

A Monumental Price Tag

The Cost of Furnishing a Family Chapel in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century

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Abstract

The artistic decoration of family chapels in the churches and private palaces of Renaissance Italy has received much scholarly attention over the years. Fresco cycles, altarpieces, and sculpted tomb monuments have been studied in great detail. What is lacking, however, is an overview of the complete ensemble of investments and commissions of which these art works were once a part, including the purchase of chapel rights, stained glass windows, vestments and liturgical array for the mass, and provisions to keep the chapel in operation in the long term. The present essay seeks to make a start at recreating this wider context of the surviving artwork by looking at the cost (absolute and relative) of the different elements involved in three prominent Florentine chapel projects of the second half of the fifteenth century: the Strozzi, Gianfigliuzzi, and Tornabuoni chapels. There is a wealth of published documentation for each of these projects, which will be compared systematically to give an impression of the scope and scale of the enterprise of furnishing a family chapel in the upper echelons of mercantile society at a time of increasing public projection of social prestige.

Next to building a town palace, furnishing a family chapel in a church was probably the main public monument a successful Italian Renaissance entrepreneur could erect for his family, contributing at the same time to the preservation of their souls in the afterlife, as well as to the greater glory of his city.¹ Although there is evidence that in the fourteenth century, furnishing a chapel could be undertaken as a project of different orders of magnitude, with even some lower ranking artisans leaving sums of money in their wills for the purpose, by the second half of the fifteenth century, it ap-

1. On the size of artistic commissions and the correlation with their social status, see J. K. Nelson and R. J. Zeckhauser, *The Patron's Payoff: Conspicuous Commissions in Italian Renaissance Art*, Princeton, NJ/ Oxford 2008. Also Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, New Haven/ London 2007.

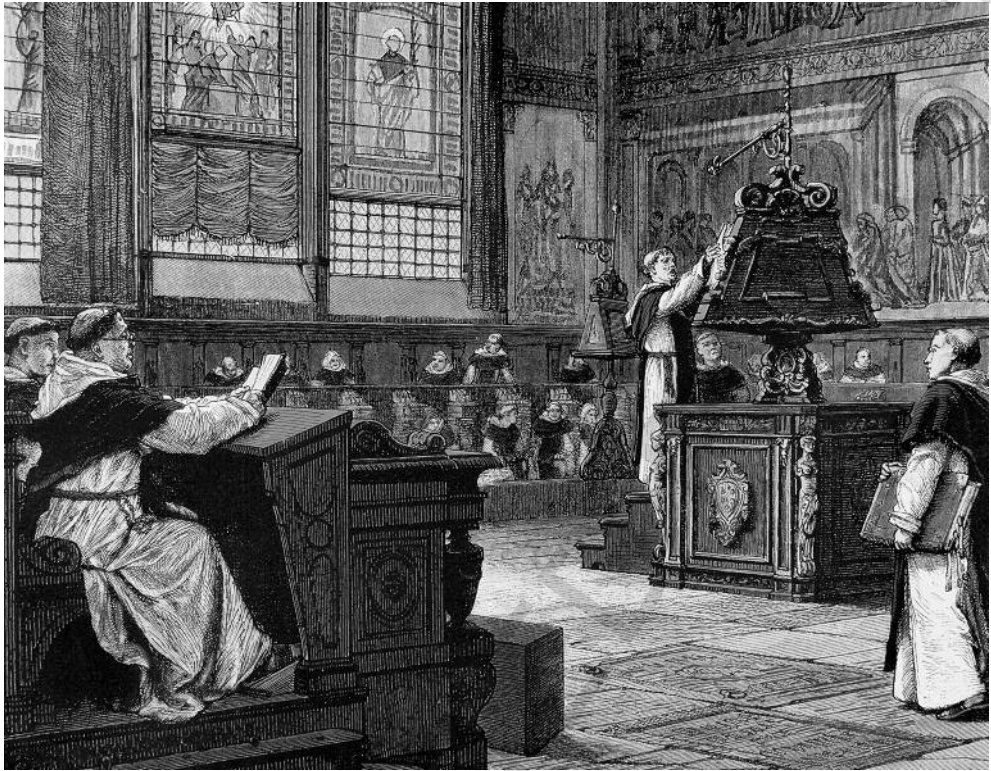


Fig. 1. *Reading of the Mass in the Tornabuoni Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italian hand-coloured engraving, 19th century. Image in the public domain.*

pears to have been the exclusive privilege of elites, and was treated in an increasingly competitive fashion.² The main parts of such prestigious family monuments still surviving today are often fresco cycles, altarpieces, and carved stone tomb monuments – the art work with the greatest durability, the lowest risk of being destroyed to retrieve valuable materials, and the highest artistic status in our own time.

Originally, however, these chapels were coherent and dynamic installations, in which a variety of art works provided the backdrop for the reading of the mass (fig. 1). Sources suggest that patrons planning to furnish a chapel approached it as a comprehensive project. By looking at the surviving frescoes, altarpieces and tomb monuments in isolation, as art historians have done in the past, we lose the context of this performative theatre with all its different components. We also lose sight of the scale of the entire undertaking – the scale of it as an event within the life of a member of the en-

² On chapel commissions by the lower classes and the disappearance of such commissions in the fifteenth century, see S. Cohn, 'Material culture without objects. Artisan artistic commissions in early Renaissance Italy', in: R. Duits (ed.), *The Art of the Poor. The Aesthetic Material Culture of the Lower Classes in Europe, 1300-1600*, London 2020, 23-28.

trepreneurial upper middle class in Italian towns and cities, and the scale of it as a marker of magnificence in the eyes of their contemporary fellow citizens, few of whom would have had the means to sponsor such a project.

A way to regain a sense of both the typical scale of a chapel project and the array of art work involved is to look at the expenditures for furnishing a chapel. What did it cost, and which proportions of that cost were for the art work that we still know and admire today? Existing scholarly literature on Italian Renaissance art provides us with the prices of some individual fresco cycles and altarpieces, but these figures are usually not presented in a comparative framework that would give us an impression of their economic significance. This essay will attempt to sketch the outlines of such a framework by collating and analysing the published materials regarding three prominent chapel projects in Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Since the publication of Richard Goldthwaite's *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600* in 1993, there has been an increasing interest in the economic background of Renaissance art.³ Studies by Michelle O'Malley and Evelyn Welch, among others, have tended to problematize the subject, pointing at the inconsistencies of Renaissance prices, the difficulties in relating prices systematically to quantitative factors (e.g. the size of altar pieces), and the importance of social relations and status in the mutual contractual agreement of prices between artists and patrons.⁴ None of these issues are surprising, of course, for a society with little formal price regulation and a clientele-based social model. Given the complications, this essay will not seek to provide a single, definitive figure for the cost of furnishing a chapel. Instead, it will suggest bandwidths for the price of a prestigious chapel project as a whole and for the relative value of each of its components. The contours emerging from the three case studies discussed here may in time offer an incentive for a more extensive and methodical investigation.

The Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella

The first case study, in order of project magnitude, concerns the Strozzi Chapel – the first chapel to the right of the choir in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (fig. 2).⁵ The rights to this chapel were obtained by the Florentine merchant-banker Filippo Strozzi in 1486. The chapel as it can be seen today still contains the famous fresco cycle executed for Strozzi by Filippino Lippi between 1487 and 1502, with a long interruption because of Filippino's work on the chapel of Cardinal Carafa in Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome. The frescoes show four patriarchs (Adam, Abraham,

3. R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*, Baltimore 1993.

4. M. O'Malley, *The Business of Art. Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven 2005; M. O'Malley and E. Welch (eds), *The Material Renaissance*, Manchester 2007.

5. On the commission of this chapel, see E. Borsook, 'Documents for Filippo Strozzi's Chapel in Santa Maria Novella and Other Related papers', *The Burlington Magazine* 112 (1970), 737-45 and 800-804.



Fig. 2. The Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, Florence. [photo: The Warburg Institute, Photographic Collection].

Jacob, and Noah) in the four compartments of the vault, grisailles on the back wall, two scenes from the life of St John the Evangelist on the left wall, and two scenes from the life of St Philip the Apostle on the right. A rough calculation tells us that they cover a total wall area of ca 215m².⁶ The chapel also contains a stained-glass lancet window after a design by Filippino Lippi.

Archival research by Eve Borsook has revealed that Filippo Strozzi purchased the rights to the chapel for 250 florins in 1486 (to be precise, these were 250 *fiorini di suggello*, a money of account; the price in gold florins was lower: 208 florins).⁷ This money formed an endowment, paying for a wood-carver's workshop in the Mercato Vecchio, the proceeds of which kept the chapel in operation. It is rare to have an insight into the actual price of the acquisition of the rights to a chapel in a church or the financing of its liturgical use. The sum of 208 gold florins was substantial, bearing in mind that it took a skilled builder perhaps twelve working days to earn the equivalent of 1 gold florin in the later fifteenth century, and that a regular-size square altarpiece by a Florentine master at the time cost around 100 florins including its gilt carved wooden frame.⁸

In his will of 1491, Filippo Strozzi set aside 1,000 florins for the furnishing of the chapel (to be precise, 1,000 *fiorini larghi*, another money of account, which was equivalent to ca 925 gold florins).⁹ This money was to pay for the fresco cycle, the pavement, the marble altar, tomb monuments, and the stained-glass window. To give an impression of the magnitude of this projected expenditure: 1,000 florins was the price band of a large town house in Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century; to build a countryside villa might have cost around 1,500 florins.¹⁰

6. S. Roettgen, *Italian Frescoes. The Flowering of the Renaissance 1470-1510*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1997, 230, gives the following dimensions for the Strozzi Chapel: d. 5.64m; w. 6.14m; h. 12.25m. There are frescoes situated on: the two side walls, each topped by a pointed arch; the back wall, topped by a pointed arch, minus the lancet window; and the vault. A rough estimate of the total area covered in fresco uses three rectangular walls (ignoring the pointed arches at the top of each wall and thus generating extra square metres per wall), ignores the gap in the back wall taken up by the lancet window (thus generating more extra square metres for the back wall), and omits the vault (thus offsetting the extra square metres calculated for the walls against the square metres of the vault). This results in a calculation of $(5.63 \times 12.25) \times 2 + (6.14 \times 12.25) \approx 215 \text{ m}^2$.

7. Borsook, *op. cit.* (note 5), 801, docs 20-21. The conversion rate of 250 *fiorini di suggello* for 208 gold florins is given in doc. 21.

8. Richard Goldthwaite gives the wages of a skilled builder in 1486 as 10.3 *soldi* per day; at 125 *soldi* to the gold florin, that means roughly 12 days to earn the equivalent of one gold florin. See R. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence. An Economic and Social History*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 430 (exchange rate of the florin) and 436 (wages of a skilled builder in 1486). On the price of a square Florentine altarpiece from the second half of the fifteenth century, see R. Duits, *Gold Brocade and Renaissance Painting. A Study in Material Culture*, London 2008, 85; on painting prices in the fifteenth-century in general, O'Malley, *op. cit.* (note 4).

9. Borsook, *op. cit.* (note 5), 170 and 801, doc. 22 for Strozzi's will; doc 24 includes an exchange rate of 2.3.5 *fiorini larghi* (2.16 in decimal figures) for 2 *fiorini d'oro in oro* in 1491.

10. Brenda Preyer refers to the Tornaquinci town house that was estimated at 1,100 florins

The surviving accounts related to Strozzi's project show that he contracted Filippino Lippi to paint the frescoes in the chapel for the agreed price of 300 *fiorini di suggello*, or 250 gold florins, in 1487.¹¹ This sum included payment for the materials, for the purchase of which the painter was responsible. As we shall see, and as has been commented upon in the past, it was a low price for a fresco cycle in Florence in this era. It may have been the reason that Filippino Lippi took the heirs of Filippo Strozzi to court in 1497; the tribunal of the painter's guild, the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali*, judged in his favour and ordered the final payment to be raised to 350 gold florins.¹² The initial agreed price amounts to roughly 1.2 gold florins (decimal) per square metre of fresco, the eventual augmented price to 1.6 gold florins per square metre.

The Strozzi account books also detail that the sculptor Benedetto da Maiano was paid a total of 436 *fiorini larghi*, or 400 gold florins, for what was called the *pavimento* of the chapel, but what seems to have included the marble altar with its raised platform and carved reliefs of the Virgin and Child and four angels.¹³ Furthermore, Filippo Strozzi and his heirs paid Filippino Lippi 4 gold florins for the design of the stained-glass window;¹⁴ they also paid just over 8 gold florins to the blacksmith Francesco di Michele del Pescie for the iron frames of the window; and just over 61 gold florins to the brothers of the Order of the Jesuates for the stained glass itself.¹⁵ Adding up these expenses, the finished window appears to have cost about 75 gold florins. The chapel accounts also include several small payments, to the total of 125 florins, for liturgical vestments.¹⁶ At least one of these was made from second-hand materials, retrieved from a velvet dress woven with small loops of gold thread.¹⁷

Even with the extra 100 florins for the frescoes awarded to Filippino Lippi by the guild, the documented expenditures for the Strozzi chapel amounted to 950 gold florins, only very slightly over budget compared to the sum allocated in Filippo Strozzi's will. In its entirety, including the purchase of the rights, the chapel project cost just over 1,150 gold florins. The fresco cycle by Filippino Lippi was the second largest post within this budget, after the work on the marble pavement and altar by Benedetto da Maiano. The value of the finished fresco cycle at its augmented price amounted to

in 1460. See B. Preyer, 'Around and in the Gianfigliuzzi Palace in Florence. Developments on Lungarno Corsini in the 15th and 16th Centuries,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorische Institutes in Florenz* XLVIII (2004), 55-104, esp. 48. Florence Edler De Roover refers to the countryside villa that silk merchant Andrea Banchi had built at a cost of 1,500 florins. See F. Edler de Roover, 'Andrea Banchi, Florentine Silk Manufacturer and Merchant in the Fifteenth Century,' *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 3 (1966), 221-286, esp. 277.

11. Borsook, *op. cit.* (note 5), 803, doc. 63.

12. *Ibid.*, 804, doc. 77.

13. *Ibid.*, 803, docs 61-62.

14. *Ibid.*, 804, doc. 87.

15. *Ibid.*, 801, docs 14 and 16.

16. *Ibid.*, 802, doc. 39.

17. *Ibid.*, 802, doc 31

26% of the total project cost including the acquisition of the chapel rights, and 37% of the total furnishing cost.

The Gianfigliuzzi Chapel in Santa Trinita

The second case study involves the Gianfigliuzzi Chapel, the choir chapel of the Church of Santa Trinita in Florence (fig. 3). The Gianfigliuzzi were a family of successful entre-

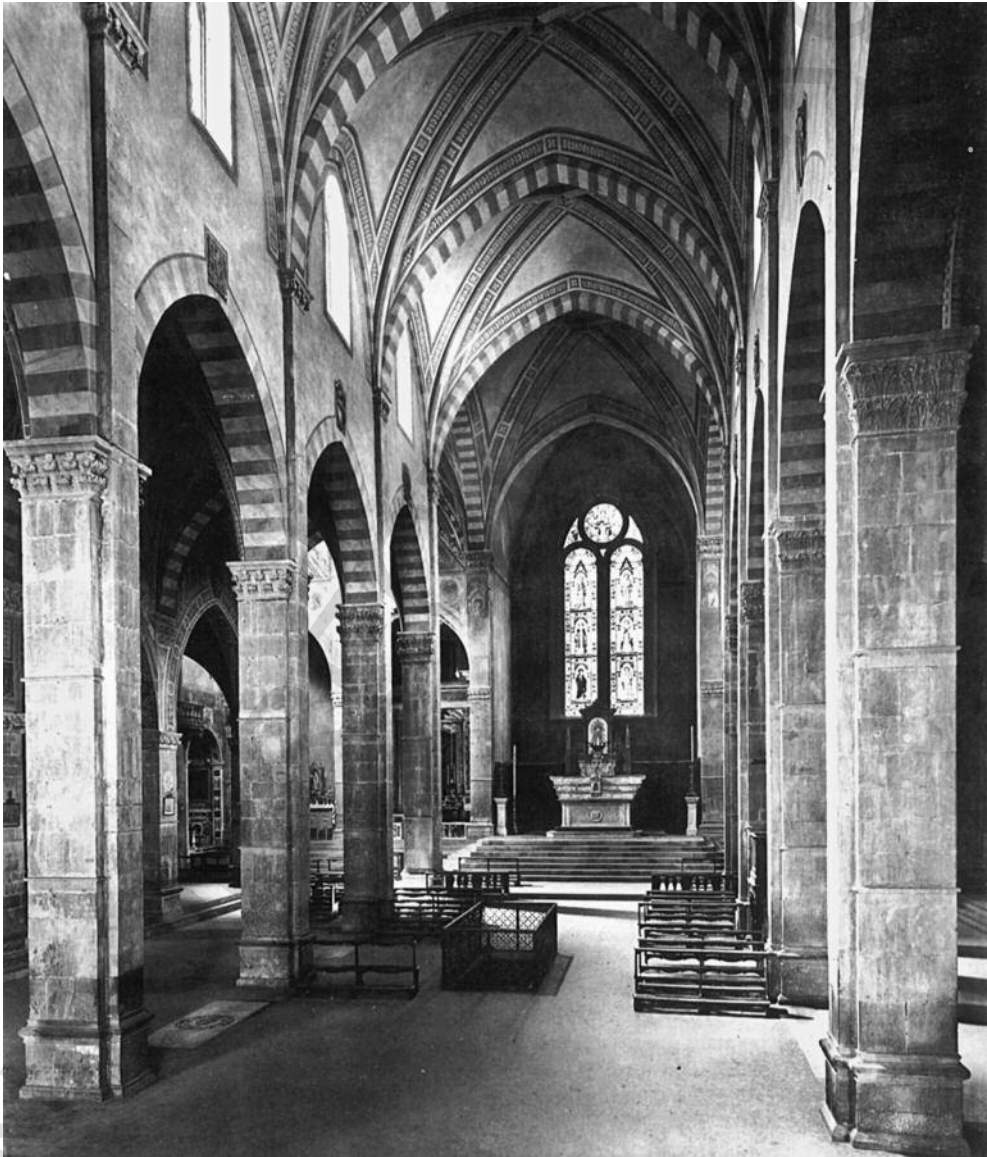


Fig. 3. View into the nave and choir of Santa Trinita, Florence; the Gianfigliuzzi Chapel is the choir chapel. [photo: The Warburg Institute, Photographic Collection].

preneurs, who rose to further prominence, and were appointed to a variety of political offices, by their affiliation with the Medici after 1450.¹⁸ Paterfamilias Bongianni di Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi obtained the rights to the *cappella maggiore* of Santa Trinita in 1464; the family already owned another chapel in the same church at this time.¹⁹ For the choir chapel, the Gianfigliuzzi commissioned a fresco cycle from Alessio Baldovinetti, Filippino Lippi's teacher, which was completed around 1471.

Only fragments of the cycle survive, mainly on the vault. The four compartments of the vault show once again four Patriarchs: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Vasari mentions that the frescoes on the walls were Old Testament scenes; they apparently contained numerous portraits of contemporaries, just like the frescoes by Ghirlandaio in the adjacent Sassetti Chapel.²⁰ The total surface area of the frescoes is difficult to assess, but it was probably slightly larger than that of the frescoes in the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella. Baldovinetti also designed the stained-glass windows of the chapel, consisting of two lancet windows and an oculus, and he made the altarpiece, the high altar of the church: a large panel representing the Holy Trinity with Saints Benedict and Giovanni Gualberto, currently in the Galleria dell' Accademia in Florence.

In his *Libro dei Ricordi*, Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi provided an estimate of the cost of furnishing his new chapel.²¹ He guessed that the large tripartite stained-glass window would cost 600-700 florins, including the masonry (Bonginanni expressed his calculations in *fiorini larghi*). For a fresco cycle by a good master, he reckoned 1,200 florins; for a marble altar and tomb monuments, 300 florins; for wooden choir stalls and a painted altar panel, 300 florins (interestingly, these latter items are listed as one single combined entry, suggesting that wooden choir stalls and the altar panel all came under the heading of woodwork in the patron's perception); and for silver candle sticks and linen cloths for the altar, 200 florins. Altogether, Bongianni's projected budget was more than two-and-a-half times as high as that of Filippo Strozzi for his chapel in Santa Maria Novella: 2,600-2,700 florins.

18. On the Gianfigliuzzi, see Preyer, *op. cit.* (as in note 10); S. J. May and G. T. Noszlopy, 'Cosimo Rosselli's Birmingham Altarpiece, the Vallombrosan Abbey of S. Trinita in Florence and its Gianfigliuzzi Chapel, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 78 (2015), 97-133.

19. May and Noszlopy, *op. cit.* (note 18), 114.

20. E. Londi, 'Alessio Baldovinetti pittore fiorentino. Con l'aggiunto dei suoi "Ricordi"', Florence: Alfani e Venturi 1907, 67. The scenes included Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba, Cain slaying Abel, Moses receiving the Tables of the Law, and the Sacrifice of Isaac.

21. Preyer, *op. cit.* (note 10), 94-95, note 84: 'Voglio che si faci una finestra di vetro nela faccia da chapo che sechondo el disegno sarà alta 23 bracia e largha 10 chon uno pilastro in mezzo di detta larghezza, chon uno occhio di sopra, storiata de la Tinità, che stimo chosterà tra lavoro di pietra e di vetro detta finestra fiorini 600 in 700 larghi; e dipinti tutta e storiata di buon maestro, che stimo chosterà 1200 larghi; uno altare di marmo e una sepulture su piano de la chapella di stima di fiorini 300 larghi; uno choro bello e una tavola a detta chappella di stima di fiorini 300 larghi; altri ornamenti pe' l'altare, cioè chandellieri e tovaglie e pali di fero fiorini 200 larghi; in tutto ragiono vi si spenda fiorini 2600 in 2700 larghi.'

To an extent, the difference is due to elements that were present in the Gianfigliuzzi but not in the Strozzi Chapel. For instance, the Strozzi Chapel has only one single lancet window, whereas the Gianfigliuzzi Chapel has a tripartite window including masonry. Unlike the Gianfigliuzzi Chapel, the Strozzi Chapel did not have a painted altarpiece or wooden choir stalls. The documented expenditures for the Strozzi Chapel, however, do not include silver candle sticks and altar linen, which may mean that the actual cost of furnishing the Strozzi Chapel was further above budget than can be established from the evidence.

Yet, the largest discrepancy between the two budgets concerned the fresco cycles. Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi expected to spend at least four times as much on his frescoes around 1470 as Filippo Strozzi arranged to pay Filippino Lippi in 1487. Gianfigliuzzi's estimate for the fresco cycle also represented a much larger proportion of the total conjectured cost of furnishing the chapel: around 45%. The programme of the Gianfigliuzzi frescoes does not seem to have been much more complicated than that of the later Strozzi frescoes and they were not much bigger in size. The artist whom the Gianfigliuzzi engaged was a more established master than Lippi was in 1487; Baldovinetti was around forty at the time of his commission, Lippi thirty. Nonetheless, the difference does not seem to justify a price ratio of 4:1.

Gianfigliuzzi's estimate does not seem to have been excessive, however. When, in May 1452, the Prato city council debated to have Filippo Lippi paint the choir chapel of Prato Cathedral, they estimated that it would cost 1,200 florins, for a total area of ca 300 m², larger by less than one-third than the Strozzi Chapel.²² Filippo Lippi's price per square metre would have been 4 florins, more than three times the price offered to his son in 1487.²³ We can only conclude that, as has been emphasised by others, Filippo Strozzi was a comparatively frugal patron – possibly with regard not only to the fresco cycle, but to his entire chapel project.

The Tornabuoni Chapel in Santa Maria Novella

The last case study involves the Tornabuoni Chapel, the choir chapel of Santa Maria Novella (fig. 4). The patron of this chapel, Giovanni di Francesco Tornabuoni, was the uncle of Lorenzo the Magnificent; he made his career in the Medici bank, and became

22. E. Borsook, 'Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for Prato Cathedral', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 19, 1 (1975) 10; 38-41. The actual payments to Lippi included 25 florins for gold leaf and 80 florins for ultramarine. The total sum paid to the artist added up to paid 1,962 florins. On the dimensions of the Prato choir chapel, see S. Roettgen, *Italian Frescoes. The Early Renaissance 1400-1470*, New York 1996, 302: w. 6.75 m; d. 7.65; h.13.6 m. A simplified calculation similar to the one used above for the Strozzi Chapel (see note 6), treating the walls as rectangular and omitting the surface area of the vault, gives a surface are of approximately 300 m².

23. As the actual money paid to the artist over the duration of the campaign added up to 1,962 florins (see note 22), the price of the Prato choir chapel frescoes amounted to an extravagant 6.5 florins per m²!



Fig. 4. The Tornabuoni Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, Florence. [photo: The Warburg Institute, Photographic Collection].

the director of their vital Roman branch in 1464.²⁴ He acquired the full rights to the *cappella maggiore* of Santa Maria Novella on 13 October 1486, a year after he had commissioned from Ghirlandaio the well-known frescoes that still survive today: the four evangelists in the four compartments of the vault, and a double cycle of the Life of the Virgin and the Life of St John the Baptist on the side walls. Ghirlandaio also designed the stained-glass for the triple lancet window of the chapel, and made an altarpiece, which is now lost.²⁵

The Tornabuoni Chapel was one of the most lavish chapel projects undertaken in fifteenth-century Florence. Rab Hatfield has claimed that Giovanni Tornabuoni may have spent as much as 7,000 florins on it, seven times as much as Strozzi and two-and-a-half times as much as the anticipated expenditure of the Gianfigliuzzi.²⁶ The surviving documents related to the Tornabuoni Chapel project do not give a complete overview of the actual expenses, but are detailed enough to check if Hatfield's conjecture can withstand scrutiny.

The contract between Giovanni Tornabuoni and Ghirlandaio of 1 September 1485 is well known for its emphasis on the staffage Ghirlandaio was supposed to add to his frescoes: figures, buildings, castles, cities, villas, mountains, hills, plains, water, rocks, garments, animals, birds, and beasts.²⁷ Ghirlandaio was to undertake the work for 1,100 gold florins, a sum similar to the estimated price of the frescoes in the Gianfigliuzzi Chapel.²⁸ The Tornabuoni frescoes have in fact a more complicated programme than the latter, with a total of twelve different scenes on the walls. They are also much larger, covering an area of around 800 m², which puts the price per square metre at 1.4 florins (decimal), similar to what Filippino Lippi was offered for the Strozzi Chapel.²⁹ It is con-

24. On Giovanni Tornabuoni, see E. Plebani, 'Tornabuoni', in *Dizionario Biografico Italiano* 96, 2019 (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tornabuoni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/; accessed 2 February 2021). Also Eleonora Plebani, *I Tornabuoni. Una famiglia fiorentina alla fine del Medioevo*, Milan 2002.

25. J. K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio. Artist and Artisan*, New Haven/ London 2000, 350-351 (the contract between Giovanni Tornabuoni and Domenico Ghirlandaio) and 357-58 (document regarding the acquisition of the chapel rights).

26. R. Hatfield 'Giovanni Tornabuoni, i fratelli Ghirlandaio e la cappella maggiore Santa Maria Novella', in: W. Prinz and M. Seidel (eds), *Domenico Ghirlandaio 1449-1494. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Firenze, 16-18 ottobre 1994*, Florence 1994, 112-117, esp.116.

27. This well-known provision is discussed in Jeroen Stumpel, *The Province of Painting*, Utrecht: Private Publication, 1990, 177-78. It is cited in virtually every reference to the Tornabuoni Chapel contract. See, for instance, J. K. Cadogan, 'An "Huono di Chonto"'. Reconsidering the Social Status of Ghirlandaio and His Family', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 77, 1 (2014), 27-46, esp. 40.

28. Cadogan, *op. cit.* (note 25), 351.

29. Roettgen, *op. cit.* (note 6), 164, gives the measurements of the Tornabuoni Chapel as: w. ca 11 m; d. ca 11 m; h. ca. 24.5 m. The simplified calculation explained in note 6, treating the walls as rectangular and ignoring the vault, suggests a total wall area of $3 \times 11 \times 24.5 \approx 809$ m². Roettgen herself estimates that the chapel contains ca 550 m² of painted surface, which seems too low a figure, based perhaps on the scenes on the lateral walls alone; a wall area of 550 m² would put the per ratio price of Ghirlandaio's frescoes at 2 florins per square metre. O'Malley, *op. cit.* (note 4), 302, note 22

ceivable that the range of 1,000-1,200 gold florins, cited for three different chapels in the second half of the fifteenth century, was simply a set price band for a large fresco cycle, irrespective of the dimensions of the chapel.

In his will of 26 March 1490, Giovanni Tornabuoni earmarked money for various parts of the chapel furnishing that were as yet incomplete.³⁰ He reserved 400 gold florins for choir stalls, which were to be decorated with inlaid wood or paint work depicting gold brocade.³¹ The sum of 100 gold florins was to be spent on an embroidered cover for a silver cross on the altar. The painted altarpiece was to cost 500 gold florins – a high sum, suggesting a very large panel, perhaps painted on both sides, in an ornate gilded frame. A total of 600 gold florins, finally, was set aside for four marble tomb monuments.

All in all, the projected expenditure was 1,600 gold florins, on top of the 1,100 florins already spent on the fresco cycle. Not included in this total, even though they are referred to in the will, are the stained-glass windows and the silver candle sticks for the altar. None the less, it would seem that Hatfield's estimate of 7,000 florins for the chapel project is too high, and the actual cost was more likely in the order of 3,000-4,000 gold florins. In that case, the painted fresco cycle represented between a quarter and one-third of the total furnishing cost.

Conclusion

The three case studies outlined above do not give a comprehensive overview of everything involved in a family chapel project. For instance, only the documents related to the Strozzi Chapel include a relatively modest sum for liturgical vestments, whereas these could add significantly to the over-all expenditure: Giovanni Rucellai bragged in his *Zibaldone* that he had spent no fewer than 1,000 florins on vestments for his family chapel in San Pancrazio.³² Nonetheless, the figures from the three case studies give a clear indication that acquiring the rights to and furnishing a family chapel in a church was a project with a price band of at least 1,000-4,000 florins depending on the dimensions of the chapel and the ambitions of the patron.

This was a substantial sum even for a wealthy Florentine entrepreneur, whose fortune would have ranged in the bracket of 10,000-25,000 florins, up to perhaps 40,000 florins in the case of Giovanni Tornabuoni.³³ It makes it clear why for most

gives the per ratio price of the Tornabuoni Chapel frescoes as 1.7 florins (decimal) per square metre, a figure that suggests a total wall area of ca 650 m².

30. Cadogan, *op. cit.* (note 25), 369-371.

31. *Ibid.*, 369, the choir stalls are first described as 'spalliere legnee cum tarsia', but in a later paragraph as 'fiant spalliere brochatiauri'.

32. A. Perosa, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, 1, "Il Zibaldone quaresimale", London: The Warburg Institute, 1960, 121.

33. Florentine silk merchant Andrea Banchi left a fortune of 18,000 florins at his death in 1462. See Edler De Roover, *op. cit.* (note 10), 276-77. Richard Goldthwaite's discussion of the finances of

families, furnishing a chapel in a church was at best a once in-a-generation undertaking. Ironically, of the three chapels examined here, the least expensive one was probably made for the richest patron. Filippo Strozzi's wealth rivalled that of the Medici themselves, with a fortune of around 100,000 florins.³⁴ While the Gianfigliuzzi valued their newly built town palace at 5,000 florins, roughly twice the price of their family chapel, Filippo Strozzi built *his* enormous palace for 30,000 florins, six times as much, and thirty times the value of Strozzi's own chapel.³⁵ Perhaps for Strozzi, his chapel was simply a less important monument, because he could aim for much greater magnificence in other areas of his life.

Within the budget of 1,000-4,000 florins, the execution of a fresco cycle, considered perhaps as the most important artistic part of the enterprise today, was always one of the largest entries, but never represented more than a quarter to one-half of the total cost. The documents show unequivocally that in the mind of the patron, furnishing a chapel was a comprehensive project, of which the contributions by the painter were merely a part, albeit an important one.

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several mercantile families in fifteenth-century Florence indicates wealth levels of a similar magnitude among families such as the Gondi, Guiccardini, and Capponi. See R. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence. A study of Four Families*, Princeton, NJ 1968. On Giovanni Tornabuoni's taxable wealth, see Plebani, *op. cit* (note 24), 105.

34. Filippo Strozzi is known to have drawn ca 90,000 florins against the revenues of his firm between 1471 and 1483. See Goldthwaite, *op. cit* (note 33), 61.

35. R. Goldthwaite, 'The Building of the Strozzi Palace. The Construction Industry in Renaissance Florence', in *Banks, Palaces, and Entrepreneurs in Renaissance Florence*, Aldershot 1995, 99-194.

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