inside and outside, and on the arms [Filippino] must embellish as will be ordered to him by the said Filippo [Strozzi]."<sup>5</sup> Strozzi had still to consolidate the decorative program and

5. Zambrano/Nelson, *cit.*, 621-622, doc. 12. The original phrase is as follows: "Nel cielo abbia a essere quatro figure o dottori o vangeliste o altri, a elezione del detto Strozzi [...]. E da ogni facc(i)a d'essa anno a essere dua storie, secondo che dal detto Filippo Strozzi li saranno date [...]; e dalla facc(i)a della finestra, e pilastri e archo della chappella, dentro e di fuori, e arme, debba adornare

wished to reserve his right to control its content at a later date. The same contract set the deadline to 1 March 1490, but shortly afterward, probably in September 1488, Lippi left for Rome to work on the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva. By the time of his departure, Lippi had made little or no progress on the Strozzi Chapel. He occasionally returned to Florence and might have set to work and painted the vault, but much of the walls remained untouched until the completion of his work in Rome in 1493.

Filippino Lippi's unprecedented use of ancient motifs in the Strozzi Chapel must be viewed as a reflection of his studies in Rome. It is true that the classical Roman monuments were well known to Florentine artists. Sandro Botticelli, Filippino's master, had reproduced the arch of Constantine in the Sistine Chapel (Fig. 4). Domenico Ghirlandaio, one of the most sought-after artists of his era, was filling up Florentine churches with representations of similar monuments. However, their use of antiquities, when not simply ornamental, largely served to suggest historical backgrounds for ancient mythology and history. Thus, for example, Ghirlandaio created the setting for the dawn of the Christian era in the Nativity panel of Santa Trinita (Fig. 5). Similarly, despite its apparent anachronism, Botticelli's arch helped the viewers recognize the chronological remoteness of Moses' life. Filippino's use of antiquity, in contrast, was independent from historical or archeological context. They did not supplement ancient scenes as props, but rather comprised Lippi's own artistic language, which realized the unique Christian imagery in the chapel.

It is hardly probable that the patron who died in 1491 could have made substantial contributions to Lippi's ingenious classical style. Strozzi certainly had some antiquarian interests of his own, as revealed by the limited parchment edition of Pliny's *Natural History* in his possession.<sup>6</sup> But to be in possession of such an object was nothing unusual for a member of the Florentine elite. Rather than an item of a serious collector, Strozzi's printed Pliny, as a matter of fact, was a by-product of his business enterprise, which sold mass-produced copies of the same text in a less prestigious paper edi-

*secondo che dal detto Filippo li sarà ordinato.*"

6. On this illuminated book now at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, see J. Alexander ed., *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550* (Munich, 1994), 174-176.

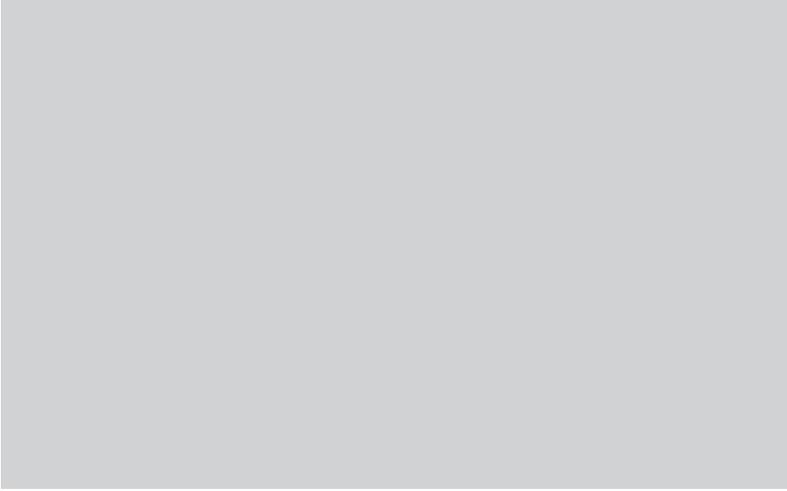


Fig. 4 Sandro Botticelli, *Punishment of Korah, and the Stoning of Moses and Aaron*. Sistine Chapel, Rome

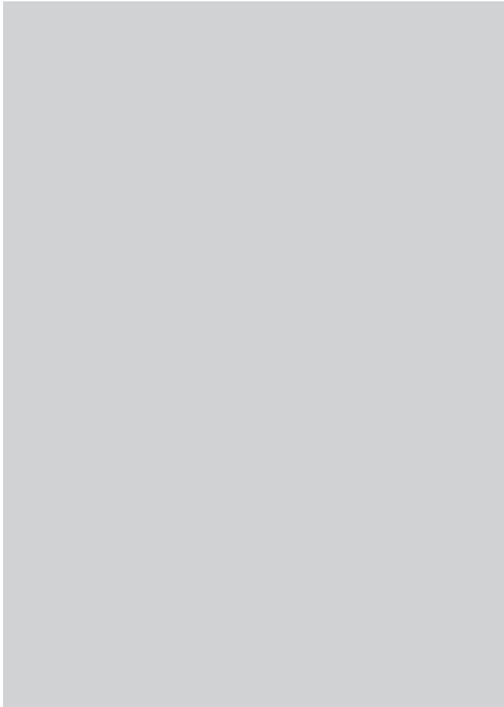


Fig. 5 Domenico Ghirlandaio, Sassetti Chapel. Santa Trinita, Florence

tion. Having spent much of his youth in exile, Strozzi had received only a modest humanistic education,<sup>7</sup> and never indulged in ostentatious display of classicism. The altarpiece now in Lecceto, born from Strozzi's commission, attests to a rather traditional and reserved sensibility (Fig. 6). Even considering the fact that this altarpiece contained a renovated Duecento panel, its expressive mode hardly relates to that of the frescoes in Santa Maria Novella.<sup>8</sup> Nor do we find any trace of ostentatious antiquarianism in the so-called Strozzi Madonna, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, painted by Lippi in the 1480s (Fig. 7). The classical style in Santa Maria Novella was therefore innovative compared not only to works of contemporary artists, but also to works Strozzi had formerly commissioned, and we can securely assume Lippi's Roman experience acted as the catalyst.<sup>9</sup>

### General plan of the chapel

Although Filippo Strozzi had probably little to do with single ornamentations in the fresco paintings, he did express his thoughts on the chapel

7. For the state of recent studies on Filippo Strozzi and his family, see A. Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood and Family Solidarity in the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, 2000). For the understanding of Filippo's relationship with other Strozzi, I also owe much to H. Gregory, "The Return of the Native: Filippo Strozzi and Medicean Politics," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 1-21; F. Kent, "Più Superba de Quella de Lorenzo': Courtly and Family Interest in the Building of Filippo Strozzi's palace," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30 (1977), 311-323. For the basic information on the Strozzi lineage, P. Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane: Strozzi di Firenze* (Milan, 1839) is still useful. As primary source, Lorenzo Strozzi, *Vita di Filippo Strozzi il Vecchio* (Florence, 1851).

8. The central section of the Lecceto altarpiece contains a Duecento panel renovated at least twice, in Trecento (by Taddeo Gaddi?) and Quattrocento (by Neri di Bicci), while the side panels were newly realized in the 1480s by a painter in the circle of Biagio d'Antonio, to be identified probably with the Master of Marradi. See E. Borsook, "Documenti relativi alle cappelle di Lecceto e della Selve di Filippo Strozzi," *Antichità viva* 9, no. 3 (1970): 3-20, in which the author suggests the altarpiece's provenance from the nearby church of Le Selve. This opinion is shared by C. Hoener, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250-1500*, (Cambridge, 1995), 43-55, while denied by G. Romagnoli, *Selve e Lecceto: Due conventi a Lastra a Signa ed un grande mercante, Filippo Strozzi* (Florence, 2005), esp. 107-109. See also M. Gregori et al. eds., *Maestri e botteghe: pittura a Firenze alla fine del Quattrocento* (Florence, 1993), pp. 212-213; J. Burke, *Changing Patrons* (Pennsylvania, 2005), 101-118.

9. For the impact of his Roman experience on Lippi's art, see for example, N. Dacos, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance* (London, 1969), 69-72.

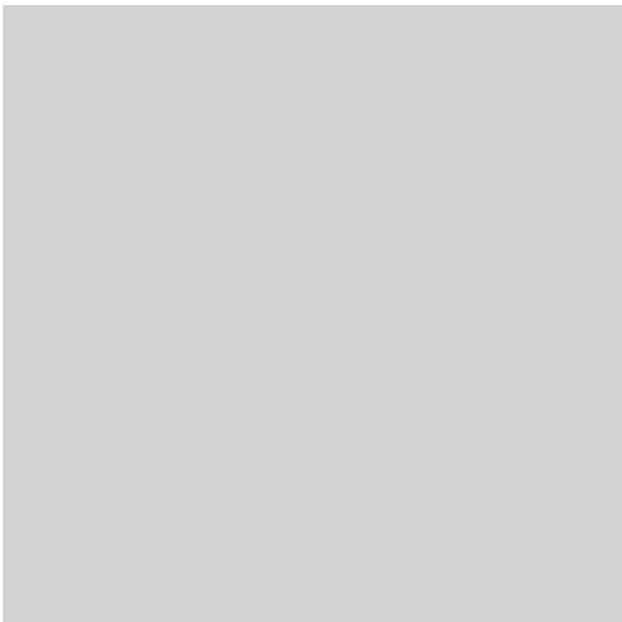


Fig. 6 Taddeo Gaddi (?), Neri di Bicci and the Master of Marradi, *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*. Santa Maria di Lecceto, Lastra a Signa

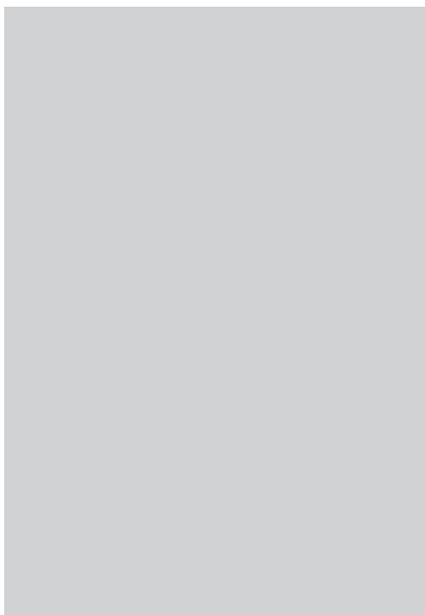


Fig. 7 Filippino Lippi, *Madonna with Child*.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

decoration however. When he wrote his will on 14 March 1491, he had already solidified the general plan of the chapel. This document prescribed that the chapel be equipped with:

[...] paintings on the vault and on the walls, and with pavement, glass window, altar, stepped platform, *prie-dieu*, and sepulcher for myself, [which is] to be placed under the glass window on the side behind the said altar, and as for the other sepulcher, that for my descendants [it is to be placed] on the floor, behind the said altar, at the foot of my said sepulcher [...]<sup>10</sup>

To understand what the patron wished to accomplish, it is useful to compare the chapel to other contemporary examples of the form. Here, I would like carefully to address the general arrangement of the chapel, rather than the individual elements: for this was in fact what the patron felt most compelled to specify in his testament.

One of the nearest contemporaries to Filippo Strozzi's chapel is that of Francesco Sassetti in Santa Trinita (Fig. 5).<sup>11</sup> First of all, both were side chapels in the transepts of gothic churches administered by religious orders, Santa Trinita by the Vallumbrosians and Santa Maria Novella by the Dominicans. In late Medieval Italy, these relatively new orders acquired great popularity, and their churches, particularly their chapels in transepts, were sought after as burial sites.<sup>12</sup> Side chapels in transepts, though honorable, permitted a more private use of the space than their counterparts in chancels where the main altar was typically located and which was thus the center of the religious activities for the friars' community. Therefore, in the Strozzi and Sassetti chapels, the donors could install standing tombs with sarcophagi, while such a privilege was not granted to families who

10. Zambrano/Nelson, *cit.*, 623, doc. 17: "[...] di dipinture nel cielo et nelle faccie, et di pavimento, finestra di vetro, altare, predelle et inginocchiatoi et sepoltura per me proprio, da mettersi sotto la finestra del vetro dal lato di drieto a detto altare, et dell'altra sepoltura, in terra drieto pure a detto altare a piè di detta mia sepoltura, per gli miei discendenti [...]"

11. On the Sassetti Chapel in general, E. Borsook and J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinita, Florence: History and Legend in a Renaissance Chapel* (Doornspijk, 1981).

12. See for example the recent contribution of M. Bacci, *Investimenti per l'aldilà: arte e raccomandazione dell'anima nel Medioevo* (Rome, 2003).

patronized chancels. The Tornabuoni installed an enormous double-sided altarpiece by Ghirlandaio in the chancel of Santa Maria Novella, but could only mark their tombs with simple tomb-slabs in the pavement, as did the Gianfigliuzzi in the chancel of Santa Trinita.

Filippo Strozzi was probably the only man who could regard himself a true rival to the Medici in Florence during the 1480s, at least in terms of wealth. As such, he could not have been indifferent to the highly acclaimed precedent set recently in Santa Trinita by Francesco Sassetti, ex-director of the Medici Bank. The latter's chapel had been decorated by Domenico Ghirlandaio, who, at the time when Strozzi was planning the decoration of his burial chapel, was engaged in the Tornabuoni Chapel, located next to Strozzi's in the same church. Strozzi surely considered Ghirlandaio as a candidate to entrust the new chapel to, and examined the artist's works carefully. We know that Strozzi indeed commissioned from the painter's workshop an altarpiece for the burial chapel of his younger brother Matteo in the church of Lecceto, delivered in 1488 (the central panel of its *predella*, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, is now at the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam).<sup>13</sup>

The circumstantial similarities in the Sassetti and Strozzi Chapels in turn help highlight the distinctiveness of Strozzi's project. First, let's focus on their treatment of funeral monuments, which were undoubtedly of central concern to the patrons. In both chapels, black marble sarcophagi were set in arched niches, but in a considerably different way. In the earlier Sassetti Chapel, two sarcophagi — one for the patron and the other for his wife — were installed in semicircular niches on the two sidewalls (Fig. 8). These niches were not set on the floor, but elevated, enabling an eye-level display. This solution, probably derived from antique *arcosolia*, was quite familiar to the Florentine merchant-banker class, including the Strozzi family.<sup>14</sup> Palla Strozzi, Filippo's most renowned relative, utilized the same formula some decades earlier for the tomb of his father Onofrio in the Sac-

13. On this altarpiece, now untraceable, see Borsook, "Documenti relativi ...," *cit.*, and other studies cited in note 8.

14. A. Butterfield, "Monument and Memory in Early Renaissance Florence," in G. Ciappelli and P. Rubin eds., *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge Mass., 2000): 135-160, esp. 152-157.

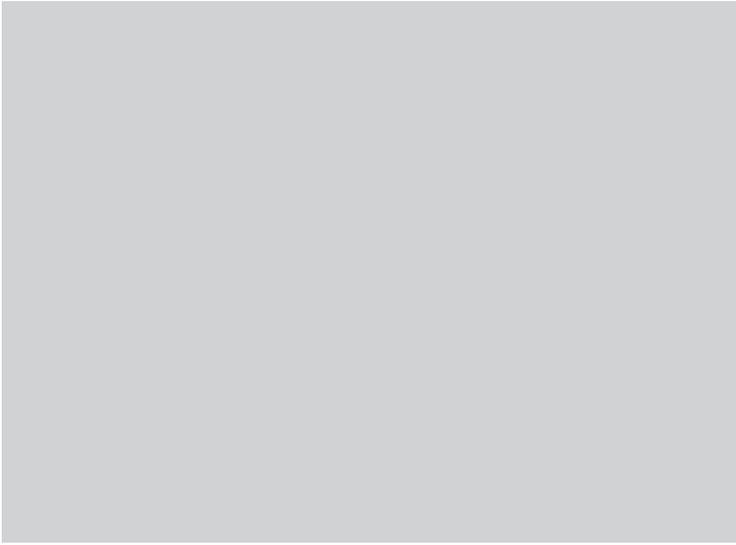


Fig. 8 Giuliano da Sangallo (?), Tomb of Francesco Sassetti. Santa Trinita, Florence

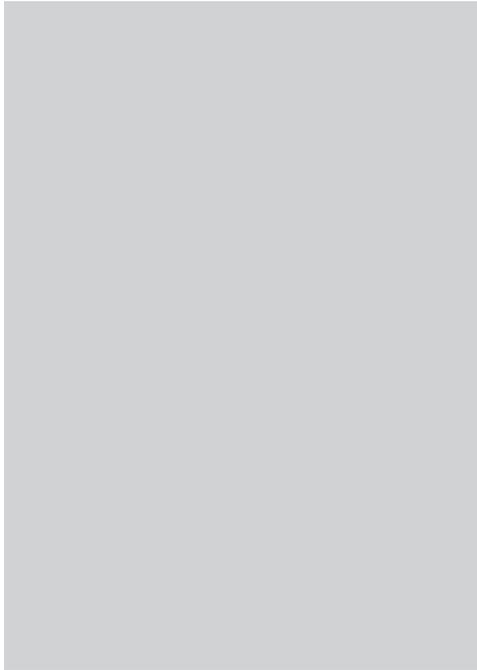


Fig. 9 Benedetto da Maiano, *Santa Fina Altar*. Collegiata, San Gimignano

risty of Santa Trinita. The niche for Filippo Strozzi's sarcophagus, on the other hand, although it approximated the form of other such Renaissance *arcosolia* examples in height, contained a rectangular space beneath the semi-circular arch. This sarcophagus is thus set directly on the floor, while the semi-circle above accommodated other sculptural elements, namely the Virgin and Child *tondo* and angels in relief.

The Strozzi monument in Santa Maria Novella differed from the Sassetti example not only in form but in placement as well. Most unusually, the niche containing the sarcophagus was positioned on the window wall — directly behind the chapel altar. The wall behind the altar was commonly considered an appropriate and recognizable resting place for the body of a saint in Renaissance Florence. Benedetto da Maiano, the sculptor Filippo Strozzi hired, was in fact more than familiar with this typology. In the Chapel of St. Fina in the Collegiata in San Gimignano, for which he worked between 1475-77, Benedetto had located the Saint's sarcophagus directly on top of the marble altarpiece-tabernacle (Fig. 9).<sup>15</sup> Reminiscent of the Strozzi monument, the Virgin and Child appear above, surrounded by cherubs in the shape of a *mandorla* and flanked by two winged angels. The entire structure is also set in an arched recess, which occupies the whole back wall of the chapel. A similar scheme was later adopted by Benedetto for the tomb-altarpiece of St. Bartolo in Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano. By contrast, the funeral monuments of the unsanctified, not only merchants like Sassetti but even those of noble or royal blood, were generally allocated on sidewalls, seen most notably in the chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte. Clearly, Florentine *decorum* dictated that the altar wall of a chapel remained free of tombs of the unsanctified.

The above mentioned will of Filippo Strozzi described precisely the allocation of the tombs. The unusual nature of his intentions is further proved by another particularity of the chapel, namely the absence of an altarpiece. Although the altarpiece was not a strict necessity for an altar from a liturgical viewpoint, it was extremely unusual that such a richly decorated chapel as Filippo Strozzi's should lack one. Since Filippo Strozzi made no

15. According to Carl, *cit.*, 161-164, despite the later reconstructions, the present state of the monument reflects basically the original structure.

reference to a retable in the long list of the chapel's furnishings in his will, this decision too was a part of his original plan.<sup>16</sup> Strozzi's sarcophagus is now also visible through the space under the altar, but this altar was most probably provided with a *paliotto* or altar-frontal, suspended on the front; Strozzi acquired one from a banner maker named Antonio di Cristofano in 1488.<sup>17</sup> Thus, if there were an ordinary painted retable, the funeral monument, especially the sarcophagus below, would have been almost entirely hidden from the sight of the visitors to the chapel. The absence of an altar-piece was therefore a necessity which stemmed from the location of the funeral monument, whose particularities were certainly recognized by Filippo Strozzi.

### Model for the patron

Although many chapel spaces were increasingly privatized during the Renaissance, Strozzi must have been aware of the *decorum* about the allocation of the tombs. The reason for this deviation was variously interpreted. Friedman sustains that the central position of the tomb intentionally focused the prayers to the sarcophagus, and consequently to the one buried there; in other words, Strozzi chose this burial space for its prominence, in spite of *decorum*. Russell Sale, in contrast, contends that Strozzi's sarcophagus set on the pavement behind the altar had a lesser degree of visibility than the sidewalls, and therefore this location is a reflection of his religious piety and modesty.<sup>18</sup>

To understand Strozzi's intent we need to examine more closely the models to which the patron could refer. Tombs for saints and *arcosolia*, as well as other prominent examples such as that for the Cardinal of Portugal, must have supplied some guidance, but as we have so far discussed,

16. The Pazzi Chapel in Santa Croce was one of the very few precedents, but we should recall that this example was designed in the Brunelleschian style, which excluded any significant multi-colored ornaments except the della Robbia terracottas and painted windows. Friedman, *cit.*, maintains that in the Strozzi Chapel the function of an altarpiece was assigned to the Virgin and Child relief in the upper half of the funeral monument. This thesis is not shared by Sale, *cit.*, 305-308, who regards the juxtaposition of the altar and the funeral monument coincidental.

17. Borsook, "Documents for...", *cit.*, 802, doc. 32; Sale, *cit.*, 302-308.

18. Friedman, *cit.*, esp. 110; Sale, *cit.*, 302-308.

none of these conventional examples could have convincingly encouraged Strozzi to adopt the singular arrangement of the funeral monument. Both Friedman and Sale indicate wall monuments in Venice such as the one for Niccolò Marcello in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, since Filippino Lippi might have been there while the chapel decoration progressed,<sup>19</sup> but they are rather a possible source for the painter and not for the patron. We should distinguish models for the donor from those for the artists. Here, I would like to point out one which concerned the donor in a very personal way. That is the original and much older Strozzi Chapel at the western end of the transept in the same church of Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 10).

Founded probably in the middle of the fourteenth century by heirs of Rosso de' Strozzi, Filippo's distant relative, this space was not an ordinary side chapel.<sup>20</sup> It was added much later to the church structure, as was the Rucellai Chapel on the opposite end of the transept, and was much larger than other family chapels in Santa Maria Novella. Like its Rucellai counterpart, the chapel is on axis directed to the crossing of the nave and the transept. It was also called the Strozzi of Mantua Chapel, after a branch stemmed from Rosso's descendants who settled in Mantua in the fourteenth century.

The old Strozzi Chapel is elevated from the church floor by approximately three meters, and accessed by two flights of stairs. In addition to the usual burial chamber under the chapel floor proper, the chapel has a peculiar sepulchral space beneath the stairs: a deep arched niche on the ground level of the church (Fig. 11). It is unclear who among the Strozzi family was originally buried here, but the inscription on the horizontal block above the elliptical arch clearly indicates its use as a *sepulcreto*, or a collective tomb of a Strozzi branch: "† SEPULCRA FILIO(RUM) ROSSI DE STROZZIS EOR(UM)Q(UE) DESCENDENTIUM E(T) UXOR(UM)." Presumably, this sepulcher was the original burial space, predating even the chamber under the elevated chapel's floor.

This sepulcher had been considered a very particular tomb ever since its construction. Guido Tigler, in his recent article on the typologies of fourteenth century funeral monuments, suggested convincingly that the

19. Friedman, *cit.*, 112; Sale, *cit.*, 311-315.

20. On this chapel in general, see K. Giles, *The Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella: Florentine Painting and Patronage, 1340-1355*, Ph.D. Diss., New York Univ., 1977.

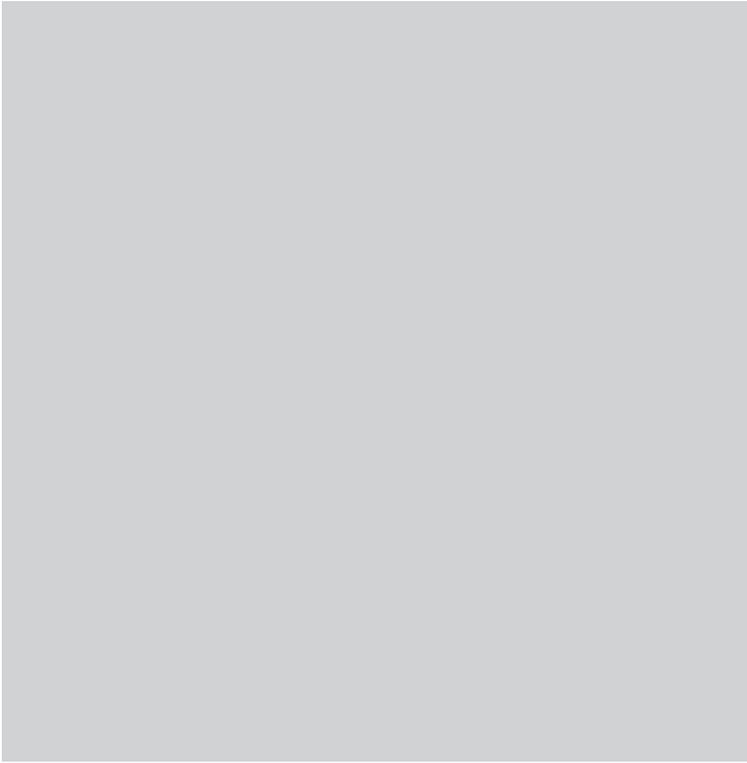


Fig. 10 Chapel of the Strozzi of Mantua. Santa Maria Novella, Florence

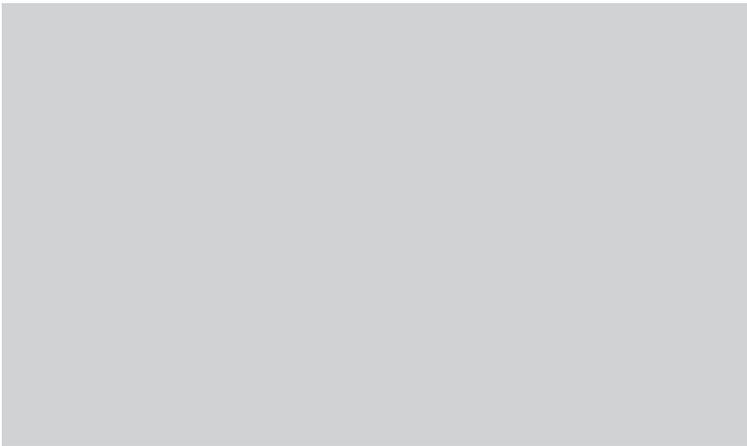


Fig. 11 Sepulcher beneath the Strozzi of Mantua Chapel (detail). Santa Maria Novella, Florence

elevated old Strozzi chapel was regarded as a sort of imitation of Mount Calvary (Golgotha).<sup>21</sup> When the Florentine pilgrim Giorgio Gucci visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in 1384, he described the Calvary Chapel as “a high place, raised twenty *braccia* or more above the floor of the said church, and you go there by a stone stairs, as you ascend in Santa Maria Novella to the chapel of the Strozzi.”<sup>22</sup> At approximately the same time, someone from the Gucci family constructed a similar elevated chapel with an inferior sepulcher in the Florentine church of the Ognissanti. According to popular tradition, Adam was buried beneath the place of crucifix and was baptized by Christ’s blood as we often see represented in late Medieval painted crosses. There was indeed a small chapel — a vaulted niche — dedicated to Adam at the foot of the Cavary Chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. As Tigler concluded, these settings clearly provided a model for the sepulchers placed beneath the Strozzi and the Gucci Chapels. In the former, the allusion was enhanced by the inscriptions in the scrolls held by the two prophets in the spandrels above the sepulcher’s arch quoting phrases from the Book of Isaiah (53, 5) and Psalms (22, 17-18), both references to the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

We do not have records indicating how the sepulcher under the old Strozzi Chapel was used in the fifteenth century. The chamber under the upper floor indeed seems to have become the main burial space since the time of the completion of the entire chapel decoration. Alessio Strozzi, a prominent prior of the Dominican convent who died in 1383, financed the chapel’s marble pavement and was buried in the chamber under it.<sup>24</sup> One reason for this change might be that the upper sepulcher was closer to the chapel altar where the masses were daily celebrated. Yet the original function of the lower sepulcher was never forgotten. In 1464, when the Rucellai

21. G. Tigler, “Tipologie di monumenti funebri,” in *Storia delle arti in Toscana: il Trecento* (Florence, 2004), 45-74, esp. 70-74. For this sepulcher, see also the recently published F. Schwartz, *Il bel cimitero: Santa Maria Novella in Florenz 1279-1348, Grabmäler, Architektur und Gesellschaft* (Berlin/Munich, 2009): 184-185.

22. B. Bagatti et al. eds., *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli* (Jerusalem, 1948), 132.

23. For these inscriptions, see Tigler, *cit.*, 74, note 133.

24. On Alessio Strozzi, see S. Orlandi, *Necrologio di S. Maria Novella* (Florence, 1955), I: 623-642. His remains in a glass coffin have been in the lower sepulcher since the mid-twentieth century.

Chapel at the opposite end of the transept was elevated by some meters (due to the construction of its adjacent Pura Chapel), an additional burial space was opened beneath the stairs for access.<sup>25</sup> The Rucellai and probably the Dominicans as well were most likely influenced by the structure of the Strozzi Chapel in their decision.

When Filippo Strozzi was planning his chapel two decades later, he surely took into consideration the typological precedent his ancestors' chapel had set. Although his branch of the family was distant from the founding members of the old chapel, Filippo had great influence on the entire households from the Strozzi lineage at that time. As Lorenzo, his son, would later remember: "one can say truly that the wealth made in that period in the Strozzi family derived from and depended on him."<sup>26</sup> As a man from the same lineage, Filippo Strozzi could hardly have ignored the preexisting chapel in the same church. Nor could the Dominicans: Alessio Strozzi, who was buried there, was praised in many of their sources from the fifteenth-century onwards and was believed to have contributed to much of the decoration of the old chapel. Lorenzo Strozzi too dedicated to Alessio one of the most detailed biographies in *Le vite degli uomini illustri della casa Strozzi*.<sup>27</sup>

Some elements in Filippo Strozzi's tomb can now be read as referencing the old chapel in fact. Viewed from the transept, the very unusual standing tomb of the old chapel was situated frontally (albeit not behind the chapel altar), as in Filippo Strozzi's tomb. Both tombs have their foundation set directly on the pavement. The spandrels above the arches of each tomb contain two figures. When Lippi painted the winged figures for Filippo's tomb in fresco, Roman arches were his immediate sources. But the source of inspiration for the patron lay elsewhere. For him, rather, the prophets above the old Strozzi sepulcher were much more familiar.

The inscriptions reinforce this link between the two familial funeral

25. J. W. Brown, *The Dominican Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence* (Edinburgh, 1902), 126.

26. Lorenzo Strozzi, *Le vite degli uomini illustri della Casa Strozzi* (Florence, 1892), 16-23: 15-16: "Tal che si può con verità dire che le ricchezze, che in quel tempo si fecero in casa Strozzi, avessero principio o dipendenza da lui."

27. Strozzi, *cit.*, 16-23. His fame ascending, Alessio would later be considered for beatification in the seventeenth century.

monuments. That on the old sepulcher, “† *SEPULCRA FILIO(RUM) ROSSI DE STROZZIS EOR(UM) Q(UE) DESCENDENTIUM E(T) UXOR(UM)*,” was distinct for two points. First, it declared that it belonged to all of Rosso’s descendants, not just to a specific person, emphasizing its collective nature with the plural form of “sepulcra.” Second, it mentioned not only the blood offspring but also their wives. These two features were not copied, for example, by the similarly elevated Gucci tomb in the Church of the Ognissanti.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Filippo Strozzi’s sarcophagus itself curiously lacks an inscription, even though equipped with a plate for it. An inscription, however, can be found on the tomb-slab for his descendants on the floor below the sarcophagus. Its rectangular plate was divided equally into three parts, the center of which bears the Strozzi arms, while the two sides were filled with the following phrase in a handsome Renaissance type: “*PHIL(IPPUS) STROZ(IS) MATTEI F(ILIUS) // CONIUGI POSTERISQUE SUIS.*” In this brief inscription, both his wife and the descendants are mentioned as well, in the manner of the family prototype. The absence of an inscription on Filippo’s own sarcophagus was hardly an accident. He surely studied the old Strozzi Chapel, and, following this example, avoided declaring the presence of his personal tomb in the new chapel.

Filippo nevertheless did not simply imitate the old chapel. Some fourteenth century elements like the lavishly decorated polyptych disappeared, while others were inapplicable for structural reasons. Among these were the tall stairway recalling the way to the Calvary, and the lower sepulcher, which corresponded consequently to Adam’s burial site. Locating his tomb directly on the pavement, under the stained glass window with the Virgin and Child, however, Strozzi still represented the concept of the rest beneath the Sacred, which was an overarching theme in the old chapel. Strozzi’s special interest in the notion of Adam’s burial site is indeed reflected in the choice of subject matter painted on the vault of the new chapel (Fig. 12). In the initial contract with Lippi we have already cited, Filippo Strozzi was still undecided what was to be painted there. He only vaguely called for, “Church Doctors or Evangelists or others.” The vault

28. The inscription in the Gucci tomb is: “*SEPULCRUM GUCCI DINI* [in the upper line (a later addition?): *GUCCI RYNIERI*] *ET SUORUM DESCENDENTIUM M CCCLXXV.*”

was where Lippi started to work, and probably the only portion of the mural completed before Strozzi's death.<sup>29</sup> Here, as we see today, Strozzi made Lippi paint the figures of four patriarchs from the Old Testament, one among which was Adam, inserted in the most important cell directly above the window wall that contains his tomb. The representation of Adam in a chapel vault was extremely rare.<sup>30</sup> It is probable that this idea derived from the patron's contemplation of the old chapel, although it was not simply imitated. The link between the two chapels operates in the sphere of personal and familial tradition — in a manner we may even call anthropological — more than on a strictly liturgical or artistic level.

### The patron's social standing

I would also argue that Filippo Strozzi may have been compelled to emphasize this link for social reasons. Filippo was of a newly emerging branch of the Strozzi. His father Matteo had been the second most wealthy in the family, but the household's net capital in the *catasto* declaration of 1427 was less than one twentieth of that of Palla Strozzi's, the practical head of the lineage at that time.<sup>31</sup> In terms of traditional prominence, Filippo's branch was inferior to those of Rosso de' Strozzi's descendants, with its chapel in Santa Maria Novella and the outstanding Dominican Alessio Strozzi who was buried there. Many of the Strozzi, including the father Matteo and later Filippo himself, were then exiled from Florence as a result of political conflict with the Medici in the 1430s. However, with the help of relatives, Filippo succeeded in making a great fortune in Naples and then finally, in 1466, he was permitted to return to his native city, where he began participating in local politics. As is well known, his contribution was essential for the arrangement of peace between Lorenzo de' Medici and Ferdinand I of Naples following the Pazzi conspiracy. After this event had consolidated

29. For the chronological debate of the fresco paintings, see Zambrano/Nelson, *cit.*, 584-586.

30. Sale, *cit.*, 148-164, lists a few precedent examples to the representation of patriarchs, but as he admits, none of them, especially in regard to Adam, corresponds typologically to the vault of the Strozzi Chapel.

31. L. Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists: 1390-1460* (London, 1963), 351-378, esp. 372-373; R. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton 1968), 31-73.

ties with the Medici, Filippo assumed some important positions in the Florentine government, while other members of the Strozzi lineage remained excluded from the government as potential enemies to the Medici.<sup>32</sup>

However, Filippo was deeply concerned about the welfare of the whole Strozzi family, and sought to solidify broad family ties. He hired for his company sons from almost all the branches of the Strozzi, some of whom were Rosso's descendants, and he selectively acquired properties in the area traditionally tied to the lineage, such as Santuccio. Other family members followed Filippo's lead in consolidating their social status. Filippo's brother Lorenzo once seriously thought about proposing marriage to Marietta Strozzi, a granddaughter of Palla Strozzi, believing that the prominence of Marietta's branch would bring honor to his family. Other relatives were willing to back this arrangement, except, this time, Filippo, who feared it might be seen as a hostile act against the Medici.<sup>33</sup> Similar actions of consolidation ensued in other families too, but recent scholarship on Florentine social history agrees that those aspirations were stronger amongst the Strozzi, probably because of their political challenges.

For Filippo, who obtained great economic success, the next anxiety was social *onore*, or honor,<sup>34</sup> and he spent generously on architectural projects. To carry out these projects, Filippo's friendly relationship with the Medici was indispensable. He indeed personally consulted Lorenzo de' Medici for the construction of his palace, which referenced the Medici palace in appearance even while exceeding it in size. Other Strozzi members made no similar attempts in this period, not only due to economic difficulties, but also probably for political reasons. Nonetheless, drawing connections to his lineage was of central concern to Filippo in his architectural commissions as well. His desire, though unfulfilled, to construct the façade of Santa Trinita exemplifies this, for, as mentioned above, the site housed a burial chapel for Onofrio Strozzi in the sacristy, in addition to another

32. On the Strozzi family and the life of Filippo, see note 7. In addition to the studies cited so far, see L. Fabbri, "The Memory of Exiled Families: The Case of the Strozzi," in Ciappelli and Rubin eds., *cit.*, 253-261. For a general study of broad family ties, see F. Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori, and Rucellai* (Princeton 1977).

33. For the marriage strategies of the Strozzi, see L. Fabbri, *Alleanza matrimoniale e patriziato nella Firenze del '400: Studio sulla famiglia Strozzi* (Florence 1991).

34. On the concept of *onore* and Filippo's concern for it, see Crabb, *cit.*, 5-7.

private chapel of the Strozzi in the church proper. Filippo was also deeply concerned in other religious matters. He initially struggled to find a proper burial space for his brother Matteo, who died prematurely in 1459. He thought first of a church in Naples, but around 1477, almost twenty years after Matteo's death, he finally obtained the rights to the main chapel of the church in Lecceto, in the Florentine *contado*, where he left an ostentatious inscription bearing his name.<sup>35</sup>

The new chapel in the transept of Santa Maria Novella was surely an honorable one as a burial space. However, at the time of its acquisition in 1486, Filippo became one of the few wealthiest men in the city, having almost quadrupled his fortune after the return to Florence.<sup>36</sup> This clear elevation in status may have meant that, while obviously set in a prestigious site, the new family chapel on its own still left something to be desired, if compared with the chapels patronized by other wealthy merchants. The Tornabuoni, for example, possessed the rights to the chancel of the same church, and the Rucellai another and much bigger chapel in the right end of the transept. The name of the latter was also transmitted prominently on Santa Maria Novella's pulpit, designed by Brunelleschi, and on the façade by Leon Battista Alberti. Under these circumstances, to emphasize the connection with the old Strozzi Chapel of his relatives was an efficient way for Filippo to acquire further notoriety.

Filippo's preoccupation with the old chapel might have stemmed from his strong wish to reestablish his family, and to proclaim its unwavering strength. The rare representation of four ancestors of Christ in the vault of Filippo's chapel — not only Adam as mentioned above, but Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, who are each defined as patriarchs by painted plates (Fig. 12) —, clearly indicates strong concern for familial lineage. So does the inscription referring to the descendants cited earlier. Filippo was well aware of his position as the new *pater familias*, and wished for the welfare of his descendants. Filippo's consolidation of the Strozzi following their political hardship in the early *Quattrocento* was sufficient to earn him the title of "new patriarch." In this capacity, he would mirror the status attributed to Rosso

35. See note 8.

36. Goldthwaite, *cit.*, 58-65.



Fig. 12 Filippino Lippi, *Adam, Noah, Abraham and Jacob as Patriarchs* (detail). Santa Maria Novella, Florence

de' Strozzi, who was heralded in the old chapel as the primary familial ancestor. The figure of Adam, to which the most important cell in the vault was assigned, is not depicted as the one tempted by the serpent, but as protecting his son from it.<sup>37</sup> This is quite an unusual representation and clearly demonstrates Filippo Strozzi's wish for the flourishing of his lineage.

Standing in the transept, facing Filippo's chapel, one could see on the left the old Strozzi Chapel rising over the former choir, which then occupied the space under the crossing.<sup>38</sup> To ordinary visitors generally barred from private chapels, the most remarkable accessible decoration in Filippo's chapel would have been the glass window. It was divided into two

37. This son of Adam is probably Seth. Sale, *cit.*, 202-204.

38. For the reconstruction of the old choir, M. B. Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: The problem of the rood Screen in Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 37 (1974), 157-173.

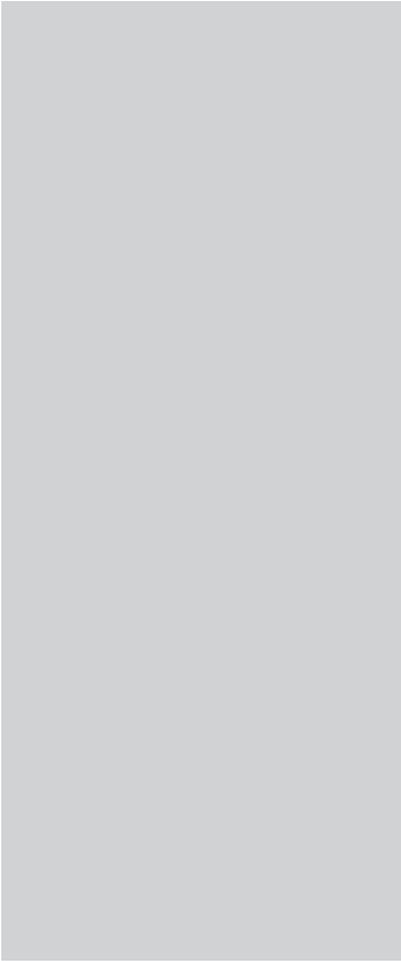


Fig. 13 Filippino Lippi (design), *Madonna with Child, Saint Philip, and John the Evangelist*. Santa Maria Novella, Florence

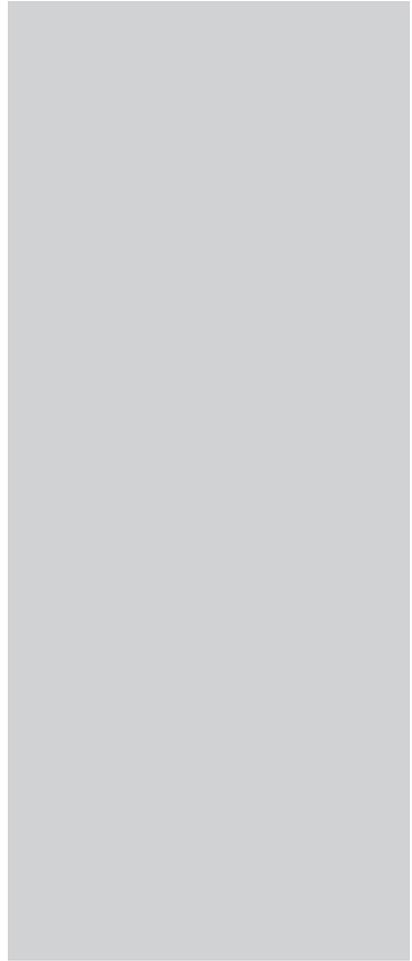


Fig. 14 Nardo di Cione (design), *Madonna with Child, and Saint Dominic*. Santa Maria Novella, Florence

sections, with the Virgin and Child above and two saints beneath (Fig. 13). In the old chapel too, the window was divided in the same manner, the Virgin and Child above and the St. Dominic beneath (Fig. 14). The typological affinity between these two windows helped the visitors establish a relationship between the two chapels. The new chapel drew the viewers' attention to the presence of the *Trecento* chapel, which demonstrated clearly the long

lineage of the family.<sup>39</sup>

Stained glass windows were a particularly efficient device to publicize the family's influence. Before the acquisition of the new chapel, Filippo Strozzi had had one with "Nostra Donna e San Filippo e l'arme degli Strozzi" installed in the window which illuminated the former modest family burial space in the nave he never relinquished.<sup>40</sup> He also commissioned a window with his arms for the transept in front of the chapel.<sup>41</sup> This window does not survive, but must have been similar to that above the old Strozzi Chapel (Fig. 15).<sup>42</sup> Marking these windows with the same coat of arms, he could display the strong presence of the family, as well as its honorable ancestry, in one of the most prominent churches in Florence.

## Conclusion

We have discussed the important typological precedent the old Strozzi Chapel set for Filippo Strozzi. For him, if not for his artists, this site was the most familiar exemplar to which he naturally paid homage. It is also worth reaffirming that the new chapel was not a simple copy of the old. The frontal and central setting of Filippo Strozzi's tomb derived, I believe, from the sepulcher of the old chapel, but the former's closeness to the altar was a great advantage in terms of *remedio* for the deceased, which the latter did not share. The classicism in the new chapel's décor was unrelated to the old Strozzi Chapel.

It is indeed misleading to believe that Filippo Strozzi conceived on his own a precise iconographic program based on the old chapel. At the time

39. Old art objects were sometimes highly valued for this reason. Francesco Sassetti, for example, was proud of the *Trecento* altarpiece, once in the chancel of Santa Maria Novella and then removed by the friars, as proof of the tradition the family boasted. A. Warburg, "Francesco Sassetis letztwillige Verfügung," in *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antik: Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Europäischen Renaissance*, (Berlin, 1998), I: 127-158, 142. As mentioned above in the text, Filippo Strozzi too appreciated a renovated Duecento panel, now in Lecceto, for one of his newly built chapel, arguably paying homage to its ancientness.

40. Borsook, "Documents for..." *cit.*, 800, esp. doc. 7.

41. Borsook, "Documents for..." *cit.*, 800, doc. 9.

42. For this window the catalog registration of the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (N.Cat.Gen: 09/00447030) suggests a date in the second half of the fifteenth century. If this is true, Filippo Strozzi might have been involved in its commission.

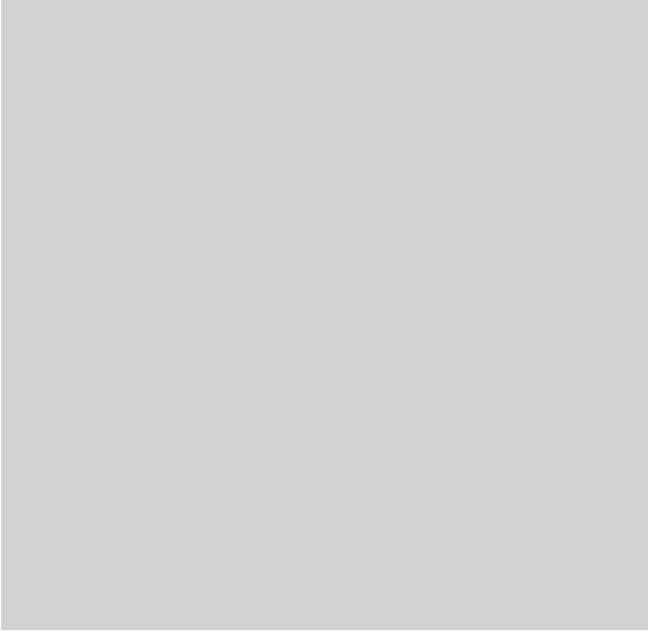


Fig. 15 Strozzi coat of arms, window above the Strozzi of Mantua Chapel.  
Santa Maria Novella, Florence

of inception of the project he might have had an only vaguely defined, even though strong, wish to make reference to the old chapel. The way to visualize the connection between the two chapels would have been later discussed with the artists, as is well demonstrated in the decision to insert four patriarchs in the vault. It could have been even modified after the patron's death. The project was not at all static. Earlier iconographic studies tended to consider the donor's intentions as being precisely reflected in the art works in the chapel and their visual language. However, many of these items were completed after Strozzi's death in 1491, and the details of the fresco paintings in particular were determined after Lippi's return from Rome in 1493. It is mainly in this phase that classical or humanistic sources could have been consulted. Nonetheless, the general design of Filippo Strozzi's chapel, especially where the tomb was concerned, required clear input and determined participation from the patron. It was the most singular arrangement of the patron's tomb that later determined the details of

the chapel's decorations. In other words, unlike decorative programs conceived by practitioners of art, which might focus on individual motifs or ornamental details, or by learned advisers who might suggest refined pictorial themes, what Strozzi devised conveys what must have been a more basic, personal and familial pride, as well as his strong desire for a peaceful afterlife. This is why the tomb of his own ancestors seemed like the most relevant exemplar.

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